



Economic Commission for Africa

AFRICAN YOUTH SPEAK ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

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AFRICAN YOUTH SPEAK ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY



African Information Society Initiative

“African youth must be given the opportunity to contribute their own perspectives and understanding to the global knowledge base, to increase their potential for building peace and ensuring security and development” (statement from ADF’99)

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1. Introduction

For the effective role of the African youth, societies must develop and nurture responsible, well-informed citizens capable of creating sustainable incomes and livelihoods, thereby reducing pressure on scarce government finances. Support must also be given to young citizens who will contribute to the global economy of the future if Africa is to make any meaningful headway in its development efforts.

This is because “the median age of the African population is less than 20, yet many young people are disillusioned by the protracted political and economic crises afflicting the continent. Today’s Youth will one day be leaders in society making decisions that will have enormous impact. They have many assets, talents, and resources to offer. The challenge is to mobilize their energies and to transform the Information Society so that they feel included and represented.”

¹ A panel of eminent persons, set up by the UN Secretary General as a part of a Youth Employment Network Initiative, has especially recommended a focus on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as a means to creating more jobs for young people².

The role of ICTs in supporting Africa’s young people has been highlighted by the ECA-led African Information Society Initiative (AISI) since its inception in 1996, as well as the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

The support to Youth was also articulated as one of the recommendations endorsed at the third meeting of the Committee on Development Information (CODI III)³, which was organized in May 2003 in Addis Ababa as indicated below:

¹ ADF IV excerpts

² “Recommendations of High-level Panel of the Youth Employment Network” General Assembly of the United Nations, 28 September, A/56/422, para. 19, p.6

³ <http://www.uneca.org/codi/>

"Encourage African Youth in activities in the production and dissemination of knowledge resources as well as ensure their full participation in the WSIS process"

"ECA should put the African Youth as one of its key target groups among its activities and ensure that they are the recipients of traditional and indigenous knowledge."

"African Youth must be empowered and involved in the processes that seek to establish Africa as a major partner in the Information Society; and

"Existing Youth-led efforts and initiatives should be identified and encouraged in order to bridge the Generation Divide."

Following these recommendations, the ICT and Science & Technology Division (ISTD) of ECA conducted online discussions aimed at creating a platform for African Youth to share experiences and knowledge in order to help develop innovative approaches to their needs and to establish a dialogue with public and other stakeholders in devising and implementing the Information Society initiatives at country and regional levels.

Discussions were focused on issues such as policies and strategies, education, employment, and entrepreneurship.

2. Policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and review

Youth must be involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of public policy to ensure more meaningful participation in decision making process, within governance structures, social institutions, government, the corporate sector and civil society. Youth policies on employment, entrepreneurship, education and innovation coupled with ICT policies pose complex challenges. Yet, they must be consulted and strategies adopted to engage them a lot more if realistic, comprehensive and integrated policies are to emerge.

The main questions addressed were:

- In many countries there are a number of national e-strategies being formulated and implemented. Are the Youth aware?
- What can African governments do to advance the cause of Youth in the Information Society?
- What needs to be done in the area of ICT policy to enable this role?
- What is being done at the national and regional levels?

What needs to be done in the area of ICT policy?

- Draft a strong Youth paragraph, including Youth causes, in ICT policy and strategies;
- Involve Youth Association in various Information Society committee;
- Create Youth Advisory Council around national and regional information society activities;
- Active consultation - room creation within policy to engage Young people in the formulation of the policy at all levels
- Inclusion: The inclusion of the needs recognised via the active consultation of Youth and Youth experts in the formation of ICT Policy.
- Draft sectoral ICT Youth Policy at regional and national levels.

On the issue of awareness on African government strategies, most discussants agreed that there is some level of awareness, but limited to a few privileged individuals, who have discovered these policies out of personal interest - and at times, curiosity.

Most of the contributions dwelt on the need for governments to involve, empower and motivate Youth in order to take positive progressive steps. Discussants believe that if the

Youth are not involved, it only points to the lack of readiness to promote sustainability in all the processes and strategies involved.

2.1 Statements

Below are quotes from contributions made during the online discussions on policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and review.

*“Make Youth involvement as mandatory for Policy process”,
Gbenga Sesan, Nigeria*

“The reality of the situation is that a greater percentage of Youth are unaware of national e-strategies. Maybe some don’t because of lack of trust for government-led efforts and policies, and others because there’s no effort to involve them. In many African countries, we have read beautiful documents that never translated into action, and in a bid to often throw the bad water away; we throw the baby with the water and ignore much of policy directions coming from government. On the other side of the equation is the reality of lack of information flow from government “quarters” on such initiatives as this. Many times, only Youth who take part in international/pan-African discussions, seminars or parleys hear of these efforts. Truth be told, much work needs to be done in the area of Youth being aware of government policy directions, and in this case, e-strategies. The policy should include clauses that make it a mandatory part of the process to involve Youth. That is some work we have been hitting at in Nigeria, and I think it deserves a lot of combined effort. And this forum will help!”

