

Initiative to create digital jobs in Africa

Dr. Judith Rodin, president of The Rockefeller Foundation, on Monday, 13 May 2013, launched a new foundation initiative that will focus on Africa's youth and employment, Digital Jobs Africa.



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Innovation for the
Next 100 Years

Dr. Rodin was joined by Strive Masiyiwa, executive chairman of Econet Wireless and member of the Board of Trustees of the Rockefeller Foundation; Mamadou Biteye, managing director of The Rockefeller Foundation Africa Regional Office; and Phumla Langa, student at the Impact Sourcing Academy in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The Rockefeller Foundation's nearly \$100 million investment in Digital Jobs Africa will impact one million people in Africa through jobs and skills for youth in the information communication technology (ICT) sector who would not otherwise have an opportunity for sustainable employment. The Digital Jobs Africa initiative builds on three years of the Foundation's existing work and will focus on high potential youth who lack access to jobs and economic opportunities.

The initiative, led out of the foundation's Africa regional office in Nairobi, Kenya, will continue on for the next seven years and leverage significant funds and support from other stakeholders.

The rise of the ICT sector

Digital Jobs Africa will seize upon the opportunity created by the youth bulge in Africa and the phenomenal rise of the ICT sector to create sustainable job opportunities for African youth. Through a series of complimentary activities that include catalyzing the impact sourcing sector, skills training, and growth of other digital job opportunities, the initiative will aim to meet its goal of impacting one million people.

Africa has the youngest population in the world today, with the number of people between age 15 and 24 expected to double to 400 million by 2045. 60% of young people in Africa are unemployed, and youth unemployment rates are double those of adult unemployment in most African countries.

"Digital Jobs Africa recognises the enormous talent pool of young people in Africa who lack access to quality sustainable employment opportunities - and seeks to catalyze opportunities to close that gap," said Dr. Rodin.

Innovative ways to improve lives

"As the Rockefeller Foundation celebrates our centennial year and looks to our second century, we are supporting innovative ways to advance our century long commitment to improve the lives of poor or vulnerable people across Africa. Innovative, energetic and better informed African youth have the potential to drive economic growth and development, and this new initiative will marry that potential with the growth of technology to increase much needed employment opportunities."

To achieve the goal of impacting one million people, Digital Jobs Africa will bridge the gap between the supply of high potential job seekers who need both technical and soft skills to be work ready and companies seeking talent to service their expanding business needs.

Digital jobs such as data entry, service center support, online research and web design will provide youth with skills that will make them more resilient to a dynamic and uncertain labor market.

What is Digital Jobs Africa?

Digital Jobs Africa will focus on three specific interventions:

- Creating digital job opportunities by leveraging the rising demands from African-based companies, government, and multinationals to create employment opportunities and continuing to grow the impact sourcing sector, which is the socially responsible arm of the business process and information technology outsourcing industry that employs individuals who would not otherwise have an opportunity for sustainable employment;
- Working with local organisations to provide skills training to young people;
- And supporting an enabling environment for digital jobs that can be coordinated among government and businesses without the continued involvement of philanthropy.

Creating opportunities for African youth to obtain jobs through this initiative will have a powerful multiplier effect. It will improve the welfare of their households and catalyze indirect job creation for their communities. Family members of the youth employed in digital jobs will gain economic and social benefits as a result of the youth working, and the digital jobs created will in turn create indirect job opportunities for communities - ultimately leading to impact on one million people across the continent.

Dr. Rodin made the announcement at the recent World Economic Forum on Africa meeting in Cape Town, South Africa. South Africa is one of the six focus countries of the initiative. The others are Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Morocco and Egypt. The country selection was based on high levels of youth unemployment, the growth of their ICT-enabled sectors, including the existing level of governmental support and the potential to create significant numbers of jobs within the sector.

"The Rockefeller Foundation's Digital Jobs Africa initiative will give businesses in Africa the opportunity to employ a talented, skilled and developed workforce right here in our own cities," said Masiyiwa.

"Africa stands at a critical moment - where the challenges we face are now matched by unprecedented opportunity for change. It is critical that the private sector think creatively and collaboratively about how we can join with our development partners to actively build the workforce of tomorrow.

"The current pace of job creation in Africa is insufficient to meet the demands of a youth population growing in size and becoming better educated. Digital skills are fast becoming a requirement to gain employment, and ICT enabled jobs are more critical than ever in helping young people develop the required skills for the jobs of the future," said Biteye.

The initiative will be implemented in partnership with grantees, the private sector, development agencies, and other foundations that will support, co-fund and adopt many of the job creation tools and principles that the initiative will create.

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