

The role of African universities in developing and shaping an information society: The case for Uganda

The African Information Society Initiative (AISII) is Africa's common vision to create effective digital opportunities to be developed by Africans and their partners, and to speed Africa's entry into the information and knowledge global economy.

At national level, Uganda's vision for information and communication technology (ICT) development is¹

"A Uganda where national development, especially human development and good governance, are sustainably enhanced, promoted and accelerated by efficient application and use of ICT, including timely access to information."

Uganda's submission to the WSIS addresses eight themes. While Ugandan universities are not explicitly identified as partners, they do have a significant role to play. Following are actions identified by the document that I consider Uganda's universities should play a key role.

Theme (1): Infrastructure: financing, deployment and sustainability

Develop national policies and implementation mechanisms to address specific obstacles to ICT deployment.

Government to promote and support development of appropriate ICT solutions that are affordable and sustainable.

Theme (2): Identifying and overcoming barriers to the achievement of the information society

Launching national e-awareness campaigns concerning ICT usage/benefits to both men and women.

Theme (3): The role of Government, the business sector and civil society in the promotion of ICTs for development

Put in place legal and regulatory frameworks, which define the nature of public interest obligations and civic responsibilities of companies that deal in communications business, especially the broadcasters who use publicly owned frequencies.

Develop the necessary policies that provide for preparation and transition to a knowledge-based society.

¹ Uganda's Working Document for the Second Preparatory Meeting for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), February 2003, Geneva, Switzerland. Available from <http://www.ucc.co.ug>

Ensure that policy, legal and regulatory frameworks created for ICT development incorporate the gender perspective.

Mainstream ICT development and sustenance in Government budgets.

Theme (4): Education, training and human resource development

Set up mechanisms that promote collaboration among professional, industry and training institutions so as to build appropriate human resources capacity.

Theme (5): Access to information and communication technologies

Establish coordinated sectoral policies that encourage and promote access to and affordable use of infrastructure.

Review the licensing regimes to ensure access to a wide range of ICT services especially in the rural/underserved population.

Ensure that ICT facilities are provided at levels of cost, which match the ability of the majority of users to pay, so as to reduce gender and spatial disparities in information access.

Localize the content for relevance and access for multilingual users.

Initiate an e-government programme to digitize public domain information and make it available through Internet web sites, public library systems and other appropriate dissemination media.

Theme (6): Information network security

Deploy appropriate infrastructure for enforcement of network security.

Develop human resource capacity to ensure network security.

Develop, implement and monitor programmes to create public awareness about rights and responsibilities regarding proprietary information.

Theme (7): Development of a policy and regulatory framework

Establish coordinated sectoral policies that encourage and promote access to and affordable use of infrastructure

Accord due regard, recognition and protection of intellectual assets.

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Ensure quality through the institution of a code of conduct to govern relations between the private sector and representative bodies, as well as ensuring observance of professional and business ethics.

Establish info-ethics councils for propagation and enforcement of info-ethics.

Establish and maintain a licensing and regulatory regime that promotes fair competition.

Theme (8): ICT Applications (education, health, culture, poverty eradication, government, employment, business)

Develop ICT applications in the various sectors (including health, education, agriculture, local administration, etc) with a view to enhance the quality of services and efficiency in service delivery.

Develop national programs that encourage sharing of infrastructure, services and expertise.