*« Nous devons faire le Premier pas »,
Jean Paul Nkurunziza, Burundi*

« Je viens d’apprendre la mise en place d’un comité nationale des TICs au Burundi. Ce comité a sorti avec le soutien du PNUD un plan stratégique national des TICs non encore adopté. J’ai eu la chance tomber sur le document. Mais ma constatation est que les jeunes du Burundi n’ont pas été impliqués (aucune organisation des jeunes n’a été consultée !) C’est pourtant ces derniers que l’on voit agir dans le domaine des TICs ici au Burundi, qui en créant des petits cybers, qui en créant des associations, ... J’ai fait un pas en avant en allant voir le président de ce comité. Il a été surpris de l’existence de mon association BYTC. C’est ainsi qu’il a promis de nous impliquer désormais dans toutes les rencontres futures.

Cameroon: Involvement of Youth in national policy formulation and implementation, by Thomas Tchetmi

L'association Presse Jeune compte poursuivre son engagement à travers le suivi&évaluation de la politique nationale de la jeunesse. Quatre points précis retiendront notre attention :

- Le plaidoyer pour l'élaboration du Plan opérationnel de la Politique national de la jeunesse ;
- Le plaidoyer pour la tenue d'une Table ronde des bailleurs de fonds pour le financement de la Politique nationale de la jeunesse
- La promotion de la politique nationale de la jeunesse
- La création des mécanismes et instances de participation des jeunes à la mise en œuvre, le suivi&évaluation de la politique nationale de la jeunesse : la Charte national de la jeunesse, le Conseil National de la Jeunesse, l'institutionnalisation du Parlement des Enfants, les Conseils Municipaux d'Enfants et de Jeunes, etc.

Finalement, nous retenons des débats plusieurs leçons parmi lesquelles:

- Les TIC constituent avant tout un instrument de participation des jeunes au processus de prise de décision car c'est l'une des rares fois dans l'histoire qu'une technologie est enseignée aux adultes par les jeunes.
- La nécessité de développer les politiques spécifiques d'appropriation des TIC par les jeunes pour créer les emplois et les richesses.
- Il ne faut pas se livrer à des généralisations sur les organisations de jeunesse
- Les organisations de jeunesse disposent d'un potentiel qui dépasse largement celui de simples « autres personnes à consulter »
- Les organisations de jeunesse aident l'Afrique à briser le fossé numérique, à faire face à la mondialisation et à la révolution technologique
- Le dialogue social, le partenariat entre les gouvernements, les bailleurs de fonds et les organisations de jeunesse sont essentiels pour vaincre la pauvreté
- Il est essentiel de renforcer la concertation entre tous les acteurs du secteur de la jeunesse dans le cadre de la société de l'information.

Donc, comme les responsables dans nos pays ne veulent pas nous impliquer,c'est nous les jeunes qui devons taper à leurs portes!!! De plus, il me semble que nous devons faire le premier pas nous les jeunes, en élaborant des projets relatifs au développement des TICs,ce qui nous ferait mieux connaître. »

“Involving the Youth had a lot more to do with the mentality/mind-set”, Titilayo Akinsanmi, South Africa

“24 months from November 2003, if I had been asked what was the e-Strategy being formulated/adopted/in place in Nigeria, I had absolutely no idea. Not because I was not interested in the on-goings within my community/country - I would say it had a lot more with the mentality/mind-set that - I make bold to say - all young people in Nigeria had grown in - Our focus was mainly on getting out of school/university, getting a good job, and continuing ‘the struggle’ to make it materially like the others before us. If we as young people had



any idea of government policy it was after the whole process of formulation had occurred and public statements were being made in Newspapers and on the Television. Thus we were stuck on the ‘reactionary’ conveyance belt - what ever we had to say made minute differences at that point in time. We simply reacted and had no ‘known’ avenues to actually act and make a change were we saw fit. (I must also at this stage mention that these policies were more often than not about the continued petroleum crisis, the educational sector etc. These were not looking into how ICT can be harnessed to address some of these problems. ICT initiatives for change came more from the private sector than from anywhere else.”

« La jeunesse ne fait que consommer et son avis est plus consultatif qu’élaborateur », Ade Bada, Bénin

« En générale la jeunesse n’est qu’en aval des décisions prises par les politiques et certains aînés investis d’un pouvoir décisionnel qui est fonction de leurs attributs et/ou de leur expérience. La jeunesse ne fait que consommer et son avis est plus consultatif qu’élaborateur. Nous assistons à une sorte de « marginalisation » d’une jeunesse qui doit être le moteur et le garant du développement de la société de l’information. Toutefois, il faut remarquer que les jeunes n’ont encore pris dans son entièreté conscience de l’enjeu important qu’est l’élaboration de cette politique, qui participe de beaucoup à notre avenir dans l’actuel contexte de la globalisation. Ce n’est qu’une minorité de jeunes qui sont au courant de l’existence de telles politiques et stratégies et ces derniers

n'ont souvent pas les moyens d'en assurer la vulgarisation. Pour pallier à cet état de chose et permettre une meilleure information des jeunes, le politique doit par la voix des ondes débattre du sujet dans toutes les langues du pays et inviter la jeunesse à prendre part au débat afin de prendre en compte son avis dans le document final.»

