

# Govt to support ICT innovators

By Edward Kayiwa

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) minister Frank Tumwebaze has said the Government has set up a programme to support individuals who are committed to innovation in the ICT sector.

He said the ICT innovation support programme, birthed more than a year ago, has already got support from the Cabinet and Parliament and is expected to enhance the growth of ICT skills and innovation across the country.

Tumwebaze said his ministry will, under this programme, put up a common ICT hub that will network between the Government and the ICT innovators, and also inculcate the culture of creativity and analytical thinking.

"We already have funds to support young innovators whose inventions have proved that they can survive in the market. We shall soon announce a panel of judges who will determine, according to the set criteria, which innovations require support, because this is a smooth avenue of creating jobs and boosting economic growth for this country," he said during the Leo Africa economic forum at the Kampala Serena Hotel on Friday.

Tumwebaze said the Government, through the National Information Technology Authority (NITA-Uganda) is also in the process of certifying ICT innovators, to enhance procurement of



The Government has set aside funds to support young ICT innovators and skills hubs

ICT services locally, within the public sector, which is the biggest consumer.

"The government policy right now is Buy Uganda Build Uganda (BUBU) and this includes ICT services as long as they are certified. However, since digital solutions are not readily on the market to be procured for instant

use, we also need a framework to guide procurement of the services," he explained.

Tumwebaze said the ministry is, therefore, preparing an ICT guiding document for government ministries, departments and agencies.

The ICT sector in Uganda is vibrant

and dynamic and has now turned into an inevitable tool of socio-economic development. It is also considered by the Government as a primary growth sector, as demonstrated in the National Philosophy on ICT document.

According to the Uganda Bureau

of Statistics, the sector's contribution to economic growth in terms of GDP stands at 6.5%, while sh225b is still needed to improve ICT infrastructure across the country, in order to increase its usage in both rural and urban households.

Japheth Kawanguzi, the founder of the Innovation Village, said promoting the use of ICT could support learning and teaching to provide young people with the skills they need to participate effectively in the global economy.

He said the government could also offer incentives to SMEs, such as lowering taxes on raw materials, supporting skills hubs in the different regions of the country.

According to Kawanguzi, ICT facilitation is key in supporting investment and business growth across the various sectors of the economy, as Uganda looks towards achieving a middle income economy status by 2020.

"The sector right now lacks infrastructure for developing software innovations, making the costs high. So we need a place to access the chips that are used in software development to make it attractive to the developers, but also affordable and accessible to the users," he said

Lucy Mbabazi, the founder and chairperson of Leo Africa, said the Government should support innovation and give young innovators space to operate, and also offer preferential treatment.