

Collaboration key in closing the digital skills gap in Africa

By  Sindy Peters

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In the face of an immensely challenging digital skills gap on the continent, Mojolaoluwa Aderemi-Makinde, head of brand and reputation at Google Africa, remains optimistic. She was speaking at this year's AfricaCom in Cape Town on digital skills as a critical foundation of Africa 4.0. For Aderemi-Makinde, while digital skills is just one of the access points to the opportunities presented by the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), it is at the heart of the ecosystem.



Mojolaoluwa Aderemi-Makinde, head of brand and reputation at Google Africa

Part of addressing the challenge, she said, is acknowledging that a huge gap exists. Current statistics show that 90% of children in Africa leave school without learning any basic digital skills. She acknowledged that while there are many organisations on the continent, including Google, that are working towards applying digital skills knowledge in the region, greater collaboration between all role-players is needed for sustainable development into the future.

"I think it's not enough for us to do things as individuals," she said. "We can't solve this problem by ourselves." In order to accelerate and scale impact, organisations need to function as a collective toward a common cause, said Aderemi-Makinde: "This is a problem that requires us to collaborate - as governments, as the private sector, as individuals - to solve so that we do not leave anyone behind."

Focus on youth empowerment

The common denominator in all conversations on digital skills development in Africa is the youth, she said, as the continent has the youngest population in the world - by 2050, Africa's youth will make up one third of the global workforce. 40%, however, are likely to engage in destructive activities due to unemployment, said Aderemi-Makinde, but, empowered with the right skills and tools, they could channel their energy into contributing positively to their environments, building products for Africans that help solve societal, business, and community problems.



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Focusing on the youth, some of Google Africa's on-the-ground efforts involve training young children to code. "Many

people ask me why all children should learn to code as not all children want to be developers. I always say coding builds two critical skills that are necessary in the fourth industrial revolution - problem-solving and critical thinking. We don't need every child to become a developer, what we need is for every child to be able to build on these skills and use them in the future," she said.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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