Computer Aid International seeks partnerships in Uganda

By Edris Kisambira

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British charity Computer Aid International (CAI) is looking for new distribution partners in Uganda. The hunt for new partners is driven by the charity's ambition to build technical capacity in efforts aimed at strengthening ICT for development by helping bridge the digital divide. CAI supplies professionally refurbished computers to developing countries at a small fee.

While most people and organisations would find it difficult to imagine how laborious it would be to record and analyse data if they didn't have access to a computer, there are people that cannot afford, not a single computer but the number of computers they need.

It is also easy to take access to computers and the Internet for granted but in this new information age everybody needs the two. Until now, CAI has operated in Uganda with four partner Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). "We are constantly looking for new opportunities to work with local organisations looking to apply affordable ICTs to education and social development," Gladys Muhunyo, the Africa Programme Manager for CAI said.

Role of the CAI

CAI works to help not-for-profit organisations that work especially in rural communities as well as those that are constrained by finances and cannot afford PCs to serve the communities they work with better. Muhunyo said CAI's role is to bridge the digital divide through development of distribution channel partners and leveraging their existing global partnerships. She said the activities of CAI aid implementation of the millennium development goals at the grassroots but also ensures the programmes to which ICT is implemented are sustainable. Lack of technical capacity by partners as well as the end users is usually a drawback and has often times led to the failure of promising development initiatives in especially disadvantaged and marginalized communities. Muhunyo was recently in Kampala to brief the media on the activities of CAI in Uganda, where so far some 4,000 PCs and laptops have been distributed to different institutions among them learning institutions and health centres.

CAI is the world's largest not-for-profit supplier of professionally refurbished computers to developing countries. It helps bridge the digital divide by enabling practical ICT solutions for health, education and community development. "Imagine a hospital without a PC, how will they keep records in this day and age?" Muhunyo poses. The digital divide is most pronounced between more and less developed economies in all aspects of ICT including telephone access, PC ownership and Internet usage.

Breaking through barriers

While phone access has rapidly increased in the past decade with the spread of mobile phones, around a third of people in the developing world now have access to phones.

But PC ownership and Internet usage has risen more slowly, with less than 4% of people in Africa using the Internet, compared with 63% in the UK. In Uganda, PC penetration is very low with just about 2 million PCs out of a population of 28 million people.

In Uganda, CAI has worked with schools and universities, the department of meteorology and different NGOs. "We are encouraged by information technology to enhance education, health and research," Muhunyo said. The organisation is now talking to the ministry of ICT and it is through this new ministry that it will sign-on new partners. But what is the cost of a new computer supplied by CAI? A single PC will set you back by a mere Pound Sterling 39 (but that is minus a few other costs). A second hand computer on the Uganda market costs between Ush400,000 - Ush800,000 (about US$235.2 - $470).

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