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UN-backed meeting in Kigali focuses on role of youth in getting Africa online



From left to right: Broadband Commission Vice-Chair Hamadoun I. Touré; Co-Chair Paul Kagame; Vice-Chair Irina Bokova; Co-Chair Carlos Slim Helú

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With much of Africa still unconnected to the Internet, broadband commissioners and representatives of governments, the private sector and civil society met in Rwanda's capital to examine how to get the continent wired to high-speed networks, including the role of young people in getting Africa online.

The forum focused on the role of youth in defining new information and communications technology (ICT) services and driving take-up, according to a [news release](#) issued by the UN International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which was among the participants in the two-day meeting that ended today in Kigali.

It also focused on the policies needed to help ensure African youth gain access to online services such as education and health care, and considered how government and industry can support strategies to encourage youth entrepreneurship.

ITU Secretary-General Hamadoun Touré told participants that broadband is the single most powerful tool available to accelerate progress towards achieving the anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)), and to drive social and economic development.

“In the 21st century, with broadband, no young African should ever again need to be sent abroad in order to enjoy the benefits of an excellent education,” he said.

“If you are connected, it no longer matters if you are geographically or socially isolated; you are still connected to the information society. But if you are not connected, you are – literally – cut off from a whole portion of the world’s riches.”

ITU says that fixed broadband Internet access remains “prohibitively expensive” in Africa. By 2010, only one out of nine people in Africa had access to the Internet, and fixed broadband penetration was just 0.2 per cent – compared to 24 per cent in Europe and 26 per cent in the United States.

The meeting was held at the invitation of the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, who told the gathering that African youth possesses the energy, passion and dedication to use ICTs to address global challenges.

“Our duty as leaders is to build the right environment and promote the necessary investments to allow them to fulfil their potential,” he stated. Let’s not wait another century to recognize that broadband was another missed opportunity for Africa.”

The forum also featured a competition showcasing 11 new apps created by young Rwandan developers. The two winners, M-AHWIII and Osca, will represent Rwanda at the forthcoming ITU Telecom World 2011 Digital Innovators competition in October.

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