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| **Call for Input Title:** | Solutions to Promote Digital Education for Young People & their Protection |
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| **Submitting to:** | UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) |

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**What are the main challenges that young people in your country face in accessing digital education? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.**

Uganda hosts the youngest population in the world with 78% of the 45 million people under 30, and a median age of 15.7, whilst 73.8% living in rural communities.

One of the most obvious challenges of implementing e-learning in Uganda among the young people is the lack of adequate infrastructure and connectivity. Many learners and educators do not have access to reliable and affordable electricity, internet, devices, and software that are essential for e-learning. The other main challenges that young people in Uganda face in accessing digital challenges include pedagogical flexibility and inefficient social interaction among learners and instructors, lack of self-directed and independent learning, restricted mode of assessment, and lack staff competence in ICT and pedagogical approaches

Specifically, the students in Uganda face three main challenges that in implementing digital literacy in the classroom, and these are lack of supportive access and digital tools, lack of digital literacy skill from teachers and also students' lack of digital literacy skills.

The adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2006 was a major step forward in advancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities, turning their socio-economic exclusion into a human rights issue

In Uganda, persons with disabilities have been recognised as a vulnerable group which requires special measures of protection. This is because of the various challenges they face that make it impossible or hard for them to access the same opportunities as other members of society. The 2014 Population and Housing Census Report found that 12.4% of the Ugandan population live with some form of disability

Despite the expression of commitment to the above instruments, access and use of ICT by persons with disabilities is still a major challenge in Uganda. For example, persons with visual impairments may require diﬀerent assistive devices to use the computer with minimal assistance from a third party. These devices may include screen reading software and screen magnifiers. These devices are expensive and this cost may deter an employer from hiring a person with visual impairment.

On the other hand, research has found that providing computers, internet access and basic computer education was a necessary but not sufficient condition for reducing the digital divide experienced by poor people and persons with disabilities in urban areas.This is because digital inequalities intersect with structural inequalities such as a lack of access to quality education and poverty.

Assistive technology enables and promotes the inclusion, participation and engagement of persons with disabilities.Indeed, article 20 of CRDP calls for eﬀective measures to facilitate access to quality assistive devices and technologies, delivered at aﬀordable cost and in the manner and at the time of choice of persons with disabilities. In Uganda, majority of people that need these technologies do not have access to them and many are not aware of such technologies and their functionalities. A 2018 study by the Uganda Communications Commission found that about 76% of persons with disabilities were not aware of the low-cost assistive technologies like manual Perkins Brailler, hand-held magnifiers, hand frames/slates and communication boards.Screen readers, text-to-speech software and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices can cost more than $1,000 each, and not everyone is aware of the financing or grant opportunities in their country

Many persons with disabilities in Uganda lack the basic and specialist training for them to meaningfully use the available assistive devices. This has been occasioned by the lack of enough training facilities and trainers to provide the required training. For example, the limited adoption of screen readers and screen magnifiers was partly a result of insufficient training in ICT for persons with visual impairments in the country. Training was available only at the UNAB Hi-Tech Project and was restricted to those who could aﬀord paying for it

**What steps is the Government taking to ensure that young people can realize their human rights online in a safe, empowering, and inclusive way?**

Uganda’s legal and policy framework is based on the supreme law of the country, the Constitution of Republic of Uganda, adopted on 8 October 1995. Article 29 (a) states that “Every person shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression which shall include freedom of the press and other media

The Ugandan government has not taken any formal step in ensuring young people’s human rights online, either regarding their safety, empowerment, and or inclusiveness, however there is a Computer Misuse Act (2011) that proposes tough measures for anyone who indulges in child pornography. According to Section 23, A person who (a) produces child pornography for the purposes of its distribution through a computer; (b) offers or makes available child pornography through a computer; (c) distributes or transmits child pornography through a computer; (d) procures child pornography through a computer for himself or herself or another person; or (e) unlawfully possesses child pornography on a computer, commits an offence.

The notion to protect children online is new in Uganda and many are not taking precautionary steps to provide safe online spaces for children. The legal and regulatory frameworks that exist are inadequate in addressing online child safety.

Uganda’s Vision 2040 is “A transformed Ugandan society from a peasant to a modern and prosperous country within 30 years”. Worldwide, and especially in developing countries, it has been acknowledged that there is a link between Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and human development outcomes. In the context of this new ICT policy for Uganda, the thrust is to harness ICTs to enable Ugandans to lead healthier, longer and more creative lives.

The ICT Policy for Uganda 2014, under the Mainstreaming Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities Issues section, the government of Uganda emphasizes that the successful penetration of ICTs within the existing social and economic structures depends on its people. However, women, youth and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) are at times marginalized in most activities but constitute a very important segment of society. Therefore, there is need to empower and include these marginalized groups by addressing them as special groups in society that can positively contribute to the growth of ICTs, as well as the use of ICTs an empowerment tool in their daily activities. To this end, the following strategies are lined up:

* + - 1. Promote ICT as an alternative career for women, youth and PWDs in the informal and formal educational system;
      2. Encourage creativity and innovation around ICTs among women, youth and PWDs leading to entrepreneurship development;
      3. Enable full and equal participation of women, youth and PWDs in creating the Information society;
      4. Implement special ICT training programs for women, youth and PWDs;
      5. Facilitate and encourage the development of electronic networks and systems for associations and organizations engaged in the advancement of women, youth and PWDs issues in the country; and
      6. Implement ICT programmes/projects focusing on combating HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases among women, youth and PWDs.

