

Girls In ICT Rwanda

Girls in ICT Day 2013: Expanding horizons and changing attitudes

Summary

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International Girls in ICT Day is an initiative backed by ITU Member States in ITU Plenipotentiary Resolution 70 (Guadalajara, 2010) to create a global environment that empowers and encourages girls and young women to consider careers in the growing field of information and communication technologies (ICTs). International Girls in ICT Day is celebrated on the 4th Thursday in April every year. It was celebrated for the first time in Rwanda in 2012. During the planning period for the event, the women entrepreneurs involved formed a group - Girls in ICT Rwanda - which the Ministry of Youth & ICT pledged to support.

The group's goal is to improve the current statistics regarding the numbers of women in the ICT sector as well as to alter the stereotype held by many young girls that ICT is a man's field. Girls in ICT Rwanda consists of women of all ages working in the field ICT including entrepreneurs, professionals and university students. The group has visited a number of schools in Rwanda including Lycee de Kigali and Gashora Girls School. During these visits, the group's members speak to teenage girls to encourage them to consider ICT as a career option as well help them to understand and appreciate the importance of developing ICT skills in any career.

For the 2013 event, Girls In ICT Rwanda organised an event that took place at Lycée Notre Dame de Citeaux, a secondary school in Kigali and invited several schools to participate. The following schools sent 15-30 female students to take part: Gashora Girls School, Lycee de Kigali, FAWE Girls School, Nu Vision High School, Riviera High School, Akilah Institute and the host school, Lycée Notre Dame de Citeaux.

The event was sponsored financially by the Ministry of Youth & ICT, the ICT Chamber of PSF and DOT Rwanda. The event also received sponsorship in the form of promotion and coverage by Igihe, Radio 10, Tele 10 and The New Times.

The Minister of Gender and Family Promotion, the Minister of Youth & ICT and the PS of the Ministry and Youth & ICT attended the event. The day included a number of activities. It began with a career fair with ICT entrepreneurs and professionals set up stands where students could come and speak with them. Participating companies/organisations included: Bank of Kigali, Broadband Systems Corporation (BSC),

Tigo Rwanda, Shaking Sun, Sail Ltd., Hehe Ltd., DOT Rwanda, the American Embassy in Rwanda and the Akilah Institute.

After the career fair there were a couple of ice breakers including an a binary themed game. Following this there was a Q&A session with panel of women in technical fields. A guest speaker on the panel was Esther Mbabazi, the first female pilot from Rwanda who brought up the importance and relevance of ICT in many fields, including hers, when she described the computerisation of modern aeroplanes. The panel also included: Clairyce Iribagiza, CEO of mobile app development company, Hehe Ltd.; Paula Saphir, Senior Network Security Engineer at RDB/IT; Paula Ingabire, Project Manager at RDB/IT; Susan Lister, Software Engineer at the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI); Lucy Mbabazi, in charge of Emerging Market Solutions at VISA and Annita Kabbatende, Network Engineer at MTN Rwanda. Students quizzed panelists on their careers.

Following this session, both the Minister of Gender & Family Promotion and the Minister of Youth & ICT spoke with participants. This was followed by the group challenge where schools were divided into groups and told to come up with a solution to the problem of limited access to ICT in rural areas. Groups then presented their solutions and the panel voted on the best solution. The winning solution came from a group of students from Nu Vision High School which was impressively presented by Nkubito Jackline. She described a combination of government subsidized computer labs for women as well as outreaches from girls and women in ICT to rural areas. Jackline received a tablet as a gift from Crystal Rugege, the Director of Business Strategy & Operations at Carnegie Mellon University Rwanda and a member of Girls In ICT, for her an exceptional presentation skills. Members of the winning group will be featured in the Education magazine of The New Times and received gift vouchers from the PS of the Ministry and Youth & ICT.

When asked what she got out of the event, one high school student said, “Some of us didn’t think that we could make it as IT professionals... but now I’m convinced that I can have a good career in that.”

The event concluded with participants networking and enjoying the refreshments.