

Microsoft engages youth to drive sustainable African economic growth

Microsoft Corp have announced its ongoing commitment to driving opportunities for African youth through its YouthSpark initiative.



Unemployment remains rife on the African continent. With almost 200 million people aged between 15 and 24 in Africa today, the youth community represents more than 60% of the continent's total population and accounts for 45% of its growing labour force. However, the imbalance between the demands of the labour market and the supply of appropriately skilled workers in Africa is reaching its breaking point. In light of this Microsoft Corp have announced its ongoing commitment to driving opportunities for African youth through YouthSpark initiative.

Microsoft YouthSpark is a global initiative that aims to create opportunities for 300 million youth in more than 100 countries during the next three years. This companywide initiative includes Corporate Social Investment (CSI) and other company programs - both new and enhanced - empowering youth to imagine and realise their full potential by connecting them with greater opportunities for education, employment and entrepreneurship.

"It is a sad reality that while young Africans are more literate than their parents, more of them remain unemployed," says Djam Bakhshandegi, CSI program manager at Microsoft in Africa.

"At the core of our YouthSpark and other CSI activities is our belief that relevant innovation holds the key to unlocking the answers to our most pressing challenges in the region. Through YouthSpark, in sub-Saharan Africa alone, we have already reached over half a million young people and made \$1.1 million worth of software donations to non-Government-organisations. In addition we have trained almost 30 000 teachers through our Partners In Learning tools as well as equipping hundreds of small and medium businesses with relevant start up skills.

As part of its broader strategy, Microsoft views Africa as a critical investment market. Its flagship African investment and growth drive, 4Afrika, which YouthSpark falls under on the African continent, was launched February 2013. Through [4Afrika](#), Microsoft will actively engage in Africa's economic development to improve its global competitiveness.

By 2016, the Microsoft 4Afrika Initiative plans to help place tens of millions of smart devices in the hands of African youth, bring 1 million African small and medium enterprises (SMEs) online, up-skill 100 000 members of Africa's existing workforce, and help an additional 100 000 recent graduates develop skills for employability, 75% of which Microsoft will help place in jobs.

"YouthSpark forms part of this 4Afrika vision and through YouthSpark, we are paying specific attention to the next generation of our ecosystem through our work with schools, students, start-ups and the developer community to drive skills and ICT integration which will in turn trigger growth," says Bakhshandegi. "Through our partnerships with governments, non-profit organizations and businesses, Microsoft YouthSpark aims to

empower youth to imagine and realise their full potential."

Microsoft YouthSpark goes beyond philanthropy and brings together a range of global programs that empower young people with access to technology and a better education and inspire young people to imagine the opportunities they have to realise their potential, including Office 365 for education, free technology tools for all teachers and students to power learning and collaboration, and Skype in the classroom, a free global community for teachers to connect their students with others around the world.

Other YouthSpark initiatives include:

- **[Partners in Learning Network](#)**. An online professional development platform for government officials, school leaders and educators to help them with new approaches to teaching and learning, using technology to help students develop 21st century skills.
- **[Microsoft IT Academy](#)**. A career-ready education program available to all accredited academic institutions, providing students with 21st century technology.
- **[DreamSpark](#)**. Free access to Microsoft designer and developer tools for students and educators, help advance key technical skills during the high school and college years, a critical time in a student's development.
- **[Imagine Cup](#)**. The world's premier youth technology competition, which challenges students to apply their knowledge and passion to develop technical solutions for social impact, to develop engaging games, and demonstrate innovation that can benefit others, local communities and the world.
- **[Students to Business](#)**. A program that matches university students with jobs or internships in the technology industry.
- **[BizSpark](#)**. A software startup program, providing young entrepreneurs with access to Microsoft software development tools and connections with key industry players, including investors, to help them start a new business.
- **[Employability Portals](#)**. An all-inclusive platform that links users - who wish to plan their career, get career advisory, acquire training, build their capacity, apply for jobs and internships - with customized resources, counselors, mentors and jobs.

Another example is Microsoft's [Build Your Business programme](#), a comprehensive and interactive training course designed to support aspiring and emerging entrepreneurs.

David Arkless, Manpower Group's president of corporate and government affairs, says, "Start-ups and small businesses are the backbone of Africa's economy, and this learning course will encourage aspiring entrepreneurs to take the leap to set up a business venture. We are committed to helping new small businesses get off the ground and provide them with the skills to deal with the rigors of competition and day-to-day business tasks."

"We are committed to using our technology, talent, time and money to help create sustainable growth across the African continent," says Bakhshandegi. "Microsoft YouthSpark is not just about enhancing young people's digital skills. Rather it is about helping young people having a more balanced set of skills that is

required in today's very competitive work environment."

For more, go to www.microsoft.com/youthsparkhub.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>