Digital Inclusion in Africa

Role of Libraries and Information Centres

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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

**Access to Digital Resources:**
- Creating locally-relevant content
- Provide access to digital tools
- Providing access to infrastructure

**Digital Inclusion Advocacy:**
- Policy on digital inclusion
- Digital literacy rights
- Library and information rights

**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