*“I have resolved that ICT is Africa's last chance”, Leopold Armah,
Ghana*

“Our involvement in the drafting of Ghana's ICT for accelerated development framework document, active participation in Ghana's WSIS Coordinating Committees activities, implementation of an ICT Youth clubs for pre-tertiary institution pilot project and inclusion of young people in Governments delegation to WSIS phase 1 in Geneva (December 2003) are some of our achievements. Personally, I have resolved that ICT is Africa's last chance to leapfrog from developing to developed status and not the biggest because we lost out in the previous revolutions and we can't afford to miss the Internet revolution too. We are going to be in the centre of all the transformations.”

*« La volonté politique existe, mais plus d'efforts sont requis »,
Donaldine Gbaguidi, Bénin*

« A mon humble avis, la volonté politique existe certes mais il reste encore et surtout un gros travail de base à faire si nous volons effectivement atteindre l'objectif visé. et pour ce faire, je pense que l'idéal serait de permettre et laisser les jeunes eux même exprimer leurs besoins ; leurs capacités, attouts et autres et ce ne serait que sur cette base qu'on pourrait être certains d'avoir un «produit» pour la jeunesse. cependant, l'étape de la conception etant déjà passé, je crois qu'on pourrait «corriger le tir» si l'on parvient à tenir compte de certains paramètres... Il faudra surtout que l'on «minimise» la théorie et qu'on mette beaucoup plus l'accent sur la pratique, le concret. »

3. Building a highly skilled and educated workforce

Education is a fundamental human right and an essential tool to ensure that all youth realise their full potential. To compete successfully in a fiercely competitive global economic environment a highly skilled and educated workforce with aptitude and skills in the application of information and communication technologies in every day life will be essential.

Discussions were stimulated by the following questions:

- How do you see African countries tackling the challenges of building a highly skilled and educated workforce with aptitude and skills in the application of ICTs in their every day life?
- What are the challenges to this and how can they be overcome?
- Do you think that the African education system is effective enough to inspire, assist, organize and develop, young people of all ages, to be skilled leaders for the 21st Century?
- What needs to be done to harness Africa's educational resources to ensure young people to be active in the Information Society?
- With the emergence of the Information Society and Knowledge Economy, are Africa's Youth prepared through the educational system to be effective participants? If not what are the challenges?

What needs to be done in the area of education?

- Mainstream ICTs in all educational levels and develop sound sectoral policies accordingly.
- The programs and the curricula of educational institutions need to be designed to prepare individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills that would enable them to be successfully employed.
- Reforms should focus on affordable educational systems based on excellence, energized by its human resources, dedicated to high standards, social values and a healthy spirit of competition, all contributing to Youth development.
- Development of lifelong, practical and entrepreneurial skills at all levels of the educational system was also emphasized.
- Establish innovative financial mechanisms, promote research and development, and compile and the disseminate success stories of young leaders' experiences.

Most of the participants highlighted some of the weaknesses of the educational systems

in African countries, including the lack of adequate reforms, systems based on colonial objectives, foreign-oriented contents, etc., and pointed out that educational systems in most African countries need an intensive and continuous reform process of re-engineering to address the new challenges in preparing young learners to efficiently contribute to the Knowledge Economy in the 21st century.

Egypt: Egypt Education Initiative (EEI), by Abdallah Diwan

Egypt is witnessing progressive change in several development sectors that is affecting socio-economic reform in the new millennium. The government of Egypt has given educational reform high priority on its agenda. Education is crucial in driving the economy and for creating wealth for the nation. Any progress in this sector positively affects all other sectors in the economy. Consequently, education accounts for almost one-third of government spending on the services sector and has triggered a dynamic process of change that will impact future generations. EEI was created to help attain these government educational goals. It is a public-private partnership between the government of Egypt and the World Economic Forum's IT member's community. The initiative supports Egypt's overall education reform efforts and maximizes the potential for collaborative public-private partnerships (PPP) to achieve its goals. Since the Annual Meeting in 2005, the World Economic Forum has been working with the government of Egypt to identify areas of priority and potential opportunities for private sector collaboration. IT companies working with the government of Egypt in the area of educational have also contributed in the formulation of this proposal, which takes into consideration Egypt's education system challenges in terms of volume (numbers of schools and teachers). With the support of the World Economic Forum, multinationals and donors, the Ministries of Communications and Information technology, Education and Higher Education have put in place several initiatives to provide ICT to all Egyptians at an affordable cost.

