The 12ᵗʰ Annual Internet Governance Forum Meeting

IGF 2017 - Shape Your Digital Future

The Egyptian Cabinet Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC) Open Forum: "Digital Inclusion for Africa"

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Background Paper

#Digital inclusion, #Digital literacy, #Africa, #ICTs capacity building, #Connectivity, #Access, #Socio-economic challenges, #grievance redress mechanisms, #Crisis & disasters management, #early warning systems

Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) has been globally credited for increasing the speed and reach of information worldwide and adding value to human lives in many ways. Connectivity—whether through the Internet or mobile phones or other services—is increasingly helping to change people's lives in unprecedented ways. ICTs have an increasing impact on economic development and have become critical ingredients for the development of nations. In practically every sphere of life today, ICTs is redefining how people live, work and entertain themselves.

In many countries over the world, technology is becoming more widespread and prevalent and there have been massive jumps in technological innovation, all of which has created higher expectations for technology at home, at school, and at the workplace. Those nations who have the opportunity to learn digital skills are in a better position to obtain and make use of technology than those who do not.

Increasing digital literacy and equipping people with digital skills can enable critical information to reach marginalized communities at a rate and scale never before possible. The term digital inclusion reflects what access, adoption, and literacy in the

digital world mean today. On a broader level, digital inclusion refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and can use ICTs. Digital Inclusion is further concerned with addressing inequalities, where those unable to access the affordance of technologies are disadvantaged and marginalized in society and therefore digitally excluded.

Africa's millennial population is close to 200 million people and by 2040 they will make up 20 percent of the global workforce. Africa has the fastest growing digital consumer market and the largest working-age population in the world. The potential problems triggered by this boom in working-age youth is compounded by a lack of educational opportunities, technology training in particular where only around one percent of African children leave school with basic coding skills. In such context, African nations lag behind the western developed countries with regards to digital literacy and inclusion due to multifaceted problems which include socio-economic factors, connectivity, technological access and literacy, and digital repositories.

There is a vital need to integrate efforts and initiatives by governments, world leaders, international, regional, national, and non-governmental organizations, think tanks and research institutes to adopt technology-driven approaches which aim to bridge the digital divide between Africa and the rest of the world, and to speed the continent entry into the information age and ensure the digital inclusion for its nations.

Several measures and prerequisites need to be taken for digital inclusion for Africa to close Africa's digital skills gap and prevent the digital divide from getting wider and wider leaving people without access behind. This includes improvement on the technological infrastructures, telecommunications policies, as well as education systems and providing technology training. Furthermore, spreading digital literacy across Africa and reaching out to marginalized people who need digital literacy and equipping the youth with the technological skills which enables them to succeed in the local and global workforce is essential. Digital literacy needs to be embedded in the curriculum from a very young age in order to equip the next generation. High quality IT education is crucial to the future employment of African citizens and the sustainability of the African economy. Digital literacy has the power to put millions of young Africans on the path to successful careers improve Africa's position in the globally competitive knowledge economy.

Crisis and disasters management and early warning systems increasingly require the use of a wide range of technological tools. ICTs, mobile phones, geographic information systems (GIS), social media tools and other technologies are being used to manage crisis and disasters and build early warning systems in Africa. New technologies are used to warn communities of potential crises and inform them how to prepare, and to help governments and aid agencies predict how emergencies may unfold. Technology has also improved early warning systems, allowing humanitarian organizations to monitor droughts, helping displaced people find shelter and food in addition to other natural disasters. Additionally, ICTs can play a critical role in helping African citizens resolve their grievances through ICT-enabled grievance redress mechanisms which promote responsibility and accountability. Best practices and success stories for digital inclusion and technology benefits in Africa need to be observed and transferred in order to maximize benefits on all levels in Africa.

Questions addressed by the Open Forum

The following questions will be tackled in the Open Forum
- What measures are needed to ensure digital inclusion of people in Africa?
- What should governments do to foster digital literacy for their nations?
- What are the policies and measures needed to address the technology skills gap between Africa and the rest of the world?
- Are African education systems up to the challenge of delivering a digital workforce?
- What should be done to further unleash ICTs potential economic and societal benefits?
- How can technology help in facing crisis and disasters in Africa?
- In what ways can new technologies be applied to early warning systems in Africa?
- What policies are needed to expand the use of grievance redress mechanisms in Africa?
- What are the best practices and success stories for digital inclusion in Africa that can be observed and transferred?