GESCI's African Knowledge Exchange (AKE) -
An Integrated model for digitally- driven skills development and start-up creation

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Background

The Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative (GESCI) was created in 2004 by the United Nations GESCI envisions a world where the widespread use and integration of digital technologies will realise higher levels of equality and inclusiveness. It is a world where ICTs are efficiently used to support governments and communities for:

- Equitable access to a quality education
- ICT competency skills development for youth employment
- Multi-level leadership competencies for social and economic development.

Initially, GESCI sought, through commissioned and action research to:

a) Identify the critical link between skills development, learning & innovation and job creation through having a policy focus on how new technology-driven skills could be efficiently developed among the youth in Africa.
b) Identify new technology-driven training scenarios that enable new skills development which will facilitate employment and job creation in the emerging knowledge societies in Africa.
c) Fully integrate entrepreneurialism practice (not theory) in the training scenario to facilitate start-up creation

Key characteristics of the model

GESCI has developed a new and innovative training model which combines high level skilling to commercial - standards with entrepreneurial abilities which will lead on to small enterprise creation in technology-based arenas.

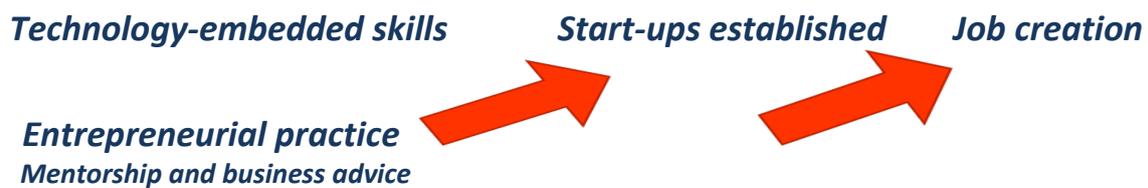The model incorporates various supports needed for the creation of start-ups.

The model has been applied by GESCI in the cultural arena, which has a high potential for growth in Africa, skilling African artists in the application of digital technologies in creating new products and services for the multi-media industry through its programme called "AKE – Creative Media Venture".

Crucially, the model is also applicable to traditional employments in service areas and to new and emerging ICT-based service opportunities for start-ups and self- employments.

Specifically the one year integrated training and enterprise programme provides:

1. ICT–based skills, singly or in clusters, to a standard that is commercially relevant. Appropriate digital tools and software are incorporated in the modernised training curriculum.

2. Training has a clear emphasis on guidance and direction together with technical, advisory, mentoring and consultative supports at every phase of the project rather than a re-establishment of the traditional teacher/student environment.
3. Trainees experience team-working and collaborative project design and development to simulate real-world employment environments and market-place standards.
4. In the third quarter, practical entrepreneurial advice, guidance and mentoring is provided followed by the establishment of small start-ups which have marketable products or services to offer and which, ideally, already have commissioned work in hand.

Technology-embedded skills   **Start-ups established**   **Job creation**

Entrepreneurial practice
Mentorship and business advice

Implementation of the model
*Entitled **African Knowledge Exchange (AKE) - A creative Media venture,*** this one year programme provided the participants/ young entrepreneurs with the opportunity to focus on five central objectives of the project:
1. Provision of access to the full range of digital media equipment, software and tools in GESCI's digital media production studio to allow participants to improve their creative media skills in an inter-related and collaborative environment involving Animation, Games Design and Apps and Music and Sound Design
2. The identification, selection and development of multi-media projects which have promising commercial potential in themselves and also have blueprinting or replicable potential in the marketplace
3. Provision of professional advice and external mentoring on the processes of start-up formation
4. A professionally- designed **Living Lab** action research was adopted throughout the project with the objective of developing a new, unique and scalable training and enterprise model which integrates creative digital media skills development, product identification and their development to commercial standards. This was carried out in conjunction with the University of Aalto Media Lab, Finland, an expert centre on the Living Lab model.
5. Formation of a number of start-ups with already -commissioned project work

Supports provided included artistic, technical, advisory and consultative at every phase of the project rather than a re-establishing of a traditional teacher/student environment.
The four programme areas were: Games and Apps Development, Music and Sound Design, Animation (2D/3D) and Culture and Storytelling.

Success and impact of the model in implementation

The success and impact of the model in implementation are as follows:

- ✓ The model responds directly to both employers' skills requirements by facilitating industry-standard skills development relevant to the job market and to self-employment.
- ✓ The AKE Living Lab model is also unique in that it is offered to participants who may have have no formal training while most other Living Labs involve universities or college graduates.
- ✓ it is cost-effective in that training is much shorter than that provided through formal TVET institutions.
- ✓ Entrepreneurialism **in practice,** not theoretical, in relevant skills development to create their own small enterprises or be employed.
- ✓ Model can be replicated across traditional and the emerging technology-based service sectors where start-ups and self-employment proliferate.
- ✓ 100% employment achieved: To date, all participants trained by AKE-Creative Media Venture are employed or have created their own enterprise. Some have become employers.

Evaluation and lessons learned

- The central importance of national/regional Policy supports for cutting-edge and innovative training initiatives. Policy and its **funded** implementation must bridge the gap between skills development and the provision of supports for business opportunities and start-ups;
- The importance of policy measures to support sustainability of innovation initiatives;

Increased knowledge and awareness of the challenges and opportunities for linking skills development and business development and creating enabling conditions for youth skills development that leads to employment in new and emerging ICT- based service sectors;

- The urgent need for fundamental curricular reform in TVET to reflect the job market and the increasing importance and application of ICT in all jobs;
- identified new possibilities on the relationships between new skills development and business practices : a cross-cutting partnership model;
- the importance of establishing "centers of practice" rather than classrooms;
- the need to reach out to the industrial and commercial community and incorporate their advice and contribution to modern skills development;
- The importance for trainees to establish connections to other stakeholders for future partnerships and collaboration towards securing business opportunities;
- Relevance of the local-to -global market place;
- Understanding the need for clear visions and leadership skills for collaborative and multi-disciplinary project development and for team-driven project execution;
- Appreciating ownership of knowledge, social value creation and new ways of sourcing, creating and repurposing creative content and understanding copyright and intellectual property rights; new outlooks on the changing marketplace;
- Understanding sustainability in terms of jobs, start-ups and free-lancing;
- Strategies to build AKE sustainability in skills development (content and model) and through networks (hosting an innovation network).

Key success factor for the replicability and scaling up of the AKE model

In a first phase GESCI will focus on scaling up the AKE- Creative Media Venture Model.
A Key success factors for replicability and scaling up is:

- The ability to create multi-stakeholder and public- private partnerships to ensure relevance with the industry and the job market;

Countries recommended for implementation of AKE
East African countries (Ethiopia Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda) have expressed their interest in AKE, as well as Guinea Conakry. Studies have also shown that opportunities for implementing AKE exist in the following countries

Algeria, Republic of Congo. Egypt, Ghana, Guinea Conakry, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tunisia, and the Zambia.

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