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Registering more progress on ICT innovations

Today, the Ministry of Information and National Guidance is launching the ground-breaking of the ICT Hub at the Uganda Institute of Communications and Technology (UICT).

This is a significant step in establishing the required infrastructure to support local ICT innovations.

Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) is happy that some of the ideas birthed in the President's vision more than 20 years ago, are coming to life. No doubt, ICT is such a strong pillar to the continued growth of our economy.

World over, there is an increasing exposure of predictable insights into the future of doing business the smart technological way. We hear of 5G, the Internet of things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI) and how these innovations are changing lives. Several countries have developed as a result of leveraging on technology.

We have seen that with increased support to young people, our country can be a centre of innovation and excellence in development and utilisation of applications (apps). In Uganda today, the academia;

the UCC organised Annual Communications Innovations Awards (ACIA) and the young brains at the various ICT innovation hubs/innovation villages are strong examples of positioning Uganda to be the centre of innovations in the region. We know that with e-Health solutions, for example, we can meet most of our health targets.

We have seen mobile technologies and their potential to enhance lifelong learning and skills development.

These things are upon us and we have no choice, but embrace technology or we will be left behind.

In September last year, President Museveni directed the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning to earmark at least sh15b every year, to support ICT initiatives including the establishment and equipping of ICT parks, incubation hubs and support to innovators. This came up as a result of the first ever ICT Innovation Forum organised by the Ministry of ICT&NG and UCC in August 2016.

The recently released industry market report shows that there are more people accessing internet mainly through mobile devices. The growth and vibrancy in the sector is a catalyst to the strategic direction of



the country.

UCC promotes a favourable competitive investment climate where provision of Internet by the licenced companies will only become an increased need translating into cheaper services and higher consumption.

The ICT Hub will thus be an attraction to people who dare dream, young people who inspire the future, young people, in whose passion lies enormous opportunities for further job creation, young people who want to shape the destiny of their future through ICT innovation.

The adaptation of ICTs in the development of new ideas, to deliver services or products with quicker,

better, faster and cheaper Internet will help these young people realise their dreams and the country, achieve its development objectives.

UCC through the Rural Communications Development Fund (RCDF) has been working over the last couple of years to promote the uptake of communications services in unserved and underserved areas of the country. This has been achieved through market operations, obligations and other interventions.

Within the education sector, UCC has provided grid-powered and solar-powered computers with a year's internet connectivity to over 1,000 secondary schools around the country as well as other educational institutions such as schools of nursing, technical colleges, universities, national teachers colleges and primary teachers' colleges.

The impact of this intervention has been tremendous. We now see the integration of ICTs in the delivery of education. Learners in rural areas have been exposed to ICTs at an early age and teachers have been equipped with critical thinking and ICT skills to enable effective delivery of the education syllabus. This will provide a foundation for the local

ICT industry, whose products and services we anticipate to consume.

Research indicates that in terms of the share of ICT in export and import revenue, Uganda's ICT service exports stood at \$74.9m in 2011, which was 5.7% of total exports, while the import of ICT goods stood at 7.4% of total imports in Uganda. Our collective efforts can yield greater results, more jobs and improved services through embracing technology.

From the Communications sector, the target to increase ICT sector contribution and increase the employment in the ICT sector from one million in 2012/13 to three million in 2020, three years from now is achievable.

The hub when fully established is expected to be the place where young ICT developers will provide lasting solutions to address our social and economic needs. The hub will no doubt support the value chain of innovation ideas — from the mind, to the market. Congratulations, Ministry of ICT, on this first phase.

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