

Ict and the youth

Technology, Mobile Phone



ICT can be broadly defined as a set of activities that facilitate, by electronic means, the capturing, storage, processing, transmission, and display of information. The term information and communication technology (ICT) is used in this context to encompass the production of both computer hardware and software as well as the means of transferring the information in digital form. It also includes low cost forms of communication such as radios.

Another term commonly used to describe the changes produced by information technology is the digital economy. This expression emphasizes the new opportunities created by transforming information into a binary digital code. The digital economy refers to more than the boom and bust cycle of many new ventures aiming to tap the potential of the Internet for commercial purposes. The more profound effect of ICT is likely to be in improving the efficiency and reach of the mainstream production of goods and services, in both the public and private sectors of the economy.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been increasingly promoted as a key solution for comprehensive development, poverty eradication and the empowerment of historically disadvantaged groups, such as women, the youth and minorities in the Global South. ICT-based business initiatives and e-commerce projects in particular, have been hailed as “potential goldmines” for women’s and youth empowerment. However, research and experience show that to be successful, projects must balance the need to overcome structural barriers to advancement with sensitivity to the limited space within which many in the Global South navigate. An International Telecommunication Union (ITU) study (2005) describes ICTs as potentially powerful “development enablers” and the World Bank currently

supports more than 1, 000 projects with an IT component (The World Bank Gender Group, 2006) They are cost-effective with significant transformative power, allow developing countries to leapfrog several stages of the development process and, in furnishing individuals directly with tools for self-empowerment, avoid top-heavy and corrupt bureaucracies (Heeks, 1999; Karake-Shalhoub & Al Qasimi, 2006). Specifically, Eggleston, Jensen, and Zeckhauser (2002) argue that ICTs " can enhance the functioning of markets that are critical for the well-being of the poor" because ICTs can foster greater market integration in many ways: - They allow firms and individuals in developing countries to participate more competitively and with greater ease in the regional, national and global economies and reduce uncertainty in doing business; - Information regarding prices enables producers to plan their product mix and input purchases in an efficient manner; - Access to ICTs allows producers to sell their products in the most profitable markets and determine the optimum timing of sale; - Availability of price information shrinks the informational asymmetry between the rural producers and middlemen; - ICTs reduce the exploitation of rural producers by e-middlemen; - Increased information facilitates technology diffusion, adoption and innovation at a much faster pace; - Increased information about the availability of jobs could result in better and faster matching between landless laborers and available jobs, ultimately leading to increased productivity; - ICTs provide greater access to weather-related information and credit opportunities. In short, access to ICT and proper use of this access could place an economy on a higher income trajectory over time. ICTs can offer many youths in the developing countries an entrepreneurial advantage.

Some of the ways by which it can offer such entrepreneurial skills to the youth include: * Sale and repair of mobile phones. Until recently not many people in the developing countries knew about the use of mobile telecommunication. Since its emergence in the early 2000's it has provided a lot of jobs for the youth who have gone into the selling and repairing of these mobile phones. It has also taken a chance at the download of applications like E-Bible, Quran, and other applications onto these phones. It is relatively cheap in the sense that it does not require a huge amount of money to go into. For example, to go into the repairs of mobile phones all that one requires is a soldering iron, electricity and a table or desk on which the repair works will be done, which is relatively cheaper than manufacturing and so on. A typical example of an organization helping the youth in this area is rLG communications which is a small ICT company who is into the training of the youth who are willing to learn how to repair and assemble mobile phones and after their period of training sets them up in business. * Word processing shops. This is very prevalent on the campuses of the tertiary institutions. This is normally called " Type and Print Shops" or " Photocopy Shops". Due to the fact that many people lack typing skills and also don't have personal computers, they normally result to other people to type and print their letters, documents, make photocopies of documents and even design cards for special occasions. For example, Invitation cards for weddings, outdoorings, funeral posters and even political posters are designed and printed by the youth which serves as a major source of entrepreneurship. * Assembling, Servicing and Sale of Computers. With the emergence of ICT into developing countries, many people now see why its important to have a personal

computer at home or at work. This has given rise to many computer retail shops in town. These shops do everything from assembling of the various parts of the computer, to servicing and even sometimes software acquisition and installation. An example is Zepto computers in Accra who trains young people in assembling of computers and laptops, case branding of laptops and servicing of these devices in the event of malfunction. Another example is IPMC which runs short courses for young people in this field. * Internet cafes. The use of internet services cannot be over emphasized in this 21st century generation where everything is going ICT. Before the use of mobile phones became very common, the only way of getting internet access was to go to the internet café. This gave rise to many internet cafes around the cities and towns especially. They provide such services as browsing or surfing the net for information, E-mailing and recently with universities and WAEC using online applications, registering of applicants online for admission into Universities and the like. To undertake this, one needs a computer and an internet facility (e. g. Modem) and you are in business. * Selling telephone-based services: The availability of mobile phone networks in many low-and middle-income countries opens up many opportunities for young people. One common option is to purchase a mobile phone through a micro credit program and to earn income by providing low cost phone calls to others, as illustrated in the story below about a 16-year-old schoolgirl in rural India (see Box 1). Box 1: On-selling telephone-based services Every day at 8 a. m., her straight black hair tied neatly in a braid, 16-year-old Neelam Aggarwal rides almost 5 kilometers to school in a horse-drawn buggy. She would like to be a doctor someday. But for girls like Neelam, who lives in the

