

# **ADF Youth Speak on eEmployment as a Response to UN Youth Employment Network**

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The proof of sustainability of any enterprise, people-group or structure is the young people the system can equip for the days ahead. If these youth are either unemployed today or unsure of employment when they complete their studies, there is the need to focus attention on the situation and offer creative and appropriate solutions.

Available statistics show that, because of substantial growth in the numbers of youth worldwide, more young people than ever before in history are about to enter the labour market. In the developing world there will be 700 million new entrants to the labour force between 2002 and 2010. According to the International Labour Organization, more than a billion jobs must be created to accommodate these new workers and reduce unemployment. Particularly in the developing world, where minimal economic growth is forecast, economies are unlikely to be able to absorb the available labour supply<sup>1</sup>.

Attention has increased quite significantly across the continent with respect to the opportunities that Information and Communication Technologies offer for development and economic emancipation. A few years ago, telephones were scarce commodities in Africa, but not today. Nigeria achieved its first 10 million-lines mark in early 2005 and is planning another 10 million in less than 15 months.

Internet access – albeit through public access points – has become commonplace, offices are now incomplete without computers for staff and daily operations, and policy frameworks addressing Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are becoming popular.

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), 35 African countries now have (at either beginning or ending stages) National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) plans. All these point to the response of the continent to what has been described as Africa's Last Chance<sup>2</sup> – the opportunity to use ICTs for accelerated development.

New economic indices reveal that the major factors of production are knowledge and technology<sup>3</sup>. The role of ICTs in increased employment opportunities cannot be ignored, as many nations across the world have been able to identify this and apply in their plan towards increased economic development. India's prominence in the software industry, the ongoing *asianisation* of hardware technology and the response of such nations as the United Arab Emirates to ICT opportunities –

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Himes and Angelique Olmo, 2002. Population Resource Center

<sup>2</sup> *Africa's Last Chance*: Sesan, 2004. [www.gbengasesan.com/papers.htm](http://www.gbengasesan.com/papers.htm)

<sup>3</sup> *The IEE Engineer and the Knowledge Economy*: Sesan, 2003. [www.gbengasesan.com/papers.htm](http://www.gbengasesan.com/papers.htm)

and the attendant results – tell the complete story of employment opportunities provided by ICTs. In Nigeria, and many other African countries, some young people have been able to change their employment status by erecting temporary offices (kiosks, umbrella units, etc) where they provide telecommunication services such as mobile phone calls, sales of recharge cards and repair of damaged handsets.

It appears that the fact that young people are more comfortable with technology offers promises with respect to youth employment issues in Africa. Mobile platforms, web technologies, internet services and other ICT delivery mechanisms are available for youth who are able to translate opportunities into livelihood ventures. Fortunately, most of the employment opportunities provided by ICTs do not require huge start-up capitals – a mobile phone *merchant* can actually set up his *umbrella business* with less than \$100. Even if he has less, he can afford to grow his start-up capital from almost nothing by retailing recharge cards for sub-dealers.

Another great example is the opportunities provided through online platforms, especially blogs, which are increasingly enjoying growing revenue bases. The practical training on blogs and eCommerce provided by the ICT, Science and Technology Division (ISTD) of the ECA, as a pre-ADF V workshop comes at an important time for the well over 50 young people who were trained.

If these opportunities exist in ICTs, why then are we not seeing dynamic change across the continent in the area of engaging ICT opportunities for employment? The answer is quite simple: some have not seen the opportunity; others assume that ICTs have a steep learning curve; and some others are ignoring opportunities – or are not prepared to follow the path of ICT opportunities because of their assumption that the *ICT pasture* is not green enough.

While the campaign for ICT opportunities in employment need to increase in tempo, youth themselves must seek to identify this dynamic opening. For those who think ICTs present high entry barriers (steep learning curve), they fail to realise that ICTs offer a wide spectrum of choices ranging from those comfortable with *newbie* to those requiring advanced attention and understanding. It is the choice of each entrant to choose which width of the spectrum best meets his/her needs, and individual learning capacity. Reality is that some ICT opportunities require no high-level thought process beyond the simple ability to sum up your income and calculate your profit at the end of the day.

Africa's response to employment opportunities provided by Information and Communication Technologies for its youth will define the final outcome of the present (un)employment situation across the continent. The ECA's focus on Youth as the theme of its fifth ADF, and the deliberate planning of break-out sessions on ICTs and Youth Employment, go a long way to show what the continent can expect as these ADF V youth take advantage of eEmployment opportunities.