

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE VICE CHANCELLOR, MAKERERE UNIVERSITY AT THE 2ND ANNUAL ICTEXPO KAMPALA 29TH – 30TH NOV 2010

INTRODUCTION

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me the great pleasure to welcome you all and give this keynote address at the 2nd ICTEXPO here in Kampala, on “The East Africa Digital Forum” that is bringing together stakeholders in the industry from the region and beyond.

Expositions like these enable the sector to grow as has been espoused in your Expo flyer which stipulates that “The ICTExpo is an annual event that showcases a variety of ICT Solutions, Products & Services, Technological Trends, Evolutions, Innovations as well as Research and Development in the ICT Sector.”

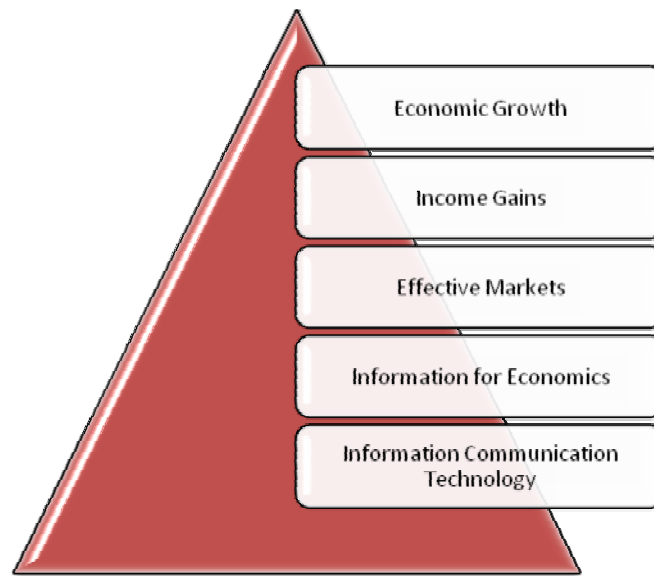
Today, the key players and decision makers that influence and impact on the advance of the sector in the region have managed to come together under one roof. It is my belief that at the end of the two days, alliances would have been forged, social networks would have been strengthened, knowledge would have been shared, and business connections established.

Allow me now to focus my address on the Digital Forum which you are attending. I will highlight some issues that could form the basis of discussion during the course of this forum.

ICT for Social Development and Transformation

ICTs the world over are changing the way of life as well as the development paradigm. The ability to connect, and communicate through the different tools that are available is redefining the way institutions are being run. Business processes are being re-defined and communities have more access to information, and are contributing more to the generation of this content than ever before. Access to information is critical in the decision making process and can influence the development process of any nation. When the citizens of a community or a given country have access to information they

have the power to authoritatively make important decisions. The figure following demonstrates the power of ICT in the growth of the economy.



The Purported relationship between ICT and economic growth, adopted from Eggleston et al. [2002].

ICTs provide the relevant platform for access to information for economics, and this enables the streamlining of the markets thus making them effective. Once you have in place effective markets then the citizens can have income gains because of the appropriate information which in turn leads to economic growth.

Whereas this is true, we certainly still have challenges in making this a reality in Uganda and the region as a whole. Majority of the citizens that are accessing ICTs are largely using them for social purposes although the trend is changing slowly.

This is largely attributed to lack of awareness of the power of the gadgets that they are using, as well as lack of the appropriate content that is relevant to the consumers. It is therefore very important for the different stakeholders to deliberately invest in supporting awareness and content development.

Once these are in place then our people will know what is possible, be able to access the relevant content, make informed decisions, and the resultant effect will be development.

The telecommunications sector has been undergoing a sporadic revolution. I want to believe that the original inventors of the mobile phone did not think that mobile would be in position to carry as many devices as it is doing right now. The multi-functionality of the mobile phone for example has moved it from being a luxury tool to a necessity in life. Additional functions like radio, camera, torch, and music player are more critical in the buying decision. The more sophisticated users are looking for mini-computers on the phone and that is convergence in its essence.

The latest statistics show that there are more 10 Million subscribers on the mobile telecom networks in Uganda and this has happened in less than 10 years. There are more Ugandans accessing internet through cell phones than through the traditional PC's. The number of radios in the country has shot up because of the people that have more mobile phones. There are more services providers that are re-defining their services to conform to mobile platforms because of the size of the market. Airlines, banks, advertising agencies, news agencies are all in a rush to ensure that they are accessible on the mobile platform. The recent advance in mobile money transfers is an example of the power of convergence. Your mobile phone has become a mobile account, but also the telecom company to an extent is a financial institution, and this changes the dynamics within which the telecoms operate.

