

**Kyetume
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ICT policy for the disabled in offing

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have become the leading medium for communicating, transacting, informing, educating and entertaining all over the world.

Usage of technologies such as television, radio, fixed and mobile telephony, has become a basic and indispensable feature in the lives of people across the globe.

The International Telecommunications Union currently estimates subscriptions to mobile services worldwide to be close to about eight billion, of which about 22 million are in Uganda.

Since 1990, when computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web, Internet usage has fast expanded with an estimate of almost four billion users in the world now, 16 million of them in Uganda. Every country is benefiting from ICT's opportunities for economic and social development.

It is hence imperative to ensure that persons with disabilities (PWDs) are not excluded from the use and benefits of ICTs, which must be developed and deployed in a manner that is accessible to accommodate all types of disabilities.

Disability is an umbrella condition, covering impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions; it denies a person a normal economic and social life.

In today's world, with the ubiquitous impact of ICT and assistive technologies across all sectors, no one should be excluded from using computers, cellular devices/phones, the Internet, televisions, automated teller machines, as well as electronic kiosks, their myriad of software and associated services. Being excluded from ICT-enabled applications implies

being shut out not only from the information society, but also from accessing essential services, such as e-government, e-health, e-procurement, e-commerce, etc, as well as from the opportunity of living an independent life.

The challenge now is for governments to

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take the situations of PWDs fully into account by mainstreaming a disability perspective in all planned development actions, including legislation, policies and programmes, in all areas and at all levels of development. The UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities was the first international instrument on disability, enacted in 2006. Although 172 countries globally had ratified it as of March this year, apart from South Africa and Tunisia, none has formulated a stand-alone national ICT for disability policy like Uganda is doing.

The treaty charges governments with the responsibility of ensuring that the rights of PWDs are recognised and respected. Its preamble mainstreams disability issues in all legal frameworks as an integral part of strategies for sustainable development. Articles 9 and 21 of the Convention outline the need for a more accessible ICT environment that caters for the needs of PWDs by employing methods and formats accessible to them. However, although they constitute a very important segment of society, PWDs are marginalised in most societal strata.

According to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, Vincent Bagiire Waiswa, an ICT policy specialist, the Government of Uganda underscores uptake and improved utilisation of ICTs to ensure universal access to services and opportunities. Given the emergence and convergence of technologies such as the Internet and artificial intelligence, applications of ICTs for PWDs are enormous.

Therefore, the ministry has developed the National ICT for Disability Policy, the first in the country and third in the world, as an intervention to close gaps in the use of ICTs by PWDs.

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