dusty, impoverished village of Farah in India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh, such a vocation seems remote. For starters, her school-like most village schools in India--doesn't even offer science classes for girls. Still, Neelam, one of eight daughters of a sweets maker, has no intention of becoming a housewife. "I want to make something of myself," she says. So each day after school, Neelam operates what amounts to the village's only public telephone--a cellular phone owned by Indian cellular operator Koshika Telecom. By charging her fellow villagers to make calls, Neelam can make as much as US\$8.75 on a really good day. She's saving the money for computer classes, which she hopes will lead to a good job.... Source: Business week Online, 11 October 1999. The potential of mobile phones to create low-income earning opportunities for young people is further illustrated by the Grameen Village Pay Phone program (VPP). Grameen Bank is a pioneer of small loans to the poor. Since its founding in Bangladesh in 1976, Grameen Bank has grown to lend US\$3.46 billion to nearly 2.4 million borrowers (November 2001). The Village Pay Phone program makes it possible for a Grameen borrower to buy a mobile phone, and then to make the telephone available for others in the village to pay for phone calls, to send short message services (SMS) and to enable villagers to receive incoming calls. Grameen Telecom charges Grameen borrowers a wholesale airtime rate. Grameen Village Pay Phones operates in more than 2,000 villages in Bangladesh in September 2000 and an average of 100 additional villages is being connected each month. A typical pay phone owner can earn up to four times the average per capita income in Bangladesh. The phones are used for a variety of purposes. Farmers use them to find out where they

can get the best prices for their crops, and relief workers are able to better coordinate disaster response measures. Villagers are also able to use the phones to communicate with local government officials. * Young people as ‘ information intermediaries’ The widespread use of English on the Internet has created the need for local content and applications to enable non-English speakers to make effective use of it. For the poor in particular, the vast amount of information on the Internet requires an intermediary to sift through it to identify what is relevant and then interpret it in the light of the local context. Young people are well placed to perform this role of ‘ information intermediary’ For example, young people can use their knowledge of how to access the Internet and combine it with other forms of communication such as radio. In Sri Lanka and Mongolia, for example, local populations have gained access to information on the Internet through community radio networks. Radio stations use facilitators to search the Internet for information sought by local communities and broadcasts the information in their language. Another option is for young people to use their skills in information technology to develop simple web sites in local languages. For example, India’s Swaminathan Foundation has set up Village Knowledge Centres, with special websites to provide a variety of locally relevant content. Another example is Warana Nagar rural network project, in Maharashtra State in India, The district has 70 villages and is known for the strength of its cooperative societies. Villagers are using ‘ facilitation booths’ to access agricultural, medical and educational information on the Internet. The technology includes 10 computer servers, two small aperture terminals (VSATs), and about 165 personal computers. * Telecentres as income

generators for young people Telecentres are being set up through public and private initiatives in many developing countries in telephone shops, schools, libraries, community centres, police stations, and clinics. Sharing the expense of equipment, skills and access amongst an ever-increasing number of users also helps to cut costs and make these services viable in remote areas. UNESCO have produced a user-friendly manual on how to set up several different types of community-based Telecentres. 35It is aimed at telecom operators, NGOs, community groups, local government or someone wanting to establish a small business. The manual outlines how to set up four types of telecentres. At the most basic level, ' micro telecentres' use only pay phones and possibly a smart card reader and a receipt printer. They are usually housed in a shop or other business and some are outdoor kiosks. ' Mini telecentres' usually offer a single phone line (possibly mobile phone) with a three-in-one scanner/printer/copier, a fax machine and a PC with a printer, Internet access and a call meter. A ' telecentre' offers a number of phone lines, a call management system, fax machine, photocopier, several PCs with a printer, Internet access and perhaps a scanner. Finally, a ' full service telecentre' offers many phone lines, and multi-media PCs with Internet access. Other equipment can include a high-volume black and white and/or colour printer, a scanner, a digital camera, a video camera, a TV, an overhead projector, a photocopier, a laminator, meeting rooms, and a video conferencing room. In conclusion, ICT has been used to generate employment for young people in low and middle-income countries. The focus has been on identifying best practice examples in relation to five key principles: initiatives involving self-employment and entrepreneurship, the

use of public-private partnerships, a focus on the most vulnerable among young people, ways to link informal sector activities with the digital economy, and the participation of young people at the design and implementation stages of ICT base entrepreneurship.