Yet another niche is mobile health, where the mobile phone has become a tool that provides vital support to the health sector. I am reliably informed that there are more than 20 mobile health projects taking place in this country. This seriously demonstrates the power of the mobile phone and the potential that we are yet to exploit.

The opportunities presented by this convergence are enormous but we must move rather swiftly to benefit from these developments. Evidence also shows that the more the services that are made available to the citizens, the more drastic the improvement in their wellbeing.

There is need to therefore harness the efforts that the different players are undertaking so that there is holistic approach to developing the different tools and services. A lot of work has been undertaken but there is lack of coordination and interfacing in the sector. These expositions therefore give us a sense of who is engaged in which sector, the advancements therein, and what gaps need to be addressed by the different partners.

Green ICT

Our environment is our heritage and therefore we should not over emphasize technology at the expense of our environment. We are already paying for the consequences of the developed nations and we ought not to follow in the same direction.

Unfortunately we are continuously becoming a dumping ground for all sorts of relics, all in the name of donations. It is therefore important that in circumstances such as these, we have appropriate disposal and recycling mechanisms. The obsolete ICT's that are in many of rural facilities need to be planned for appropriately otherwise we will pay a heftier price than those that donated them. Guidelines must be put in place therefore for those that bring in used technologies, to document and incorporate mechanisms to track and manage such facilities. We should therefore embrace the new technologies for they have inbuilt mechanisms that ensure their safe use.

This can be achieved with appropriate education to the masses to be aware of these technologies and the consequences that follow. Once we empower the consumers they will be in position to make informed decision. There is no doubt that development that is not cognizant of the environment is not sustainable. This should not be the case with ICT-enabled development.

Rural Telecommunication

Uganda has made impressive strides in making the rural areas accessible through the Rural Communications Development Fund. This project has enabled the connection of many rural areas that were previously perceived as commercially unviable. By providing resources to service providers to put in place appropriate infrastructure, the hitherto commercially unviable areas have all of a sudden come to life, owing to the emergence of competition.

The current pricing structure allows many more people to access telecommunication services than ever before. This is important both for social and business reasons. What is required now is appropriate content that can be used by many of the rural people.

With majority not able to read and write it is important that appropriate solutions are developed to cater for their needs otherwise they will continue being marginalized, even with technology at their disposal.

Social Networking and Knowledge Sharing through ICT

We are living in exciting times where social networking and knowledge sharing through ICT is a norm. Social media is taking center stage in almost all issues. This is becoming important, look at the facts about Facebook;

Facebook has more than **400Million** active users, **50%** of the active users log on to Facebook on a given day, more than **35M** users update their status everyday, more than **60Million** status updates are posted everyday, more than **3Billion** photos are uploaded on to the site every month, more than **5Billion** pieces of content are shared each week, more than **3.5Million** events are created each month, and more than **1.5Million** businesses have active pages on Facebook.

This is an example of the power of social networking.

Social media is not only becoming acceptable but also creating new dynamics on how to access the people. There is a lot of content that is created by these users, which drives traffic because people trust content that is generated by peers. I am confident that at the end of the forum, strategies will be shared on how a region like East Africa can best tap into the potential offered by social networking and use these facilities to share knowledge as well as business ideas.

Public Private Partnerships in ICT Sector

Partnerships are extremely important if we are to grow. We certainly need each other if we are going to change the sector. We must create synergies. There must be strategies deliberately designed to support the local sector to enable perfect competition and not to marginalize it. Looking at the sponsorship partners of this expo it is evident that this is already taking place although it ought to be enhanced and strengthened further.

In conclusion ladies and gentlemen, let me make the following critical observations;

1. We need to invest in our Human Resource; this is the greatest resource that any economy can possess. This must be a deliberate effort. Institutions that are doing this ought to be supported to improve on their facilities. More partners must be involved in ensuring that the training is done appropriately.
2. Government must put in place a favorable environment to spur the growth of the industry. We should not be held back by lack of laws and policies required by the sector.
3. ICT as a business is highlighted in the National Development Plan, implying that government is cognizant of the importance of ICT, this therefore must be put into action and not just on paper.
4. We all must take charge in shaping the destiny of our sector if it is to grow.
5. We must invest in Research and Development if this sector is going to be meaningful to us as region and not just by copying.
6. We must deliberately support local initiatives such as this Expo to spur the sector.

Allow me to thank you for considering Makerere University as a partner. With a student base of over 30,000, with over 5,000 of those pursuing ICT-related courses, I would like to reiterate our commitment to supporting such initiatives. I wish you fruitful deliberations and an eventful expo.

We Build for the Future