

GenerationNext

Technology for next generation

By DARE D-AFENI

IT has been said that technology has become the driving force of change in the modern world. It has altered our economic structures and the ways we communicate. Technology—even in small amount, is helping communicate overcome conventions and traditions to take leaps forward.

Youths, for the fact that they occupy a strategic position in the quest of a society for development should be deliberately positioned to embrace and utilise technology.

There are quite a number of credible interventions aimed at youths, who have been severally, and correctly dubbed, "the future of the world." However, there are perhaps only some that really focus on the future or that are future driven as the Youth for Technology Foundation (YTF) initiative.

Youth for Technology Foundation is an international non-profit, non-governmental organization with headquarters in Owerri, Southeast, Nigeria. The Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) concerns itself with attempting to bridge the digital divide, especially among disadvantaged communities in developing and under-developed countries, with the African continent as the pivot.

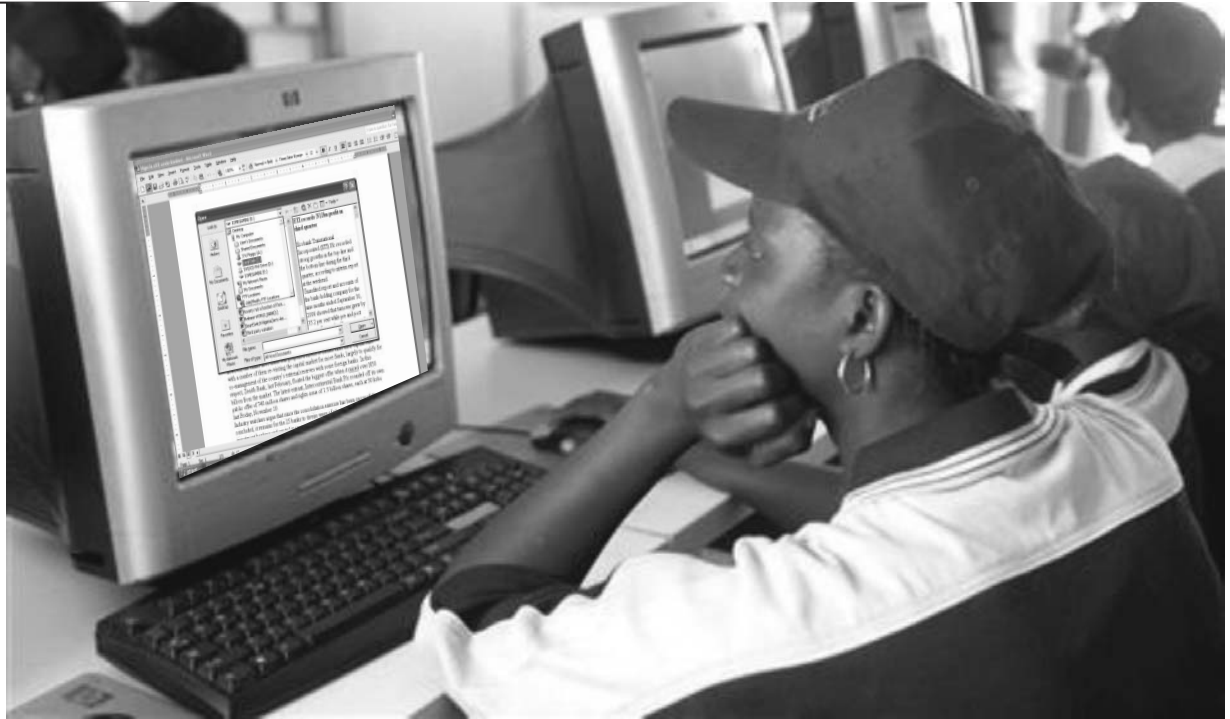
According to Njideka Ugwuogbu Harry, Founder and Executive Director of the NGO, "The YTF slogan, "Delivering to the Community-Bridging the Digital Canyon" is indicative of what YTF would achieve. Youth for Technology Foundation has an all inclusive model which focuses on bringing access to technology and resources to the underserved rural communities and women, further removed from the information age than the men whose poverty they share."

Speaking further, Ugwuogbu Harry said, "The information highway is leaving the African youth poorer in ICT knowledge, skills and global reach. Thousands of young people leave school with the hope of developing a career and a sustainable life that often turns into an illusion. A systematic and targeted infusion of ICTs in underserved rural communities in West Africa and the consequent empowerment of youth through information and technology knowledge will serve as coup de grace to youth poverty, crime, violence, prostitution and unemployment."

The doors to the Owerri Digital Village was opened on Friday September 21 2001 as the first community learning centre of its kind in West Africa and today, over 2800 young people have benefited from the programmes YTF offers. "YTF has partnered with 19 different educational institutions and after school programmes in seven different countries, including the US, Canada, Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, India and Azerbaijan," the Executive Director revealed.

While speaking more on the vision and the driven for the project, Ugwuogbu affirmed, "It was in 1999 when my vision for YTF was born. Indeed, from my own personal experiences of moving to the US from Nigeria in pursuit of college education, I remember meeting with the Microsoft Corporation (YTF's premier corporation donor), and requesting funding to pioneer the digital village 'movement' on the continent starting with Nigeria. The question was "But why should we do this?" and I answered, "Because it is the right thing to do- see great potentials."

"Seven years after, Microsoft has funded several digital villages under this paradigm. I am pleased that this vision is helping solve some of these communities' most concrete issues," she concluded.



• Youths on computer literacy course

Volunteerism

YOUNG people are those at the prime of life; they are full of vigour and vitality. As such the onus is on them to utilise these attributes for the betterment of the society. In days gone by, it was common place to find young people in villages coming together to take part in projects that are considered beneficial to the generality of the community, such projects as road construction, security activities etc were carried out by the youths through volunteer efforts.

Though volunteerism seems not to be very common around here any longer, in more advanced countries it is catching on like wild fire. This is perhaps one of the reasons why those places are more developed than many places in Africa. Non-profit organisations go quite a long way in improving the quality of life of a people. More people and bodies must henceforth join the bandwagon of volunteerism if our governments' quest for development (material and human) is to be achieved.

The youths, as the leaders of tomorrow, should, as a matter of importance embrace volunteerism. This era of civilization should not annul this important aspect of human evolution. We all need to contribute our own quota to humanity and the best time to do it is when we are in full strength.

For example, youths could join or organise themselves into groups that promote community development and good citizenship. Existing bodies that work in this direction include the Red Cross, Boys' and Girls' Brigade, Man O war, the International Association for Volunteerism (IAVE), Boys' Scout

etc. Apart from these, there are other Non Governmental Organisations that have community service and volunteerism as focus.

On the other hand, young people in a certain community or institution could also come together to form organisations or clubs with the sole purpose of contributing something positive to the society, especially to their immediate environment. Young people should cultivate the habit of sacrificing and giving their time and resources to the society, even if the society is generally perceived as not giving much to youths.

Together, we can all change the situation; for instance, youngsters living in a particular area could come together and

organise themselves to clean the streets, drainages, engage in AIDS and cancer awareness campaigns etc. They could also organise to visit orphanages and homes for the aged to lend a hand in doing chores or to meet some other needs.

The benefits of these kinds of undertaking are indeed multi dimensional. To the society, it means a better, safer and cleaner environment to live in; to youths, leadership traits, sense of responsibility, confidence and requisite experience for excellence in life are gained; and to the parents, a sense of pride is instilled.

Volunteerism pays. Don't forget, real excellence has its source in giving.



• Students of Covenant University, Ota, engaging in community service