

Information, the world's new capital - Digital Natives

Information is the new capital and currency of the world, Nishant Shah, of the India-based Digital Natives with a Cause, told Bizcommunity.com yesterday, 10 November 2010, as the three-day workshop on digital and internet technologies that brought together young delegates from nine African countries ended in Johannesburg, South Africa.

 [Bylssa Sikiti da Silva](#) 11 Nov 2010

"If the 20th century was the age of the industrial revolution, the 21st century is now actually the age of the knowledge information," Shah said.

The workshop, hosted in collaboration with the Netherlands-based Hivos Centre for Internet and Society, aimed at analysing how young Africans use the digital tools and platforms at their disposal to create social change in their environments. Delegates came from countries such as South Africa, Morocco, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Egypt, Uganda, Nigeria and Kenya.

Youth need to be more involved

However, despite the power of this newly-found capital and currency, there is a general impression out there that not everyone is getting access to the information or being part of the discussion of how that information is produced. Fieke Jansen, of Hivos, said research shows most of the young people growing in the south are not being part of the discussion, as policymakers, academics and practitioners act on their behalf, thus influencing their lives.

Jansen said: "We told ourselves we should break this cycle and include them in this discussion, as we strongly believe that there is a need for young people to grow up and intersect with technology in the aim to create social change."

Shah said: "Look, worldwide there is a huge pressure on young people to become economically active. You can see how governments all over the world are putting more resources into pushing populations to get access to the digital.

"Excluding the youth by, for instance trying to censor the internet, could only mean that there is a lack of understanding of how internet works.

"Older people can no longer ignore the youth in this age of digital revolution because exposing young people to digital technology can give them more voice that could help bring change, for example they can get involved in issues such as government accountability and transparency."

Gap between academic, practice

Furthermore, Jansen said research also shows that a huge gap exists between academic and practice, something she said her organisation and its partners were working hard to address. "We need to bridge the gap because academic and practice need each other," she pointed out.

Digital Natives with a Cause, which is based in Bangalore, is a research company specialised in the

intersection of internet into society. The two organisations organised another workshop in August this year Taipei, Taiwan, attended by young delegates from several Asian countries. A third workshop is due to take place in early December in Santiago, Chile's capital city.

It is estimated that the global youth population now stands at 1.2 billion this year, 85% of which live in developing countries.

Jansen said: "There is no limit on what young people can do with digital. And age doesn't matter in technology, it is the way you approach technology that matters."

Youth, agents of change

Shah said nobody can produce change in isolation. "It is time the world saw young people not only as beneficiaries of change, but also as agents of change. So it is time we start listening to them. While the old generation needs to teach the youth, young people also need to tell them if you don't build a new army, society will be in trouble."

The Johannesburg workshop was also made possible with the help of their local partner, South Africa-based The African Commons Project.

Download and read [Digital Natives with a Cause? A Report](#).

For more information, contact the Hivos Centre for Internet and Society at www.hivos.net, the African Commons Project at www.africancommons.org or go to www.digitalnatives.in/africa.

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