

How SMEs Can Leverage on Technology - HP Boss

By Frances Ovia, 07.20.2006

Small businesses in Africa are capable of competing effectively with their counterparts in developed countries if only they could leverage on the opportunities provided by Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in their business applications and operations, Dr. Lloyd Atabansi, Managing Director Hewlett-Packard Nigeria Limited has said. Atabansi, who spoke at the 2006 Africa Small Business Summit which held in Abuja recently, noted that a lot was going in Africa in terms of investment especially at the micro level, saying telecommunications especially has made life easy for small business operators in the continent. The world leading IT solution boss, who spoke on Enhancing Intra-African Trade through access to Technology to Support SME Development, said technology advances in telecoms have been explosive in Africa, noting that the number of mobile networks operating in Africa has increased tremendously.

According to him, mobile subscribers across Africa now out number subscriptions to fixed lines. This he considered critical to further economic development, as the telephone density of sub-Saharan Africa has reached the 1 per cent subscriber threshold considered essential for economic growth for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) had predicted an increase from the 28 million mobile subscribers in 2001 to more than 150 million by 2007, even as subscriber base has doubled in Egypt, Morocco, Cameroon, Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda. While describing small businesses as a powerful economic engine, Atabansi said by learning how to apply information and telecommunications technology effectively, these businesses can overcome typical hurdles to growth such as low productivity, a lack of competitiveness and the limited skill level of owners and workers. He added that small businesses are the biggest source of new jobs globally, saying ICT can significantly help micro enterprises grow, be more productive and create more jobs in their communities. HP, according to him, has contributed immensely to facilitate SMEs access to technology through HP e-inclusion strategy. The strategy provides people access to greater social and economic opportunities by closing the gap between technology-empowered and technology-excluded communities, focusing on sustainability for the communities and HP.

Atabansi noted that HP structures its e-inclusion work to advance social and economic development, accelerate achievement of its long term business goals, empower people in developing communities, and thus enhance its competitiveness. He added that the strategy also creates innovations we would not have thought of otherwise discover talent we never would have found, and spur revenue growth as we devise new business models to serve emerging markets. He listed part of the strategy to also include the recent launch of the Micro enterprise Acceleration Program (HP MAP) which is an initiative designed to speed up economic development in communities around the world. Delivered in partnership with local non-profit organisation, MAP, according to him, provides micro enterprises with the right training to be able to solve everyday business challenges, so they can grow and create new jobs.