

Way Forward: Youth, ICT and Entrepreneurship?

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An average African Youth looks around to consider the critical factors that make for a productive life and see that quality education and appropriate employment are not guaranteed – and even when either (or both) are in place, it is usually at a very high personal cost – they are each day coming face to face with the reality that the world is indeed in their generation flat and thus 'competitors' emerge from every corner of the planet. To prepare for this competition on the world's stage, many have sought solace in the confines of better-managed economies, and other lands that show promise – at least as seen on cable networks or international journals.

The factors of production have gradually grown beyond land, labor and capital towards an integrated combination of these with knowledge and technology with the New Economy emphatically placing priority on Human Capital as the new resource-currency of the 21st Century. The challenge, therefore, for Africa, is how best can we marshal our strengths towards productive socio-economic growth?

A myriad of answers can be given but if sustainability of such a growth is to be maintained, we need to actively work on the grooming of a revamped generation of youth who are competent in their chosen spheres of career intervention and are also empowered to compete favorably with their peers globally and we must maximize the opportunities that come with the 21st Century, especially Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). It must be emphasized that the education (formal and informal) of the continents Youth does not only prepare them as job-seekers and artisans but that it opens up to them the optional path of entrepreneurship by introducing them to the dynamics of becoming job-creators themselves.

Having been put to continuous use by other Southern economies, ICTs hold the potential of strengthening development efforts, providing a platform for socio-economic growth and changing the face of employment in the nation where strategic use is made of such (ICT) opportunities. The **Global Knowledge Partnership** has over the past year via its **Youth social Entrepreneurship Initiative** in Asia sought to replicate a model of networked Youth social entrepreneurs.

While it remains the responsibility of government to move beyond promises (and declarations) to the actual modeling of a conducive environment, the private sector must see the need to at least cooperate with the academia on capacity building while it also encourages self-motivated Corporate Social Responsibility. Non-profits must be consistent in its intervention, especially for rural youth empowerment and supplementary support. The African academia must embrace new learning models that focus on entrepreneurship – and not on creating job-seekers. The media can help sharpen the saw by showcasing youth-led best practice entrepreneurial efforts and development partners should provide effective support – with a clear example in the ongoing support provided by the **United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)** to the **African Youth ICT4D Network (AYIN)**.

Beyond these calls for support, Africa's youth must learn to move from activism to action, and realize that we are the architects of our own future – and that of the continent. We must all work together with the continent's youth to break the cycle of underdevelopment and accelerate freedom via ICT-enabled change.