

Education Experts Discuss Market-Relevant Skill Building Solutions to Curb Youth Unemployment



Source:

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Representatives of the World Bank and GSMA, together with other members of the Edu-tech community joined IICD to discuss the need of equipping young people with market-driven skills in order to connect them with potential employment opportunities. This need has been expressed as a response to weak education systems and growing unemployment in Africa.

Michael Trucano, World Bank's Senior ICT and Education Policy Specialist, and Ronda Zelezny-Green, GSMA's Ecosystems Manager for Connected Living Programme and Manager for Mobile for Development joined the two-day IICD International Advisory Board meeting discussed trends, challenges, good practices and needs in the field of

ICT for Education. IICD has 17 years of experience in using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to advance educational systems and outcomes, working directly with students, teachers, school administrators, policy makers and the private sector.

“For the last 15 years there has been a discourse around the digital divide: between people who have access and those who don’t”, said Michael Trucano, “[but] we’ve become a bit more sophisticated about this divide. We used to think that someone with access to a computer was on the right side of this digital divide but now we understand is not just about having a gadget in front of you. It is about what you can do with it, what the OECD call the second digital divide between the people who are able to make productive use of the technology that is in their environment, and those who don’t.”

"Just because you have a cell phone does not mean you know how to use it in productive ways to impact your livelihood, or to use it to enhance your learning or help you teach, so the type of a whole set of skills that need to be developed and people need to develop themselves to make use of the technology, this is what many people are calling the second digital divide.”

Market-relevant skills

Much of IICD’s work focuses on increasing youth’s employability through building ICT skills, using ICTs to improve vocational training and linking training graduates with work opportunities.

During the meeting, participants shared challenges of traditional skill building programmes, which often fail to meet the objective of increasing employment rates of their target groups. Such programmes use outdated training methods, do not reflect the needs of the labour market, supply irrelevant skills in high volumes, and leave the youth to themselves in terms of finding the actual employment. There is a large separation between these programmes and the private sector, and the type of skills offered is not linked to key growth industries of large employment capacity.

Based on IICD’s work and other known best practices, the focus group led by Ronda Zelezny-Green (GSMA), discussed the opportunities that ICTs create for more market-relevant and more efficient approaches addressing the problem of youth unemployment. Ronda shared her experience of working with telecom providers in developing countries, where they commonly struggle to identify the right type of talent in sufficient quantities. This shortage of quality talent hinders telecom’s current work and its business expansion potential.

The top needed skills, listed by Ronda Zelezny-Green, include low- and high-end technology skills, such as technicians, developers, web designers and others. A similar conclusion was drawn by IICD’s programme managers who, based on their work on building digital skills in Ghana, Kenya and Zambia, know that IICD’s programmes facilitate a strong



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The focus group identified some of the most promising interventions in the field of building market-relevant skills and increasing youth employment:

- building digital skills and using ICTs as part of vocational training,
- ICT-based tracking of youths' transition to jobs and employers' needs and satisfaction,
- ICT (online and mobile) platforms that link youth and potential employers,
- ICT-based platforms for e-learning and m-learning that supplement classroom training

The focus group also listed key industry sectors, which could contribute to, and benefit from, such programmes. Depending on the region, SME, IT, media and design sectors, and in some cases public institutions, were listed. Ronda Zelezny-Green particularly underlined the role that the local and international telecom providers could play, based on her work in countries such as Kenya, the Philippines and others.

The meeting was concluded with a commitment to further expand IICD's youth employability programmes further and set individual follow-up actions to foster partnerships and knowledge exchange practices to strengthen these interventions.

If you want to learn more about IICD's work to promote ICT for entrepreneurship and youth development go to:

- [Young Peruvians Use Social Media to Promote Agro-Ecological Production](#)
- [Integrating ICTs in Vocational Training: A Pilot Project Step-by-Step](#)
- [Motorola Foundation Partners with IICD to Bring ICT to 5,000 Zambian Youths](#)
- [Youth Promotion Through ICT: Zambia](#)
- [Getting young people off the streets and into gainful employment](#)
- [Zambian sets up digital career guidance programme for rural youth](#)