The efforts of a few young people with access to ICTs were appreciated in breaking barriers and making successful achievements in the Information Society, despite unfavourable policy environments. A participant added that the challenge was how to promote an affordable and user-friendly access, and to extend this opportunity to other young people who are underserved and not privileged. Some participants highlighted the wide gap that exist between the lessons learned in the classroom and the reality on the ground of the Knowledge Economy workplace, as other challenges need to be addressed through effective linkages between the educational system and the engines of the economy, supported by an accurate labour market information.

3.1 Statements

The quotes below highlight the views expressed by the participants during the discussion focusing on education:

*“We are very eager to have vocational training centres”,
Jama Abdullahi, Somalia*

Rwanda: Educational system, by Komeza Eddy

Le gouvernement rwandais reconnaissant le rôle primordial du système éducatif performant pour le développement du pays et prenant conscience de l'impact des TIC sur l'éducation a entrepris une série d'initiatives pour renforcer ce secteur. Nous citerons quelques unes.

- le gouvernement rwandais alloue 15 % de son budget national à l'éducation ce ci montre que le problème du financement insuffisant du secteur éducation en Afrique qui avait été mentionné lors de dernières discussions est entrain d'être résolu.
- à partir de 2003-2004 l'éducation primaire est obligatoire et gratuit. Cela contribuera à lutter efficacement contre le problème d'analphabétisme pour enfin l'éradiquer chez les générations à venir (jeunes).
- plusieurs centres de formation des jeunes aux métiers ont vu le jour dans presque tous les districts.
- des institutions d'enseignement supérieur ont été mises en place. Je donnerai ici l'exemple de Kigali Institute of Science Technology and Management (KIST) qui a ouvert ses portes en 1997 avec l'objectif de former des ingénieurs en électronique et télécommunication, génie mécanique, génie électrique, computer science et computer engineering, génie en construction ainsi que des managers dont le pays a besoin pour son économie et qui atteint son apogée. 90 % des diplômés de cet institut sont embauchés chacun année. Ce qui montre que le marché du travail en pleine expansion est entrain d'être comblé pour le moment.
- l'enseignement TIC de base est obligatoire dans des études universitaires et ces institutions supérieurs disposent de plus de 100 ordinateurs chacune directement accessible aux étudiants .le nombre continuera d'augmenter dans les jour à venir.
- le projet Nepad e-schools est en cours ici au rwanda. Plusieurs écoles en bénéficient.
- l'enseignement à distance existe aussi au rwanda. Le centre African virtual university (AVU) est basé au KIST.

“The basic school are existing throughout the country but, it is limited in the main towns only where UNICEF can reach. The remotel/rural areas are ignored and neglected. I would like to draw your attention that more than 75% of our populations are Youth under 40 years and most of them do not have the chance to get Internet and ICTs access. In Somalia the

telecommunication sector is fast growing with poor Internet connection there are several private telecom companies who offer limited ISP service. The basic school are existing throughout the country but, it is limited in the main towns only where UNICEF can reach. The remote/rural areas are ignored and neglected. Therefore, I would like to conclude my writing by saying that we are very eager to have vocational training centres, offering Internet connectivity for marginalized groups, developing distance learning programs to those Youth and women groups who have not the opportunity to get university education to aboard to have access for it, textile printing methods, and institutional capacity building for the existing administrative zones.”

*“Best method of ICT knowledge acquisition is personal drive”,
Ayo Oguntuase, Nigeria*

“My personal experience shows that best method of ICT knowledge acquisition is personal drive of the Youth. My desire to understand ICT began since my childhood in 1989 but I never had the opportunity until 1997... This initial denial of access to ICT made me make up my mind to train as many African Youths as I can help free of charge at no cost... If it can be done in Nigeria, it can be done anywhere and by anyone willing to do it. Finally bear in mind that when you train a Youth you are training a generation, while also supporting self-help.”

“ICT education at tertiary institution level should be implemented into every course of studies though it may be at different rate of exposure”, Oguntuase Olufemi Ayobami, Nigeria

“By introducing ICT knowledge to the African Youth at childhood in his family, this will become part of him in his everyday life. The government could educate the parents to train their Youths in the understanding of ICT and when the Youth is older he will not depart from it. There is also a need for introduction of ICT into the primary and high school curricula, which will be made compulsory to them. ICT education at tertiary institution level should be implemented into every course of studies though it may be at different rate of exposure. Adequate training of



the trainers i.e. this is a method where young ones trained in ICT are encouraged to train others. Formation of ICT clubs among students where they will be able to interact with others with the same interest in ICT. Organizing inter regional ICT quiz competition. Youths love competition and as Youths, competition will create a competitive spirit, which will spur them to knowing more about ICT. Worthy prizes should be given during this competition to serve as encouragement to the participants. ICT Projects collaboration should be encouraged at all levels. This can be done online and offline.”, Anselme Nahmtante Yabouri, Benin

