

Education in the Democratic Republic of Congo

New Programs and Investment Are Achieving Results

Under the leadership of President Joseph Kabila and Prime Minister Matata Ponyo Mapon, the quality of education in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has improved and access to public education has expanded. This significant progress has taken shape since 2010, when the government launched programs aimed at education and economic reforms.

BY PAUL TRUSTFULL

Prime Minister Ponyo is a champion of growth and development. In early May, he visited the Sultanate of Oman to speak about Africa's progress at the Global Education for All (EFA) annual meeting. The UNESCO-adopted organization assembled global leaders to discuss progress and future commitments to basic education throughout the developing world. The meeting in Muscat was hosted by His Highness Sayyid As'sad bin Tariq Al Said.

Progress Toward Long-Term Goals

The Global EFA meeting assesses progress toward educational goals and sets tangible actions for pursuing those goals. Efforts since the year 2000 have yielded unprecedented progress, UNESCO reports, though more work remains to be done.

The gathering of over 300 participants included world leaders and people from bilateral agencies, the United Nations, regional organizations, civil society, the private sector, and institutes and research foundations. The meeting is vital for critically assessing the progress different nations are making and for exploring areas of mutual collaboration to further develop education worldwide.

In his presentation, Prime Minister Ponyo described education as "the foundation for the progress of nations and wealth," and offered examples of the measures the DRC has undertaken. Basic education is now free and compulsory, more schools have been built, more teachers are being hired, and the government has increased spending on education.

Following the presentation of the Congolese program, Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova praised the DRC's achievements in education. She congratulated the DRC and acknowledged Prime Minister Ponyo for his commitment to building a more effective and inclusive education system to support primary education and teacher training.

Transforming a Nation's Economy

Located in Central Africa, the DRC is endowed with an estimated \$24 trillion of natural resources. After years of civil strife and uncertainty caused by warfare, this nation of 70 million has become a leading force in Africa's economic renaissance. In 2013, the nation's GDP grew by 8.3%,

according to the IMF and government sources, and growth in 2014 is expected to reach double digits.

Throughout Kinshasa, the nation's capital, signs of economic growth and rehabilitation are appearing as skyscrapers take shape, freshly paved highways line major routes and new public buses whisk commuters to their destinations.

"This country is on the move," says Prime Minister Ponyo. "Our economic performance is the strongest since the 1960s. We have an inflation rate from January to the present of just 0.3%. We will register over 8% real GDP growth this year. That makes us number five on the continent in GDP growth."

As the nation undergoes an economic transformation, leaders Kabila and Ponyo



Prime Minister Ponyo and Oman Foreign Affairs Minister Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah



Above: Prime Minister Ponyo and Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova; right: Prime Minister Ponyo and Deputy Prime Minister Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said of Oman



Cloud computing, videoconferencing, data communications and other current technologies essential to the DRC's business infrastructure are now taught at Huawei's regional training center in Kinshasa.

are keen on developing the nation's social welfare structure to further strengthen its economy and lift its people out of poverty. Integral to this vision is President Kabila's long-term plan, *Les Cinq Chantiers de la RDC* (the Five Pillars of Democratic Republic of Congo). Its long-term strategies aim to improve domestic welfare, expand international trade and boost domestic investments.

Investment in Education Generates Results

Prime Minister Ponyo has resolved to rejuvenate the education sector and is beginning to see the results of changes made under the Five Pillars framework. Since 2010, Ponyo has taken steps to ensure that all Congolese have free primary education by constructing 1,000 new schools per year throughout the country.

In conjunction with international organizations, Ponyo has personally overseen scholarship programs for young girls displaced by civil strife. Additional collaboration has led to the hiring of 109,375 teachers between 2007 and 2014, the provision of 18 million textbooks, and a review and redesign of curricula and training materials. A partnership with communication technology services provider Huawei has introduced new opportunities to DRC students

seeking high-tech careers. The Shenzhen, China-based firm opened a regional training center in Kinshasa in 2012.

Continuing to Set an Example

While the changes in the education sector have been profound, significant areas require improvement and further financing. Educating all Congolese children—considering the nation's growth rate—will require 20,000 schools. As the number of schools increases, the nation will face the challenge of encouraging more individuals to become teachers and educate future generations.

Concluding his remarks to the Global EFA meeting, Prime Minister Ponyo emphasized that creating a structure to provide education for all youth is vital to creating and harnessing opportunities in the DRC. As the Congolese people continue to develop an environment that helps society thrive, Prime Minister Ponyo's education reforms are a key part of fulfilling his pledge to bring a new level of prosperity to the DRC.

As Africa begins to adopt new models for development and education practices, the DRC can provide an example of how a nation can rise to the challenge, expand access to education and strengthen economic opportunities for its people. ■

Promoting Access to Education

In his presentation to the Global Education for All (EFA) annual meeting in Muscat, Oman, DRC Prime Minister Ponyo provided an update on recent educational reforms:

- Congolese now have free primary education
- Compulsory education expanded from six years to eight years
- 1,000 new schools being built per year
- 109,375 teachers hired
- 18 million textbooks purchased



Prime Minister Ponyo addresses the audience at the Global EFA annual meeting in Muscat.