

By Prossy Nandudu

Govt agencies rejecting Ugandan-made software

Software developers and innovators have accused government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) of refusing to use software and other technologies that have been developed in Uganda.

The developers now want the National Information Technology Authority Uganda (NITA-U) to engage and assure users that they have quality products.

The appeal was made by IT innovators and software developers in a recent meeting organised by NITA-U at Patio Restaurant.

Suspicions

Collin Asimwe, a communication strategist at Metropolitan Uganda, said MDAs fear innovators claiming they are disruptive due to their advanced technology backgrounds. He added that they fear young innovators could land on information they want hidden from the public.

"Once in the ministry, an innovator may come across a file of a maths teacher part-time in school A and full-time in school B, but is failing to balance. As a result, there is poor performance in the school where he spends less time," Asimwe said. He added that MDAs worry about the effect such information would have on the public, so they deny innovators access to their systems.

He was backed by Michael Nyitegeka from the academia, who said a few agencies that have attempted to accept local innovators' software, instead want to own and control it, leaving out the innovator, which he said is not fair.

NITA-U response

The director e-government services at NITA-U, Peter Kahiigi, explained that the meeting was aimed at finding ways young software developers can take part in the systems integration to help the Government deliver services.

"We have many government systems, but are not talking to each other so we are asking the young people to help us integrate the solutions that are meaningful to the citizens," Kahiigi said.

Embracing Ugandan software?

Kahiigi said through governments' Buy Uganda Build Uganda policy, the authority is encouraging consumption



Asimwe, Kahiigi and the sales and marketing manager of UGO Uganda Diana Kamukama interacting during the meeting at Plato Restaurant in Kampala recently. Photo by Shamim Saad

in two years.

"In the next 10 years we shall have made a saving of between \$50m and \$60m because we buy a lot of software to keep the systems running from overseas and these require regular maintenance," Kahiigi added.

He, however, warned that not all kinds of software will be taken on by government agencies.

"For your software to be accepted, it should be at the same level with imported ones," he said.

The authority is already training some of developers to meet the standards in addition to business skills, communication, management and governance with the help of mentors from key government agencies.

of locally manufactured products which have matured to international standards.

\$60m

The amount of money the Government will be saving if the bought software developed by Ugandan innovators

He cited the example of Kyambogo University, where students developed a solution for the management of university business, such as students' records and graduation certificates, which the education ministry has agreed to roll out.

He added that four others are almost ready to be used in different government agencies including health, water, and agriculture and this will bring down costs incurred by the Government on imported software.

Cost saving?

Using software made in Uganda, the Government will save between \$50m and \$60m over the next 10 years. Currently, the Government spends about \$2m annually for maintenance of some of the imported software. But if the same amount of money was saved and given to a young innovator, they could come up with the same software



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