“Education has ceased to be the exclusive domain of those who go through formalised systems”, Titilayo Akinsanmi, South Africa

“I address us as young people including in the term ‘us’ all those who are not reading this – yet – we need to be willing, receptive and determined enough to harness and tap into these initiatives. We have a saying in Nigeria that ‘if the Mountain will not come to Mohammed then Mohamed will go to the mountain’ (I don’t know its true origins...). In the same way you cannot force an unwilling horse/mule to drink even if you force it to and place before it ‘waters’ that would renew its Youth and strength. The time is near when Ignorance ceases to be an excuse – for anything and for anyone. This is in recognition of the fact that duty lies with African Governments to make known and publicise these opportunities – as much as they do with other areas of governmental achievements and opportunities.”

“Education has ceased to be the exclusive domain of those who go through formalised systems – we need to accept this and recognize alternatively trained people and integrate (that word again!) both. This could be via adopting a universal (in this context the Africa continent) set of standards as a mark of one who is qualified in a particular sector/area. This should cut across the continent, and not a case of certain qualifications are accepted in Ghana but not recognized if you happen to find yourself within the shores of Ethiopia rendering you incapable of making a living in your qualified area of competence. This is a model that needs to be adopted in all areas by all proclaimed African Countries from Madagascar to Senegal, from Southern Africa to the Northern tips of the continent if we truly seek to achieve regional integration.”

“Training school teachers and investing in ICT infrastructure are important”, Gbenga Sesan, Nigeria

“Education and ICTs for Development are indispensable. Among a three-pronged way for

Africans and their governments to promote the use of ICTs, education appears to be on the top list. In the workplace, education of employees is invaluable. A study on Information Technology, Productivity and Economic Growth: implications for Economic Growth by UNU/WIDER shows that business firms as well as other organizations in the developing countries, Africa inclusive, will face the same challenge of transforming the workplace to make these organizations function efficiently in an environment of the fast diffusion of ICTs. Matti Pohjola piece on "Information Technology and Economic Growth" brought out keys issues to the focus. This means that training in schools, and more importantly, within the workplace is a crucial means of upgrading the skills of workers so that they can adapt their technical but also behavioural and interpersonal skills to the adoption of new technologies. Training school teachers and investing in ICTs infrastructure in schools is important since this creates a new generation of employees who are comfortable with modern ICTs. The benefits from ICTs in schools, businesses and governments cannot, of course, be realized without people who understand this technology and are able to adapt it to the needs of local uses."

*"Current education systems in Africa do not produce skilled leaders",
Brenda Zulu, Zambia*

"I think that the current education in Africa does not produce skilled leaders for the 21st century. If it did we would have produced African e-bay, google, etc. IT kind of business. Instead we have young people who are involved in swindling other people using new technologies. I am sure most of you on this d group have seen the kind of e-mails that are flying around."

4. Promoting ICT entrepreneurship and livelihoods

Education provides the basis for the Youth to be ICT-savvy as well as prepares them for the job market. The role of Youth in leading and pioneering ICT initiatives in countries such as India and Malaysia is well known. Now, in some countries there are initiatives underway to support Youth entrepreneurship in ICTs.

The questions addressed during the discussion were:

- How adequately prepared are countries to harness ICT social enterprise for the Youth?
- What needs to be done by Governments? Private Sectors?
- Also for those who have not been given this opportunity through education, how can ICTs serve as a tool to promote and ensure their livelihoods?
- What kinds of schemes and initiatives need to be established for this purpose?

There was a broad consensus that African countries are not adequately prepared to engage in or promote Youth-led ICT enterprises in general, and particularly social enterprise ability to meet the needs, and formulate policies and strategies at local level. Most participants reiterated the fact that the main strategy to be implemented should be a reform of African educational systems to move from job-seeking oriented system to entrepreneurship-oriented self-empowerment. In addition, there is a need for tightly designed curriculum that deals with the culture of basic entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, and self-development.

What needs to be done in the area of entrepreneurship?

- Governments should take a big step toward education policies to make it relevant to the needs of the new economy.
- A conducive and enabling public and private partnership, and ICT investment frameworks supported by adequate policies and legislation should be put in place.
- Remove administrative barriers, promote incentives and stimuli in order to make new businesses an attractive alternative for Youth.
- The private sector, in close collaboration with governments, should increase its role in generating Youth employment and enterprise access to capital.
- Develop market-driven training programmes, promote internships and managerial training opportunities for young people.
- Consider ICT as priority sector and establish taxation reduction incentives on all ICT equipments.

Several participants argued that there is a need to develop sound national ICT policies and strategies that ensure the involvement of Youth in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and review process. Talented and committed African young people who are involved in entrepreneurship, contributing to socio-economic development of their countries should be encouraged. Cases from Ghana, Rwanda, Benin and Zambia were highlighted.

