

GE Garages to provide technology skills acquisition

General Electric Africa and Gearbox have announced their plans to launch GE Garages, a Nairobi skills building programme that will bring together partners from academia and private sector including the University of Nairobi, Technical University of Kenya and Seven Seas Technologies to support sustainable skills and job growth in Kenya.



GE Garages and Gearbox will provide training, drive awareness and generate interest in the value of advanced hardware and technology. The Garages will feature advanced manufacturing innovations such as 3D printers, laser cutters, CNC mills for the industrial world, which complement the wide-ranging modern machinery that will soon be available at Gearbox, to encourage entrepreneurial disruption and a skilled workforce for the future.

According to the National Manpower Survey, the percentage of vacant posts in the transport sector is 2.8%. While the oil and gas sector will create between 6,000 and 15,000 new jobs over the next ten years with the majority requiring technical or vocational training. The GE Garages space, which will be hosted at Gearbox's premises, will support classes and workshops, for students, entrepreneurs, makers and others to learn more about advanced manufacturing processes, software programming and business development.

Democratising opportunities

Speaking at a media event to announce the initiative, Dr Kamau Gachigi, CEO of Gearbox said Gearbox is very excited about this relationship as it central to its objective of democratising access to opportunities in industrialisation. Gearbox is in the process of assembling a formidable arsenal of modern machines and CAD/CAM software for digital fabrication, alongside more traditional but essential technologies, to be made accessible on a membership basis to people who currently have no such opportunity. They will need to be trained on the use of this state-of-the-art equipment, but also in the soft skills that are necessary to leverage the tech-knowledge to successfully launch businesses.

This partnership serves both needs. The provision of a GE Garage at Gearbox is essential to developing a continuous

pipeline of people skilled in modern technologies and prepared to deliver tech solutions through business, who will serve as the 'army' that will enable industrialisation on the scale that is required for national development. The proposed Garages training facility will be within the Nairobi location of Gearbox. GE would provide the necessary equipment while University of Nairobi, Technical University of Kenya and Seven Seas Technologies will provide input to programme as well as training facilities.

"We are delighted to collaborate with like-minded establishments on an initiative that aims to make more Kenyan youth employable in a fast changing technology-driven world," said President and CEO of GE Africa, Jay Ireland. "I'm looking forward to seeing great ideas that come to the GE Garage being transformed into practical business models that ultimately create more jobs in Kenya.

Successful US debut

GE created the Garages experience in March 2012 to reinvigorate interest in invention, innovation and manufacturing in America. Programmes have included custom projects, curated speaker sessions and workshops amidst a fully equipped advanced manufacturing space, including hardware such as CNC mills, laser cutters, 3D printers, injection moulders, Arduino kits and much more. This programme went global with a workshop in Lagos Nigeria in 2014 and has since grown to include several countries in Europe and the Middle-East.

Professor Lucy Irungu, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Nairobi, welcomes this collaboration, which she sees a great opportunity for engineering students, supervised by the engineering faculty at the University, to gain access to modern equipment and methods that will ensure their undergraduate and post-graduate projects have greater impact on the region's economic needs.

"The GE Garages-Nairobi programme brings to life the 'Empower' pillar of GE Africa's CSR platform 'GE Kujenga'," said Patricia Obozuwa, Director of Communications and Public Affairs, GE Africa. "GE's approach to investing in our communities is to empower people by building valuable skills, equip communities with new tools and technology, and elevate ideas that help solve Africa's challenges. We will continue working with government, institutions, communities and private sector peers to help bring sustainable and transformative development."

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