Promoting ICTs for Development in Ghana, the role of Civil Society Organizations

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be with you at your 10th anniversary and we congratulate Savana Signature for the success thus far. We wish you even more successes in the next decade

The choice of the theme "Promoting ICTs for Development in Ghana, the role of Civil Society Organizations"

is of particular interest to me and I am happy to share a viewpoint at this seminar

First, we build a common understanding of ICT, the roles in the ecosystem and that of civil society, how ICT improves life and finally what we can do to harness it for development

Computing is a field of science just like all the other sciences, physics, chemistry, mathematics and the others. As we know, the application of the sciences creates technologies or engineering products for development. Likewise, the application of computing create a blend of technologies we commonly refer to as information and communications technologies (ICT). These are utilized by all professions, by all disciplines and by all interested human beings. As an analogy, applications of

physics and mathematics may produce for mechanical engineering an automobile. People of all professions, disciplines and practically everyone use cars, busses and other vehicles

We may conclude that there's a role for civil society and for all in contributing to the promotion, creation, adoption, owning ICT in the information society we seek to develop. The principal stake holders in this venture are government, private sector, civil society and academia and these essential roles are not easily replaced

Computing on the other hand is quite unique being one of few fields with applications in all other fields making it pervasive. Hence aside from the core computer sciences and engineering there

are applications in other disciplines requiring sometimes new computer sciences and technologies to be developed. It is also one of few fields that always meet with user community on whom they depend for specifications and usage

We can say "Computing is for all"

Just as we have no doubt about the development impact of engineering we should have no doubt of impact of ICT on development. Correlations have been established in the past about ICT penetration and GDP, and broadband communications penetration and GDP by different organizations worldwide

Thus, we can say that technology is a development tool that improves livelihoods and quality of life

Considering the wide area of potential uses, the variety of options in how we access technology, and the sheer potential set of tools coupled with the rapid evolution of these, its not effective to innumerate favorite ideas on how Civil Society Organizations can leverage ICTs to improve the lives of communities. However, we may take a look at what make technologies improve lives. Life is based on having good data for understanding, for decisions, for appreciation or for sheer knowledge. Humans use data routinely even without technology. Having tools that can collect data accurately, organize data, communicate data and present data is

what has made technologies a success in this era. Technology also brings to bear the ability to process vast amounts of data well beyond human capabilities and faster. Technology further has ability to be trained to see patterns in data we don't see even if are unable to explain the intellectual debt of Artificial Intelligence. Lastly, technology can improve our comprehension by extracting and presenting what is important for our understanding.

We cannot have any better friend in modern times to improve the lives of the poor and marginalized than technology

When the first internet connections were established in ghana in 1993 we knew we had unleashed an instrument of immense developmental potential. We wanted to

share it. Yet, because everyone owns their portion of the internet all deliberations required coordination and collaboration of all parties

The practice of multi stakeholder bottom up approach to policy and standards development by consensus is used in the internet technical community. Adopting this practice in internet governance benefits the overall policy environment by reaching larger and more diverse contributors. What a wealth of opinion. This is encouraged because the days when all the needed expertise can be found in one organization or company or team is gone; for the complex issues with internet technology and public policy it is futile to entertain any sense of self sufficiency. We should create forums for all stakeholders to exchange ideas and

softly evolve positions but we must stick to our roles

We have to admit that a consensus process where issues addressed are more important than votes cast, can be effective in policy development

We prefer meritocracy to prevail in addressing issues over democracy or autocracy

There is need for inclusiveness and diversity when using a permission less technology such as the Internet where different parties own their networks and dictate policies within their networks

Too often, national governments in Africa are tempted to assert authority through

denial of freedom of expression and shutdowns

Internet shutdowns are estimated to cost millions of dollars and take long time to recover

I dare say that the internet shutdowns of 90s in Ghana may have completely eliminated local participation in the telecommunications sector. The pioneering internet company NCS was was shutdown in 2003. Unfortunately, we recently see history repeating itself with the spate of shutdown of media companies in Ghana

Internet and media shutdowns must be condemned... and we must help educate...sensitize and put in place guarantees, protections of freedoms, but

also allow everyone to exercise the rights to defend against abuse of freedom of expression.

Our desire to improve lives makes us dependent on technology tools and services hence a shutdown is a big threat to our ability to improve lives

Building an information society requires that our communities have opportunity to participate and as civil society, working to improve affordable internet and computing access to underserved areas is a noble cause. If providers are hesitant in extending services to remote communities, perhaps civil society, may explore building community networks as a vehicle for making networks available sooner than later

We have to prepare our people to own the information society we are building and digital economy we desire. We must be part of both the supply of services as well as consumers. In recent times we have seen technology fragmentation where some companies are barred for procuring from particular countries. How would Ghana survive in such a circumstance? Still recently we have seen countries that fragmented the internet through data protection requirements, through alternate internet or deeper packet inspection and filtering. Can Africa survive in a world of isolated networks?

We invite civil society to join us in developing permission less distributed ledger technologies, Blockchain, that brings better transparency and financial independence to the poor

Blockchain and crypto currency will make a difference in development for the poorer communities

Happy anniversary!
Thank you for your attention