However some participants expressed the lack of adequate statistics, which could help to improve the decision-making process and accelerate socio-economic impact, constitutes another important bottleneck.

Some of the participants believe that regardless of the opportunities of education, young people are often the leading innovators in the use and spread of ICTs. They adapt quickly and are generally quite hungry for more knowledge and therefore, if provided with opportunities, they can be able to translate it into livelihoods ventures. Example of ICT-driven small businesses include repairing and selling of mobile phones, operating call-centres, etc. What needs to be considered is the adoption of policies and strategies to increase access to ICT opportunities through education, with a particular emphasis on multimedia local content development.



Other participants, however, stressed the speed of adapting and learning of young people, those who needed basic education to better harness the employment opportunities offered by ICTs. The new economy requires more e-skills. In this regard, they recognized the importance of lifelong learning and vocational training.

Schemes and initiatives suggested by discussants include:

- The adoption of ICT pro-poor policy;
- The promotion of conducive environment for ICT investment in rural area and public/private partnership;
- The financial and strategic development support to ICT Youth-led, SME and SMME;
- The establishment of career counselling for young people on ICT opportunities and different areas of specialization;
- The promotion of affordable ICT rural infrastructure and local content;
- The promotion of multipurpose community telecentres in rural areas; and
- The dissemination of best practices.

Egypt: e-Learning Competence Centre, by Abdallah Diwan

The e-Learning Competence Centre was established through an alliance between Ministry of Communication and Information Technology MCIT and Cisco Systems in September 2004. The Centre is contributing to Egypt 's economic growth and competitiveness by enhancing workforce performance through state-of-the-art e-learning and human resource development. The Centre is supporting the skill development of young people in all disciplines through direct development and delivery of education programs through the Centre and by helping other ministries establish similar Competence Centres.

The initial activities for the Centre is to develop local training centres in conjunction with government and non-government organizations (NGOs), deliver education programs targeted at small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs), help set-up the E-Learning centre for the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), and begin curriculum development activities. The Centre aims to deliver a wider range of e-learning programs in the future, including e-government and healthcare education, the Centre will concentrate only on the delivery of SME and ICT programs. The Centre is delivering Cisco IT Essentials I and II, Cisco iExecutive Education and Microsoft's Unlimited Potential Programs to build ICT and management capacity within Egypt's SME communities.

The Centre offers Cisco Sponsored Curriculum Networking Academy curriculum and training to Local Academies. The initial curriculum offered by this program to the Centre is IT Essentials I and II. The requisite learning platform to support this and other curriculum to be developed and delivered by the Centre is the CLI Virtuoso. Content development projects of the centre will include, creating e-learning content for the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), Oracle, localizing and translating content for the iExec Ed Business Fundamentals Program and migrating to the Centre's LMS a series of Arabic Desktop Software Skills courses that are based on Microsoft's Unlimited Potential Program.

4.1 Statements

Below are some quotes from contributions made by the discussants:

“Creating solutions using ICT as enabler should be our major concern”, Sirak Mekbib, Ethiopia

“The education system has to go through continuous monitoring and improvement to create an ICT entrepreneur. In terms of employment, ICT jobs are increasing at an alarming rate and to date, in my experience, the industry has utilized all. But I don’t know to what level these young ICT professionals satisfied the needs of their employers. In addition, our target should be entrepreneurial skills in addition to skilled and qualified professional.

Knowledge transfer is not being implemented in Africa properly. In Europe and America, there are countless free and open source technologies that can alleviate the work burden in offices. And yet, these solutions have not been properly adapted to local solutions. Creating solutions using ICT as enabler should be our major concern. However, the governments do not create conducive environments for such initiatives that can ultimately create large pool of job opportunities.

Skilled professional migration is also another key problem. Due to low living standards in Africa, most ICT professionals migrate to well- developed countries for better employment and income. Hence the best professionals a country can have are not working for their country. The government has not developed enough capacity to preserve these professionals in their homeland and harness the knowledge and skill they have developed.”

« Les TIC peuvent beaucoup aider ceux qui n’ont pas bénéficié des opportunités d’éducation », Florette Ntako, Burundi

«Les TIC peuvent beaucoup aider ceux qui n ont pas bénéficié des opportunités d éducation. La j en suis certaine. Les TIC donnent des milliers et des milliers d options, d idées, de partage d’expérience, etc. Ces personnes n auraient que l embarras du choix si elles avaient accès a l internet. (pour un taux de chômage de 0.8% pour tout le pays soit 27.000personnes sur les 30400.000 actifs y compris des licenciés les TIC donnent des options d’entreprenariat, et surtout aux jeunes qui se tournent vers les TIC car ayant plus conscience des avantages qu ils

apportent) Si vous regarder les cyber, service de dactylographie par ordinateur, scanner, faire des ce et dvd ; secteur informel ou prive qui engagent beaucoup de jeunes.»

