

ICT Policy in Africa

The demons of the past will remain the evils that will continue cursing the development of ICT in Africa, if not exorcised. This was the sentiment held by the delegates attending the session on 'ICT Policy in Africa' at the SANGONeT conference.

Delegates from various countries in Africa were given an opportunity to share experiences of the information technology communication (ICT) environment in their countries.

Giving a description on ICT policy in Congo Brazaville, Sylvie Niombo from African Women Coordinator and the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) told delegates that due to the post conflict environment of the Congo Brazaville, infrastructure had been destroyed. This resulted in the country's ICT industry developing at a very slow pace.

Very few institutions of higher learning offered ICT training in Congo Brazaville, “That’s why students travelled to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for training,” said Niombo.

Niombo explained that computer equipment in Congo Brazaville is very expensive, noting that a second hand Pentium III computer can cost up to 800 US\$. Internet connection can cost 2000 US\$, she said.

Niombo said that the telephone market in Congo Brazaville is dominated by international companies such as Celltel and MTN. However, not many local people benefited from such a cellphone market.

Niombo told delegates that ICT’s were not seen as a priority by the government and as a result there was no political will and financial commitments to ICT.

Coura Fall, the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) CIPP Africa Manager in Senegal, said there has been some improvements in Senegal. Initially the media industry did not understand ICT policies, but NGO’s took a responsibility to train journalists.

She said through training, journalists were equipped to report and inform people about ICT. Senegal now had ITC debates on national television.

The constraints though were the slight control monopoly and weak competition in the mobile networks. The only internet operator in Senegal was Sonatel, she said.

Milton Aineruhanga, Programme Officer of Wougnet, gave a gender perspective on ICT in Uganda.

Patriarchy seemed to be one of the obstacles that hindered access to ICT by women.

Aineruhanga said women in rural areas did not have ICT access in the appropriate suitable times, as they had to fulfil their roles as women.

Aineruhanga said part of the remedy to this would be to give access to women at times when they were done with their chores and also locate ICT systems in venues that women frequented. Places near health centres would be appropriate as women were tasked with the responsibility to take children to clinics.

Aineruhanga said there was a strong need for women in Uganda to be represented in fora where major decisions on ICT’s were made. At the moment, there were few women that participated in the planning, implementation and ownership of ICT’s.

Abi Jagun from African ICT policy research said focus needed to be put on the increasing and expanding of telecom infrastructure. She said there was a need for liberalisation of the market to allow for more ICT companies.

Much has been said on the state of Africa's ICT policies, but what ought to be understood is that ICT development will not exist outside social and political framework. If socio-political evils are not addressed ICT access to the majority will remain a miracle from heaven.