

ADF V Youth & Leadership in the 21st Century: ICT Youth and Entrepreneurship Breakout Session Report

INTRODUCTION

The ICT revolution has rapidly changed the world we live in. Young people, in particular, have demonstrated an aptitude for developing, adopting, adapting and disseminating such technologies, and their leadership role in this sphere is evident throughout the continent – largely via the non-formalized sector – and in the process bringing to the fore the monumental societal challenge of unemployment facing Africa.

It is widely recognized that entrepreneurial activity is a policy priority for all modern economies – the question though is has Africa really adopted this beyond its policies?

Young entrepreneurs in developed countries and more in developing countries, continue to be closely identified with ventures associated with the digital economy. These employment opportunities vary from low-income generation involving telephony and the use of mobile phone in particular to middle income covering the telecenter initiatives and high end earners such as online firms providing remote services.

It was with this background knowledge that this session was convened. It created the platform for youth to dialogue with experienced experts amongst themselves and the older generation. The challenges of youth entrepreneurship were addressed via best practices and recommendations were made towards the further development of the African youth in the emerging ICT society.

ISSUES & CHALLENGES

- In most countries, young people are classified as beginners who don't need to concern themselves with issues affecting them and their communities. Hence lack of youth representation in policy formulation and implementation.
- Education reforms focusing on ICT, affordable educational systems based on excellence, energized by its human resources, dedicated to high standards, social values and a healthy spirit of competition, provides the basis for Africa's young people to be ICT-savvy as well as prepared for the evolving job market;

- The legal and regulatory environment, the availability of appropriate skills, the ability to change organizational set-ups, as well as the strength of accompanying innovations in ICT applications, affect the ability of firms to seize the benefits of ICT;
- The lack of access to appropriate infrastructure, venture/risk capital for innovation, startups initiative, business development, and other resources, continue to challenge African countries to empower its youth through access to ICT; balanced with the need for Youth who are willing to find the funds to begin without waiting for a handout.
- The lack of reliable and current information/ statistics about the youth and their needs, - not just generated from third party countries but by and for each country themselves. Isn't it surprising that most countries are relying on 20th Century information/ statistics to solve 21st Century challenges?
- The lack of Career guidance for young people and access to information on career opportunities.

BEST PRACTICES

Over the past four years a small number of African countries have actively taken up the challenge of having Youth involved in policy formulation and implementation due to a high-level of political commitment. This it cannot be overemphasized, needs to be to be duplicated in all 53 African countries including a focused skills development initiative.

The following best practices were shared during this session as good examples for replication and for paving the way for youth leadership for the 21st Century. These included Cowblock.net, Teknopak in Morocco, Community Development portal established in Egypt by the ICT Trust fund, the Youth Social Entrepreneurship Initiative of the Global Knowledge Partnership, CISCO Networking Academies and ITU/BDT Youth Unit: YSEI, Telecom Youth Forum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The government and other stakeholders need to play a key role in providing the basic socio-economic ICT infrastructure for the youth and promote youth employment and youth entrepreneurship policies and programs;
- Governments should take bold steps towards education policies to make them relevant to the needs of the knowledge economy. Comprehensively designed curriculum that deals with the culture of basic and social entrepreneurship and self-development;

- Regulatory environments, conducive to effective public and private partnership, and ICT youth led investment should be put in place;
- Strategies for removing administrative barriers, promoting incentives and stimuli in order to make new businesses attractive alternatives for youth, including special systems of micro financing and credit loans, support to start-up, businesses to encourage the youth to participate self-employment should be encouraged;
- Human capital development, (general education and IT skills training), through formal or informal educational systems, lifelong learning schemes – is a prerequisite that be meet before ICT enterprises can become a reality;
- Africa’ Parliaments and parliamentarians have a central role to play in mobilizing and representing the people. National parliaments have the responsibility of passing the necessary legislation to promote legislative and regulatory environment conducive to youth enterprise development;
- The private sector, in closer collaboration with governments, should increase its role in generating youth employment and enterprise; The Private sector implication should target the facilitation of access to capital, mentoring, development of market-driven training programs, promoting internships and managerial training opportunities for young people. Bank and financial institutions, notably the African Development Bank (ADB) should be strongly involved;
- Civil society can bring in their perspectives in promoting equity, transparency and participation goals, by ensuring the promotion of ICT rural youth-centered policies;
- The Regional Economic Communities (RECs) need to develop a web portal on best practices in generating ICT Youth enterprises supporting some programs;
- Young people should be open minded, know the needs of your target market, think positively about the future of the continent.

CONCLUSIONS/ ACTION POINTS

- Mainstreaming ICT, youth employment and entrepreneurship strategies in broader national ICT policies and align them with strategic development objectives;
- ECA in collaboration with UN Agencies, the African Union (AU), ADB and ICT partners in Africa should consider the possibility of providing support for youth employment and entrepreneurship programs at national and sub-regional levels with a focus on ICTS as an enabler;
- The African Union and NEPAD with the support of ECA, ADB, other UN Agencies and Development partners should consider a Pan-African

- ICT Youth Program to support youth entrepreneurship and development in countries.
- Youth entrepreneurship Fund For Africa: which ties in with the concept of funds for ICT for development as implemented since 2002 in Egypt.
 - Study of and replication of Teknopak incubator in Morocco
 - Tax rebates for first time employees and start up youth entrepreneurial organization
 - Training Fees as tax back options for start up companies
 - Build Partnerships
 - UN agencies, including UNDP, World Bank, UNFPA, UNESCO, UNICEF and others at national level to partner and support youth national network plan of action;
 - At sub-regional level, regional economic communities and other sub-regional institutions to facilitate involvement of youth sub-regional association in policy formulation, implementation and evaluation.
 - At global level, AU in collaboration with UNECA, ADB, and NEPAD to support the ADF V plan of action and youth-led initiative.
 - Need for Champions to lead ICT for Development in various countries (Similar to that of Rwanda); Possibility for Internships embedded within Govt., NGOs, International Organizations, Private Sector etc.
 - Creation of a career opportunities database for Youth with ICT skills
 - Creation of African Youth volunteering movement for Africa.