Digital Inclusion in Africa

Role of Libraries and Information Centres

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Overview

Discuss the role of libraries and information centres in promoting sustainable inclusion of Africans in the digital spaces as a means of facilitating the realisation of **A Prosperous Africa, based on Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development**

What's Digital Inclusion?

Digital inclusion is defined as:

The activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of information and communication technologies (The **Center for Digital Equity**).

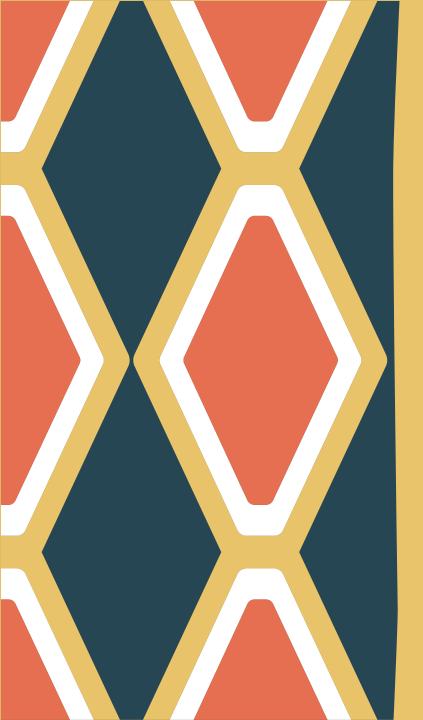**Digital inclusion is exemplified through the following:**

- Access to digital tools and infrastructure

- Ability to gainfully use digital tools and infrastructure

- Affordable access and use of digital resources

- Access to quality technical support

- Three legs – **access to digital literacy, tools, infrastructure**

Causes of Digital Exclusion

- Poverty (low disposable income).

- Lack of digital skills (illiteracy).

- Inadequate digital infrastructure.

- Lack of relevant (local) content.

- Language challenges.

- Gender inequalities (cultural biases).

- Intellectual property rights restrictions.

- Lack of awareness about digital opportunities.

Consequences

Digitally-excluded persons experience the following:

- Social exclusion.

- Economic marginalisation.

- Intellectual exclusion (low innovations).

- Low pace of development.

- Perpetual ignorance.

- Missed opportunities – vicious poverty.

- Bad governance – digital technologies bring transparency.

Internauts vs Internots

Internauts are technically capable of navigating and using the Internet while internots are non-users of the Internet.

Mitigating Digital Exclusion

- Increase connectivity through infrastructure development.

- Reduce the cost of accessing and using digital technologies.

- Build capacity to use digital technologies.

- Support the development and access of local content.

- Develop policy and legal frameworks for universal access of digital technologies.

- Create awareness on digital opportunities.

- Secure the digital spaces.

Roles of Libraries and Information Centres

Capacity Building:

- Training on information literacy
- Strengthening digital skills
- Improving media literacy

Digital Inclusion Advocacy:

- Policy on digital inclusion
- Digital literacy rights
- Library and information rights

Access to Digital Resources:

- Creating locally-relevant content
- Provide access to digital tools
- Providing access to infrastructure

Resource Mobilisation:

- Universal access
- Maker spaces
- Gig economy and platform work

Examples

The National Library of Uganda's "Digital skills @ your local library" Project:

- Two-year project aimed at improving the capacity of 25 public and community libraries that already have computers and the internet for public use.

- Offer digital skills training to women and unemployed youth and connect them to free online learning opportunities.

- Reach out to remote rural communities, organizing camps at which people will learn digital skills, including using mobile phones to connect to the internet and find information and services.

https://nlu.go.ug/digital-skills-and-inclusion-through-libraries-uganda

Examples

The following are some digital literacy projects in Kenya:

- KNLS (Nakuru) offers free short courses on introduction to computers, web design, and social media communication. About 5000 pupils, 100 teachers, 500 youths and 100 senior citizens have benefitted.

- Digital literacy programmes in academic libraries.

- Information literacy skills development.

- Digital Literacy Day marked in some universities (e.g. Kabarak University).

- Most of the libraries act as digital hubs.

Examples

Other examples in the EAC are as follows:

- Tanzania Beyond Tomorrow initiative led to many digital literacy projects.

- Digital literacy programmes in libraries in outpost towns in Rwanda (e.g. Rwinkwavu).

- Provision of e-content through digital library services in most countries.

- Use of digital ambassadors to champion issues that are relevant to digital inclusion (e.g. in Rwanda).

Key Observations

- Commendable efforts are currently being made by libraries to improve digital inclusion in the EAC countries.

- Most of the efforts are being made independently by various institutions. Thus, they are isolated, and in some cases, redundant.

- Many of the projects focus on digital literacy, provision of digital content, and access to digital infrastructure.

- Just a few initiatives on advocacy, networking and alliance building for digital inclusion are visible.

- There is less focus on production of local digital content to vocalise local issues and promote digital presence.

- Less attention has also been given to issues surrounding the gig economy and platform employment.

Question & Answers

Comments, Compliments, Questions and Answers