

Inter Press Service News Agency

Subscribe !

Print

Send to a friend

Enter your email and receive TerraViva Africa, our free weekly journal

[Homepage](#)
[World Service](#)
[East Africa](#)
[Southern Africa](#)
[West Africa](#)
[Central Africa](#)
[Environment](#)
[Health-HIV/AIDS](#)
[Education](#)
[Rights](#)
[Politics](#)
[Economics and Finance](#)
[Development](#)
[Energy](#)
[Population](#)
[Culture](#)
[Radio Service](#)
[Français](#)
[About IPS](#)
[ENGLISH](#)
[ESPAÑOL](#)
[FRANÇAIS](#)
[SVENSKA](#)
[ITALIANO](#)
[DEUTSCH](#)
[SWAHILI](#)
[NEDERLANDS](#)
[ARABIC](#)

TRADE: Rwanda Leading Africa in ICT Revolution

Erin Cunningham

PARIS, Jul 4 (IPS) - Less than fifteen years after the genocide that destroyed much of Rwanda's human capital, infrastructure, and socio-economic fabric, the country is set to become sub-Saharan Africa's hub for information and communications technology (ICT).

Thanks to ambitious government initiatives in developing Rwanda's telecommunications infrastructure, the country's ICT sector -- including mobile phone and fibre optic networks as well as PC and Internet access -- has become a primary target of both international public and private investment in recent years.

Named East Africa's number one ICT nation by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Rwanda has benefited from ICT-based investments by lucrative international players such as Microsoft, Nokia, and Terracom.

The country's current ICT sector budget is on par with nations of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a grouping of 30 rich nations, at 1.6 percent, far above the African average.

Faced with a shattered economy in 1994, Rwanda launched its "Vision 2020" strategy in 2000 in order to vigorously rebuild and reinvent the Rwandan economy, aiming to achieve middle-income economic status by the year 2020.

"One of the hard pieces of work lies in maintaining both the investment and especially the policy focus to get maximum benefit. President Paul Kagame's government has done that very well, encouraging both smart ICT policies and in general supporting a more business-friendly environment," Andrew Mack, former World Bank employee and regular contributor to East Africa Business Week, told IPS.

While the Vision 2020 framework addressed agricultural, industrial, and social elements as well, Rwanda's lack of port access, inflated airfreight rates, and surrounding instability provoked the Rwandan government to invest in a knowledge-based economy with ICT as its cornerstone.

Launching programmes in scientific research and education, technological innovation, and telecommunications distribution, Vision 2020 aimed to produce "highly-skilled scientists and technicians to satisfy the needs of the national economy" that would be integrated into the larger framework of economic and social development for the greater Rwandan population.

Donor governments are getting on the ICT bandwagon as well. Just last month, the British Department for International Development (DFID) announced it would launch a 700,000 pound sterling (1.4 million dollar) project in conjunction with the Rwandan government and World Bank to



Credit:UNIDO

ICT park in Kigali, Rwanda

Tuesday, July 10, 2007 14:48 GMT

[Latest News](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Readers' Opinions](#)
[Search](#)


- ▶ **DEVELOPMENT-INDONESIA:** Poverty, Trauma - Aceh's War, Tsunami Legacy
- ▶ **ENVIRONMENT-COTE D'IVOIRE:** The Knock-on Effect of Disappearing Forests
- ▶ **Q&A:** Science Ignores AIDS in Women, Says Nobel Nominee
- ▶ **Q&A:** "The Sahel Should Already Have Been Green"
- ▶ **FINANCE:** Development Banks Lag on Sexual Health - Report
- ▶ **POLITICS:** Global Compact with Business 'Lacks Teeth' - NGOs
- ▶ **WEST AFRICA:** Shared River Basins, Common Problems
- ▶ **DEVELOPMENT:** New Partnership Needed to Achieve MDGs
- ▶ **DEVELOPMENT:** The Poor Need Better Contraception
- ▶ **HEALTH:** Focus on Orphans, Stigma at HIV/AIDS Meet

[More >>](#)

Latest Global News

[RSS](#)

- ▶ **ENVIRONMENT:** Replanting the Planet
- ▶ **IRAQ-AFGHANISTAN:** Overlooking the Air War
- ▶ **DEVELOPMENT-INDONESIA:** Poverty, Trauma - Aceh's War, Tsunami Legacy
- ▶ **CULTURE-AFGHANISTAN:** Young Musicians Revive Classical Heritage
- ▶ **GERMANY:** Breakdowns Renew Case Against Nuclear Energy
- ▶ **ICELAND:** Jobs May Go Down With Cod
- ▶ **EGYPT:** Fearing Border Protests, Cairo Meets Bedouin Demands
- ▶ **IRAQ:** 'Arrowhead' Becomes Fountainhead of Anger
- ▶ **MALAYSIA:** Murder Trial Exposes Shaky Justice System
- ▶ **POLITICS-US:** Neo-Cons Try to Rally, Bully Republicans

[More >>](#)

SUOMI

"explore innovation in science and technology and economic growth" in the country.

