

ECA, Republic of Korea and Boston University unite to improve health outcomes in Africa

ECA Press Release No. 50/2011

Addis Ababa, 02 May 2011 (ECA) - The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Boston University and the Republic of Korea today in Addis Ababa launched an initiative called “*Engineering Expertise to Improve Health Outcomes in Africa*” to promote creativity and innovation in medical devices and related equipment, and improve the entrepreneurial competencies of students and researchers in Africa.

The Information and Communication Service (ICS) of ECA says through this initiative, the partners plan to enhance the healthcare system in Africa through training in proper management of, and techniques in designing and upgrading, medical devices.

To achieve this goal, it will promote medical device engineering competitions and biomedical engineering programmes at interested universities, undertake training of technicians in biomedical engineering, organize summer schools to enhance entrepreneurial and technical skills of students and researchers with innovative medical designs. It will also harness the growing, innovative and talented university student body in Africa to help maintain medical devices in hospitals and medical laboratories.

According to Ms Aida Opoku-Mensah, Director, ICTs Science and Technology Division at ECA, “medical devices play a key role in improving both child and maternal health. For instance, such devices can reduce risks associated with child delivery, deaths of children born prematurely and mis-diagnosis as well as shorten recovery time.”

The Laboratory for Engineering Education and Development (LEED) at Boston University will provide technical support while the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) will make its network of mentors and coaches available to help the students and their researchers to identify local opportunities that could be turned into sustainable solutions.

Dr Zaman Muhammad, Professor of Biomedical Engineering at Boston University, says “Africa spends significant amount of its modest resources in purchasing medical devices but the technical skills to operate, maintain and upgrade the devices are either lacking or still emerging. Introduction of biomedical engineering could change this scenario and improve healthcare on the continent.”

Biomedical engineering courses tend to attract more female students than traditional engineering programmes. It is hoped the project will help interested African universities in establishing biomedical engineering programmes to attract increased female student participation.

The initiative is supported with financial contributions from the Republic of Korea and is one of the projects that are being implemented under the African Technology Development and Transfer Network (TDTNet).

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