«Nous avons de ressources locales qu'il suffira de pousser », Jean Robert Hountom, Togo

« Les TICS representent pour les jeunes africains une aubaine pour se hisser sur le marche de l'emploi. Mais comment si nos etats ne nous suivent pas et si l'Afrique doit toujours attendre des autres (nommes bailleurs de fonds ou autres) et etre toujours en situation de main tendue alors que nous avons des ressources locales qu'il suffit de pousser juste un peu. ce qui m'etonne surtout c'est qd on parcourt l'histoire on se rend compte qu'au lendemain des independances on etait au meme niveau que certains pays asiatiques. Aujourd'hui alors qu'on se cherche toujours, ces pays semblent avoir depasse l'Europe et les Etats unis dans certains domaines.»

“A language bridge will solve African IT-literacy and unemployment problems”, Femi Babawande, Nigeria

“A language bridge will solve African IT-literacy and unemployment problems. I see it as a tool and not as an end in itself and it has helped me solve a lot of problems as regards my field of specialization. It is most needful to see every un-schooled person as a vital contribution into the balancing of the society. The ICT is a society on its own. And it will not be completed without the rightful contribution of everyone. Those who do not have the opportunity of formal education do have some kind of vocational training that guarantees their economic and social relevance. The focus of ICT programmes should be targeted at helping them becoming better users of ICT tools to solve their vocational problems. A local shoe builder, a welder or a mason will need to know how he can better reach the world through ICT. This will be a vehicle to national manpower renaissance and a redefinition of work. Who knows, one of those little ones can be our own William Henry Gates III or Kiichiro Toyoda!”

“Without accurate statistics information it will be difficult to tailor solutions to targeted groups”, Leopold Armah, Ghana

“The issue of Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment opportunities in the Knowledge should be a major concern for all, including young people. This is because irrespective of what ICTs have been professed to be doing and can do the main concern for most of us from the developing

world, is its ability to provide sustainable livelihood for all. And Youth Entrepreneurship and employment opportunities are some of the ways to achieve it. That is why I see this week's discussion very timely and strategic.

More importantly, countries have started developing policies and concepts in the above stated area. In the case of Ghana, ICT has been identified as one of the tools for achieving a middle-income status. It was highlighted during the launched of the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP) last Tuesday by the President. Was it coincidental? I don't think so. It is rather a new wave blowing all over the continent.

Friends, let's not leave this laudable initiative in the hands of only Government and the International Community. Unlike the previous projects that failed, we need to make sure it succeeds this time.

The statistical information of most countries in the area of Youth employment/ unemployment is not current and accurate. Most countries are relying on 20th century census data that is not applicable in the 21st century. Without accurate statistics information it will be difficult to tailor solutions to targeted groups. The following questions readily come to mind: Do we accurately have the population of Youth in our country? Do we have the number of unemployed/ employed Youth and their level of skill? And do we have forecasted information for the future and indicators to monitor their achievements?"

*« Les taxes sur le matériel Informatique doivent être réduites », Jean
Paul Nkurunziza, Burundi*

« Les jeunes sont naturellement dynamiques et entreprenants. Je vis au Burundi et je vois comment les jeunes essaient de se débattre pour survivre en créant de petites initiatives ça et là, dans des conditions de crise inimaginables. Ils commencent justement à défier la traditionnelle fonction publique qui devient une vache maigre. Nos gouvernements devraient réduire les taxes surtout pour le matériel informatique. Ici au Burundi par exemple, la taxe sur le matériel et les services informatique s'élèvent à 17% de la valeur»

*“Supporting Youth entrepreneurship is much more than buying and
selling of computer hardware”, Femi Babawande, Nigeria*

“Language still remains a pivotal ground for SUSTAINABLE e-policy. In the countries where a reasonable level of success have been recorded in ICT Youth initiatives like India, Malaysia, Japan and China, one will easily realize that the process is driven

by the indigenous languages of these people. The e-community is a real place and the people must be made to TRUST it. From the Nigerian experience, one may easily conclude that the practitioners have not been able to trust the system. Supporting Youth entrepreneurship is much more than buying and selling of computer hardware. To have a sustainable e-business development, we must talk about other intrinsic aspects like programming and software development.”

5. Creating an enabling environment

To realize the potential of young people as leaders through ICT, some requirements need to be fulfilled, these include access to venture/risk capital for innovation, start-ups initiatives, business development, as well as investments and project. Also an adequate legal and regulatory environment for partnership between various stakeholders needs to be established.

The discussion was focused on the following questions:

- Are there adequate strategies for harnessing Youth empowerment through the use of ICTs in the economic sectors?
- What kind of legal and regulatory policy needs to be established?

What needs to be done in the area of creating an enabling environment?