**What steps is the Government taking to ensure that digital education is accessible and promoted among young people? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes directed at ensuring young people’s universal access to digital education**

The Government of Uganda (GoU), like other economies attaches great importance to the development of education by recognizing education as an essential tool for transformation of society, national growth and prosperity of all Ugandans. Education is one of the government’s cornerstones and pillars for poverty alleviation and national developments as expressed by the Uganda’ Vision 2040 and the Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4).

GoU believes that “every child matters and every child can achieve” when given quality education. The provision of education services is the mandate of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) to ensure Uganda is transformed into a modern knowledge economy and natures learner civilization

At the apex, the Uganda Government Vision 2040 acknowledges the potential of the ICT to accelerate development, create jobs and increase productivity. The Vision calls for a comprehensive skills development plan (in addition to investment in ICT infrastructure and innovation

While the national policies and plans clearly identify the need to develop digital skills across the country, there is a big gap towards implementation. The following are key constraints at the policy level:

There is no entity or group of entities focused on driving the development of digital skills policies and programs. Because digital skills development happens both inside and outside formal education and touches on jobs and labor, a cross-ministerial steering committee is often required to drive the digital skills agenda. This appears to be lacking in Uganda

**What are the main gaps and challenges to young people’s protection from online threats in law, policy, and practice in your country and the impacts on young people’s human rights? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response**

The National Child Policy (NCP) demonstrates the commitment by the Government of Uganda to ensure the well-being of all children. It is another big stride in the Country’s efforts to uphold children rights and protect them from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence

Although the Computer Misuse Act (2011) proposes tough measures for anyone who indulges in child pornography. According to Section 23, A person who (a) produces child pornography for the purposes of its distribution through a computer; (b) offers or makes available child pornography through a computer; (c) distributes or transmits child pornography through a computer; (d) procures child pornography through a computer for himself or herself or another person; or (e) unlawfully possesses child pornography on a computer, commits an offence

Child vulnerability is compounded by a weak institutional framework emanating from a weak regulatory framework, poor implementation of policies and plans, enforcement of laws, corruption, limited data on children, limited capacity of staff and lack of knowledge/awareness on child human rights. This National Child Policy has therefore been developed to coordinate the efforts of the different sectors that have a direct and indirect mandate on children and deliver a comprehensive package of services encompassing all the four cardinal rights of the child in a multi-sectoral approach.

The lives of our children has lately been reshaped by the digital technologies which have resulted into new opportunities and at the same time posing risks to their well-being and rights

The biggest challenges on the internet reported by children were cyberstalking (33%), cyberbullying (20%), and harassment (11%), with no mention at all of the issues such as pornography, child pornography, with only a small mention of online abusing

Further and perhaps the most worrying statistic is that ‘the number of online activities in which children engage, the digital skills they develop and the online risks they encounter all increase as children get older’. This is contrary to the common logic within the child rights discourse which posits that the capacities of children to handle complex issues evolves, and therefore vulnerability to harm decreases with age. This reality raises concerns about the protection of children in the digital sphere and the measures that states should take to address key challenges posed by children’s access to ICT devices and the internet.

**What steps is the Government taking to ensure that young people are protected from online threats? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes.**

The notion to protect children online is new in Uganda and a few citizens are certainly not taking precautionary steps to provide safe online spaces for children. The legal and regulatory frameworks that exist are inadequate in addressing children online safety.

Although the ***Computer Misuse Act (2011)*** proposes tough measures for anyone who indulges in child pornography. According to Section 23,

*A person who—(a) produces child pornography for the purposes of its distribution through a computer; (b) offers or makes available child pornography through a computer; (c) distributes or transmits child pornography through a computer; (d) procures child pornography through a computer for himself or herself or another person; or (e) unlawfully possesses child pornography on a computer, commits an offence.*

Further, persons who avail pornographic materials to a child commit an offence as per sub section 2. Those found guilty of possession, procurement or distribution of child pornography are liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding Seven Million and Two Hundred Thousand Uganda Shillings (approx.2,500 USD) or imprisonment not exceeding fifteen years or both.

*Child pornography according to the act is defined to include- pornographic material that depicts— (a) a child engaged in sexually suggestive or explicit conduct; (b) a person appearing to be a child engaged in sexually suggestive or explicit conduct; or realistic images representing children engaged in sexually suggestive or explicit conduct.*

The act defines a child as “a person under the age of eighteen years”

Other areas concerning child online safety like cyber stalking, cyber harassment and offensive communication are also addressed in the act but offences are generalized, which leaves perpetrators to prey on children both online and offline. Those found guilty of cyber harassment are liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding One Million Four Hundred and Forty Thousand Uganda Shillings (approx. 500 USD).

Cyber harassment according to the Act is the use of a computer for any of the following purposes— (a) making any request, suggestion or proposal which is obscene, lewd, lascivious or indecent; (b) threatening to inflict injury or physical harm to the person or property of any person; or (c) knowingly permits any electronic communications device to be used for any of the purposes mentioned in this section.