

REPORT OF ICT4D FORUM

THEME: “Ensuring an increase in the use of ICTs in the Bawku West District”

A one day ICT4D Forum has been organised in Zebilla in the Bawku West District of Ghana. This was organized by the Zebilla Community Information Centre (CIC) in Collaboration with the Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS).

Mr. Kubuga Kennedy, the CIC Coordinator (*IICDs leveraging opportunity for 10 CICs in Northern Ghana*) in charge of the Zebilla CIC mentioned that an evaluation conducted by IICD of the CIC revealed that a lot of the inhabitants made some substantial use of mobile phones for their businesses. He mentioned that this was no wonder as Zebilla is not too far from Bawku and Sankansi, both trading towns. He however lamented on the low rate of participation in and use of ICTs by women and prayed that with the institutionalization of knowledge sharing platforms as the ICT4D Forums, the interest of women in ICTs would increase.

Mr. Agbenyo John Stephen, the Northern Coordinator of GINKS gave a background to the ICT4D forums organized by GINKS over the years and the purpose of decentralizing this in the various districts through the Community Information Centres. He mentioned that this is to encourage knowledge sharing on topical issues in the digital economy and to increase the interest of people in using ICTs for Development.

When he took his turn to speak on the theme “Ensuring an increase in the use of ICTs in the Bawku West District”, Mr. Bukari Abdulai, the Assistant Headmaster for the Zebilla Senior High School began by giving a brief explanation of what ICT is. He explained that an ICT tool is any kind of technology that makes it easy for information to be gathered, processed or disseminated from one place to another.

On the advantages of using ICTs, he stated that while workers can use computers to make their work easier, business people can make their networks through the use of ICTs such as mobile phones and Internet. He added that while students can use the Internet to search

for information related to their subject area, teachers can use computers to make the computation of their students' marks and grades very easily, quickly and more efficiently. "We can all take advantage of ICTs to do distance learning and acquire degrees and certificates while sitting in the comfort of our homes". He cautioned that all the advantages of ICTs listed could elude the people of the Bawku West District if ICT centres are not present in the district.

On the current situation of ICTs in the district, he stated that the statistics of the district paints a very gloomy picture of the state and use of ICTs in the district. He said that out of a total population of about 88 thousand people in the district, there are only three computer schools and only one Internet café serving this huge number of inhabitants. He added that there is no radio station in the district to produce content that is specifically related to the district. He said land lines are very limited while the mobile phone services are not the best. He further said that the unavailability of broadband Internet Service in Zebilla also makes it difficult for anybody to set up an Internet Café. He added that most workers in the district have very little computer skills. He mentioned that while some of the basic schools in the district do not have the luxury of electricity, not even a single one has a computer lab.

Mr. Abdulai added that ICT tutors in the district are just forcing themselves to prepare their students to compete with students from other well endowed schools in the country and said the current situation has made it difficult for even those who are interested in the use of ICTs to make good use of ICT.

He said the only ICT facility that is owned by the District Assembly is the Community Information Centre which has no Internet.

Speaking on how to improve upon the use of ICTs in the district, Mr. Abdulai urged the District Assembly to as a matter urgency look into the quickest way possible to get Internet connection to the CIC as quickly as possible. He called for more ICT related events such as the ICT4D forums to be organised frequently.

Contributing to the discussion, the Information Officer of the District, Mr. Abdul Aziz Abubakar concurred with the speaker and called upon all the stakeholders present, to as a matter of urgency, take the unavailability of internet at the community information centre as a very serious issue and hence exert pressure on the Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communication (GIFEC) through the District Assembly to provide the centre with Internet.

Community Information Centre (CIC) Managers from nine other districts who were also present at the forum gave various suggestions on how the Zebilla CIC Manager could improvise in the midst of scarce resources at the centre. They urged him to liaise with the District Education director on how best the centre could serve schools within the district.

Other participants spoke on how unfair it would be to have students from the district and other districts in similar woes to write the WAEC organized exams on ICT next April especially that ICT has been made a core subject in the school curriculum.

The forum ended with a resolution by all participants to take up the issue of ICT seriously in the district and to exert a lot of pressure on the torch bearers to vigorously deploy ICT facilities in the District.