

## Microsoft to Train More Than 45 Million People in Africa By 2010

By Efem Nkanga., 07.20.2006

Chairman of Microsoft, Bill Gates has stated that affordable and accessible Information and Communications Technology is a critical key towards ensuring a vibrant future for developing countries and central to helping Africa achieve its Millennium Development Goals. Mr. Gates according to a release made available to THISDAY stated this in a key note address delivered at the Microsoft Government Leaders Forum Africa 2006 in South Africa. He stated that, Microsoft hopes to deliver the benefits of ICT training to more than 45 million people in Africa by 2010 and help governments create sustainable economic growth. He reiterated Microsoft's long-term approach to investment in Africa to include partnerships, together with Microsoft's existing Partners in Learning and Unlimited Potential education programmes and collaborations between Microsoft and local and global organizations like the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Gates noted that "For Africa to truly become competitive in the global economy, strategic collaboration between businesses, governments and non-governmental organisations is essential, by providing more affordable access to technology and helping partners build strong local software economies, Microsoft can help create knowledge-based economies in Africa that generate new jobs and offer new opportunities for growth, prosperity and innovation. "Former American President, Bill Clinton in his remarks at the event stated that Information Technology has an important role to play creating a thriving, competitive Africa. He stressed that "Technology has expanded opportunities of millions of people around the world and - whether expanding access to information, education or healthcare or increasing the collective power of individuals. He commended Bill Gates for working through Microsoft, in partnership with governments, NGOs and other private-sector organisations, for helping Africa in its quest to achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. The eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), form a blueprint agreed to by UN countries and leading global development institutions and seeks to reduce extreme poverty by halve and to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS to providing universal primary education by 2015.

Microsoft's efforts in Africa focus on investments in education to increase skills and create opportunities, partnering with local businesses to increase trade and grow local industries and software economies, and working with government to develop ICT infrastructure through affordability and access. Gates also announced Microsoft's collaboration with the UNWTO to support tourism in developing countries and on the continent of Africa. He stated that creating the right technology infrastructure is an essential ingredient in economic development, both with existing industries and new industries with significant growth potential, such as tourism in Africa. According to Francesco Frangialli, secretary general of UNWTO, "This agreement is a huge leap forward for tourism. It will -drive job creation, export income and capacity building for the world's poorest countries - especially in Africa where it will be integrated into our programmes to alleviate poverty through sustainable tourism. It links Microsoft's technology and solutions with UNWTO's central role of advancing the sector as an instrument of development. Equally importantly over the next five years we will collaborate closely to build a leading-edge ICT dimension into all of our key programmes, ranging from improved access for tourists through electronic border clearance, to better quality service through distance training and sustainability management at destinations." He added that, Microsoft is supporting the commitment the UNWTO made to contribute to the MDGs to develop sustainable tourism as a force to alleviate poverty. The collaboration with Microsoft has benefits including the creation of two solutions.

The first is a new portal system called "Windows on Africa". Through the cooperation with UNWTO and NEPAD, the portal is designed to showcase African tourism by aggregating online

content in a user-friendly pan-African format. This material will be linked at the national and local level to incorporate key data from visitor centers, museums, and libraries. Ultimately, it will even provide real-time advice via PDAs and mobile devices with destination-specific data. To further support capacity building and industry growth, a tourism industry and skills curriculum, based on a model implemented by Cape Town Tourism, will be made available both on the portal and through training sessions at local community-based technology centers. In addition, the cooperation will allow for the creation of the UNWTO Emergency Response System, a mechanism for information sharing and rapid messaging that aims to both bring order and help save lives during natural or man-made catastrophes. The solution will bring together a broad range of existing tourism networks that offer elements of disaster information today; these include hotel, airline, cruise ship and travel bureau networks - all to be streamlined in one platform. The first slated application will be to provide support for industry-wide avian flu preparedness. As part of his keynote address,

Gates also highlighted the necessity for communities to deal with the workplace of the future and the importance of education. Microsoft joined NEPAD's Information Society Partnership for Africa's Development (ISPAD) Initiative as a foundation partner and platinum member in December 2003 and is an active participant in the e-Schools Initiative. Microsoft is leading a consortium of industry partners to support 25 schools in eight African countries - Cameroon, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda and Senegal - with a PC lab per school, software, teacher training, networking, connectivity, maintenance and support. "This is the first time that African governments, NEPAD and the private sector are cooperating on an ICT project of this scale and scope in the NEPAD framework, developed and driven by Africans, and for African people", said Dr Henry Chasia, Deputy Executive Chairperson for the NEPAD e-Africa Commission. "This technology will enable young people to tap into the global mainstream of information and knowledge, where they will learn and play, expand their imagination and creativity, collaborate with peers across the African continent and across the world, and generally participate in defining the future of their world." It is estimated that more than 20,000 students and 1,000 teachers have already benefited from the Microsoft consortium's efforts with the e-Schools Project. The goal of the programme is to create an ICT solution that more than 600,000 schools across Africa can eventually model to bring technology to their schools.