PORTUGUÊS**JAPANESE**

The Rwanda Development Gateway, a government-run portal for Rwanda's development sector, sees ICT as "a window of opportunity to leap-frog the industrialisation stage and transform the economy into information and knowledge-based economies" in order to effectively combat development challenges in the country while ushering in new economic and social opportunities.

Twenty-five recently demobilised soldiers, for example, were awarded one-year hardware maintenance and software development certificates in 2006 by the Washington DC-based Development Gateway Foundation.

"The aim of the training was to help demobilised soldiers get jobs as technical consultants in ICT. Some have started partnering with computer hardware and maintenance companies," Jerome Gasana, project manager of the Regional ICT Training Centre (RITC) in Kigali told IPS.

The approach has apparently worked. The Economist magazine recently reported that Rwanda is well on its way to achieving its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a result of its ICT-based poverty reduction strategies.

Ensuring access by all citizens has been a mainstay of Rwanda's ICT policy, although there is still a substantial rural-urban gap, with the majority of mobile phone, landline and internet access concentrated in Rwanda's capital Kigali and surrounding areas.

One billion dollars was committed in 2006, however, to building nationwide tele-centres with Internet and telephone access points, allowing for increased connectivity and mobility in rural areas.

A related "village phone" endeavour undertaken by Nokia and the Grameen Foundation USA in 2006 sought to bring affordable mobile communications access to rural villages in Rwanda, as well as the creation of over 3,000 related small businesses throughout the country in the next three years.

"The number of village phones (as of July) deployed amount to 167. The target is to reach 1,000 by the end of 2007," Nokia's Middle East and Africa Director of Communications, Yolanda Pineda, told IPS.

Rwanda also boasts an Internet Exchange Point, ICT Park, National Computing Centre, and Telemedicine Network, which connects Rwandan hospitals and universities in an attempt to transform and expand health services to underserved areas.

The government continues to supply and invest in technology at both the primary and university school levels, as over 1,200 primary schools are equipped with computers and at least 10 percent of Rwanda's secondary schools have wireless Internet.

"The RITC organised secondary school teachers for training in ICT from all provinces of Rwanda. The course was designed to help them disseminate ICT skills to the younger generation," Gasana said.

Rwanda formally joined the East African Community (EAC) economic bloc on Jun. 17 and is expected to play a major role in the development of the ICT sectors of its neighbours and fellow EAC members.

The country has already begun offering scholarships to ICT students from East and Central Africa to increase the number of scientists and raise the level of technological knowledge in the region.

"If they keep on the track they're on and even accelerate, I see no reason why they won't be able to reach a lot of Rwandans and even make money helping people around the region who want to develop an ICT industry," said Mack.

A recent partnership with Microsoft and the Institute of Advanced Technology of Kenya saw the RITC train 25 trainers as user support professionals in light of Rwanda's potential role as regional ICT facilitator.

"The training was designed to foster our staff, as we are targeting the market for the East Africa community," Gasana said.

Rwanda was also chosen as the geographical headquarters of the new East African Submarine Cable project, a mammoth fibre optic venture designed to bring telecommunications to rural villages from Sudan to South Africa along East Africa's coast.

"I hope they will lead by example, but I can also see Kigali developing into a real regional hub-the Singapore of East Africa," Mack says. (END/2007)

[Send your comments to the editor](#)

Related IPS Articles

▀ **DEVELOPMENT:** New EU Head Portugal to Focus on Africa

▀ **AFRICA:** Regional Integration No Path to Continental Government, Says Gaddafi

[READ IN IPSNEWS.NET >>](#)

IN FOCUS: IRAQ



▶ **IRAQ-AFGHANISTAN:**
Overlooking the Air
War

[More >>](#)

CONFRONTING CLIMATE CHANGE



▶ **ENVIRONMENT:**
Replanting the Planet

[More >>](#)

POPULATION



▶ **EGYPT:** Fearing
Border Protests, Cairo
Meets Bedouin
Demands

[More >>](#)

[Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Subscription](#) | [News in RSS](#) | [Email News](#) | [Mobile](#) | [Text Only](#)
Copyright © 2007 IPS-Inter Press Service. All rights reserved.