- Develop sectoral ICT Youth policies, targeted at employment and entrepreneurship
- Greater emphasis to be placed on micro-credit and Youth empowerment schemes.
- Need to innovate to ensure implementation of strategies, policies or laws, which are important for empowerment initiatives.
- Enforce ICT integration into educational systems, law and regulation in order to waive taxes on ICT equipments, software, especially for educational institutions and Youth related projects.
- Governments in collaboration with development partners and other stakeholders should adopt ICT act to encourage local, international, direct, investments, to promote public/private partnership and multi-stakeholder partnership frameworks.
- Establish legal and regulatory frameworks to promote access for all, ICT social enterprise and to secure venture/risk capital initiative, incentives to SMME and Youth-led projects should be established.

Most of the participants made reference to their national ICT policies and strategies and other policy frameworks where commitment of empowering Youth through ICT is apparent. There is an increasing effort in countries to formulate ICT policies aimed at taking advantage of trade and business opportunities and Youth development. African countries have mainstreamed Youth causes directly or indirectly in their national ICT policies, and some have done so through development or employment policy. However the lack of effective policy implementation constitutes the main weakness in the whole process. They recalled the need for a more comprehensive and realistic implementation strategy and a monitoring and evaluation mechanism, including the establishment of coordination structures, the adoption of innovative financing mechanisms, etc.

Reacting to the above, others stated that Youth causes are not clearly highlighted in the various policy documents. This called for more structured ways to involve the Youth in policy formulation, including strengthening their capacities to effectively address problems.

5.1 Statements

Below are some of the statements made by discussants:

“Has any African government official seen the IT parks in India and Singapore?”, Emmanuel K. Beckson, Ghana

“The challenge for us is how do we translate some if not all these ideas into concrete actions for real outputs? Where are the resources? Have we identified them? The human ware, software, and hardware.



What kind of environment are we looking at? Has any African government official seen the IT parks in India and Singapore? Sure they have. Are we really sure we want to bridge the digital divide?

Will the developed world wait for us to catch up? What is our problem then? We are fast to make policies but no support in the implementation

What kind of support do we need? It is not just financial but also capacity building, aptitude and attitudes. Change our work cultures. Will our aged-fathers be kind enough to mentor us before they retire? Maybe they are not considering retiring. They postpone our time by saying the Youth is tomorrows leader.”

*«Mettre en place des politiques nationales de la jeunesse efficace »,
Thomas Tchetmi, Cameroun*

« Le processus doit respecter les étapes suivantes :

- *Participatif : tous les secteurs doivent être impliqués, impliquer les jeunes à tous les niveaux, tenir des consultations participatives au niveau du quartier, de la commune, de l'arrondissement, du département, de la province et de la nation.*
- *Etudes : Faire l'analyse de la situation et l'analyse de la réponse dans le secteur de la jeunesse*
- *Elaborer le Draft 0 de la Politique nationale de la jeunesse*
- *Tenir un atelier national de validation du Draft 0*
- *Ventiler le draft 0 à un maximum de partenaires possibles – recueillir les amendements – Elaborer le draft final*
- *Tenir un Forum national de la jeunesse pour la validation du document de politique nationale de la jeunesse*
- *Faire promulguer la Politique nationale de la jeunesse par le Chef de l'Etat*
- *Elaborer le plan opérationnel de la Politique nationale de la jeunesse*
- *Tenir une table ronde des bailleurs de fonds pour le financement de la Politique nationale de la jeunesse*
- *Suivre et évaluer (tous la mise en œuvre de la Politique nationale de la jeunesse (revue mi-parcours, revue annuelle, revue quinquennale, etc.) »*

“We believe that support should be availed to young people to train as innovators, developers artisans and/ or become self employed in the informal sector”, Herbert Lwanga, Uganda

“Youth entrepreneurship programmes are missing within the national education systems at secondary, vocational and tertiary and university levels. Such programmes should also evolve within the informal sector targeting potential young entrepreneurs, unemployed, out of school or at risk Youth. Those interventions should be well designed and implemented by a range of service providers, including policy agencies, intergovernmental and bilateral technical assistance partners, the private sector and non-governmental organisations all in a variety of settings. Emphasis should be on activities that nurture skills and creativity of young people with potential to set up ICT/



Science and Technology innovative enterprises and at the same time make them employable in the formal markets.

We believe that support should be availed to young people to train as innovators, developers, artisans and/ or become self-employed in the informal sector. Thus to enable this, facilitation ranging from provision of credit and mentoring, counselling support, outreach, awards and competitions, training of trainers extra can be instigated, in partnership with a variety of partners and modalities. Interventions should be those that should try to integrate the already existing learning process and also Youth living in difficult circumstances should be helped to develop ICT businesses, avoid drugs and crime, and sharpen their academic skills as well as to encourage them to have positive attitudes about themselves and their communities and bolstering the self confidence and leadership skills required.

A number of programs to kick-start such interventions should be set up by a number of stakeholders such as civil society and government, inspiring and motivating young people and the public as a whole to appreciate science and technology in solving social problems.