

Youth

Jobs

Technology

Govt releases sh13b for ICT innovators

By Carol Kasujja
and Joan Murungi

The Government has released sh13b to construct a new fully-equipped technology and innovation hub in Kampala to create jobs for the youth.

This comes after Information Communication and Technology (ICT) innovators asked the minister in charge of the sector, Frank Tumwebaze, to allocate funding and build incubation hubs to help them develop their products.

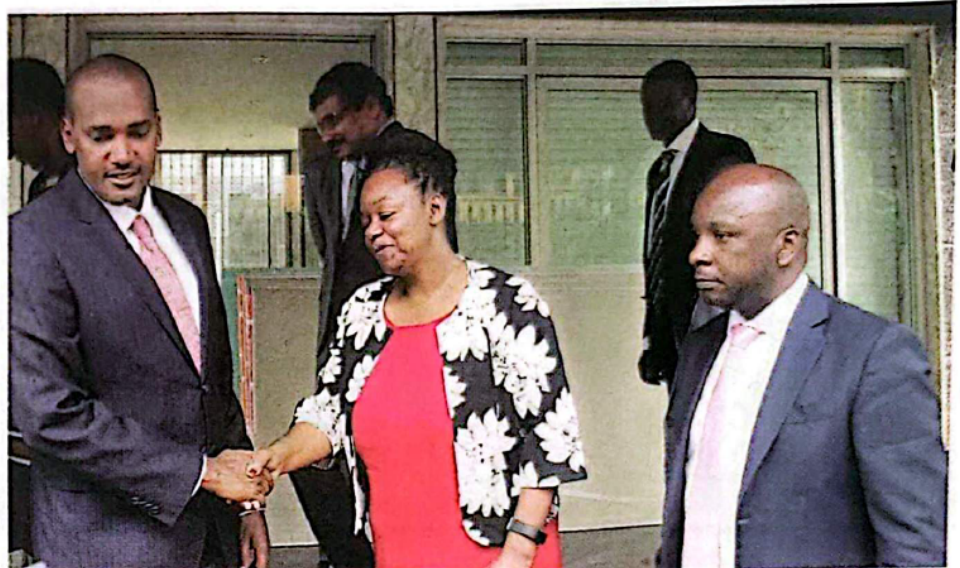
"ICT being a sector with the potential to create jobs, the Government has given us funds to start with the construction of the hub. Part of the money is meant to support 200 young people annually who have the passion in ICT, but do not have the capacity to buy equipment, get rights and also procure software licences to operate," Tumwebaze said.

The innovation hub, which will be built at the Uganda Information and Technology Institute in Nakawa, Kampala next month, will offer free working space to young innovators, who have no money for rent. They will use computers for free and also access free Wi-Fi.

While launching the innovators committee, which will vet all applications, Tumwebaze cautioned them to ensure that those who qualify for the grants have evidence that their apps or ideas are going to solve an existing problem in the country, have market and will help the Government fight corruption as well as cut costs.

"Do not develop a traffic app for Kamwenge district, where there is only one car and think we shall give you money. Develop an app that will help the health ministry monitor nurses and midwives (at work). You need to study the market first before applying so that you have a market for your application. We no longer want trials," Tumwebaze stated.

The committee of nine



Frank Tumwebaze greets the innovators committee member Dorothy Okello after the inauguration of the committee in his office in Kampala yesterday. Photo by Meddie Musisi

experts will be headed by Prof. Waswa Balunywa, the principal of Makerere University Business School.

The members are Dr Annabella Habinka, from Mbarara University of Science and Technology; Dr Benedict Oyo from Gulu University; Dr Dorothy Okello from Makerere University and Peter Kahiigi from the National Information Technology Authority (NITA-U). Others are John Musinguzi, a State House employee; Hellen Kyeyune, from Uganda Communications Commission and Lilian Aber, the National Youth Council chairperson.

"We are going to come up with the programme website where we shall advertise from. We are not going to receive physical applications and we might not issue direct money to everyone because people are fond of running away when they receive money," Vincent Bagiire, the ICT ministry permanent secretary, said. "Vetting is going to be transparent. Our main focus is in public service delivery, especially in health, education, oil and transport," Bagiire said.

The innovation hub forms part

of the broader digital strategy being drafted by the ICT ministry. It includes how the Government shall digitise some sectors such as education and health. Additionally, it will also include details on intellectual property and big data.

Speaking to *New Vision*, Aber said that as a leader, she is going to make sure that selection of winners is free and fair.

A total of about 400,000 students graduate annually from both public and private institutions. However, the Uganda Investment Authority (UIA) estimates that only about 150,000 jobs are created in the formal sector annually. This leaves an estimated 250,000 unemployed.

"As a youth leader, I am going to use this programme as an avenue to

ensure that young people are given an opportunity to practise what they learn in schools. It is a good programme, which is going to help the country overcome the problem of unemployment," Aber said.

Oyo noted that with the ICT fund, many students will start creating jobs other than looking for them.

"We are going to mentor more students to embrace new technology. Many people have phones, but they do not know other use apart from receiving calls," he said.

As of 2013, information from the International Telecommunications Union indicated that internet usage in Uganda had risen from 40,000 in the year 2000 to two million in 2008 and to six million in 2013.

The increase has had a positive trickle down economic effect in form of value-added services such as bulk messaging, games and pranks.

"The ICT innovations fund is a good idea, especially for ICT students, we have many ideas, but we do not have money to operate. The Internet is always a problem," Edward Ssemwanga, a student at Makerere University, said.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

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