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1 Introduction

Information and communication have always had a strong relevance to mankind. The Sumerian writing system was a means of communication around 3000 BC; the 1830s saw the first viable design for a digital computer and the world's first computer program by Lady Augusta Byron; while Alexander Graham Bell's 1877 contribution, the emergence of information science in the 1940s, the eventual development of ENIAC in 1946 and Claude E. Shannon's information theory of 1948 all took the world by storm. Little did history know that yesterday's innovative wonders would become exhibits in today's museum.

The global feats of today's information and communication technology (ICT) are traceable to conscious efforts, the influence of technology and the need for a faster, more reliable and convenient means of information handling, transfer and networking. The Internet, optical fibre, satellite communication, mobile telephony, eCommerce, bluetooth, wireless application protocol and other emerging technologies make ICT a present reality with future prospects and vast development opportunities.

2 Development opportunities

ICT has provided diverse opportunities for development in all nations of the world, and the developing nations actually have an opportunity, by virtue of this technological tool, to leapfrog the looming digital divide that promises greater devastating effects on any economy than the industrial divide. Global relevance and accessibility is an opportunity that countries like India and Malaysia have grabbed. Shortly after her independence in 1957, Malaysia sent people to Nigeria to learn how to grow palm trees, but with its Vision 2020, which includes the development of a USD 40 million Multimedia Super Corridor (a technological city that will replace its vast oil plantation), Malaysia's Prime Minister projects a quadrupling of the country's USD 9 000 per capita income by 2020. India has invested heavily in technical education, introduced ICT-inclined courses and produced 250 000 scientists and engineers a year, and today has its own Information Technology Park and attracts the attention of the whole world.

Economic development opportunities abound for any ICT participant. Forrester Research says that B2B and B2C eCommerce transactions will generate USD 108 billion and USD 1.3 trillion, respectively, by 2002. Other opportunities include technological innovation, healthy global competitiveness and career opportunities.

3 Conclusion – The role of youth

The role of young people in any developmental process cannot be compromised because the continual relevance of any phenomenon is dependent on the availability of equipped manpower that can continue the trend. The role of young people in ICT development opportunities include:

- information-gathering to keep pace with global trends and to enable self-preparation for national and global development;
- breaking free from the usual cycle of mediocrity and adopting a paradigm shift that encourages innovation, creativity and pioneering efforts;
- interest in national relevance and development;
- information sharing and synergism, an example of this being a Yahoo! Group (blackpioneers@yahoogroups.com; www.blackpioneers.htmlplanet.com) which seeks to integrate individual inputs for global development.

We, the young people, must adopt a mindset that establishes us as responsible contributors to ICT development worldwide.

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