

Namibia Marks International Girls in ICT Day 2013



Telecom Namibia and Cisco Systems hosted more than 20 girls from the University of Namibia for the International Girls in ICT Day event at the former's Main Offices in Windhoek on 25 April 2013.

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The forum was organised in partnership with networking leader Cisco Systems to encourage Namibian girls to choose a career in information and communication technologies (ICT).

Telecom Namibia and Cisco Systems executives, including a number of successful women from Telecom Namibia, shared their knowledge and experience with over 20 participants from the Cisco Networking Academy at the University of Namibia (Unam) Department of Computer Science.

The Unam IT students were accompanied by Prof Jameson Mbale, the Coordinator of the Unam Centre of Excellence in Telecommunications and Information Technology, which is a joint initiative between the academic institution and Telecom Namibia. Prof Mbale expressed deep appreciation to Telecom Namibia and Cisco for supporting the event in Namibia.

The International Girls in ICT Day is an initiative of the International Telecommunication Union, an agency of the United Nations. The day has been celebrated internationally

since 2010 to create a global environment that empowers and encourages girls and young women to consider careers in the growing field of ICT.

Telecom Namibia Managing Director Frans Ndoroma delivered the opening remarks at the forum and encouraged the participants to consider careers and possibilities in the fast developing ICT field.

"I am so proud of you all and am confident that from amongst you will emerge ICT leaders who will make a positive impact on our country through technology," Ndoroma told the students.

"What I want to tell you today as students is that all jobs in the future will involve the use of more and more ICT. If I look at job postings half the jobs advertised are ICT related, and this is the case even during an economic downturn," he added.

The Telecom MD stressed the need for more girls to join the ICT field if Namibia was to succeed in the emerging knowledge-based economy which is largely fueled by ICT. "Although Namibia is still at an early stage in the use of ICT products and services, widespread adoption will greatly assist our country to achieve the vision of a healthy, wealthy and educated nation as articulated in [Namibia's] Vision 2030," he said.

Gerrit Smit, Cisco's Account Manager for East and Southern Africa Public Sector and Wireline & Mobile Service Providers, said that despite the obvious benefits in working in the ICT field, many girls never even consider a career in ICTs. "Go to university but when you finish find something in the ICT field that really fits your personal ambitions... ICT is no longer a 'man's world'," Smit said.

The ICT sector remains a growing sector for employment, and a key economic factor underpinning both national and international development in both developed and developing countries. Many countries and regions are predicting a shortage of qualified staff with math, science, engineering and computing skills to meet the growing demand.

Telecom Namibia's Chief HR Officer Andrew Kanime said his company was looking to increase the number of female in its employment. "We give preferential treatment to girls and women when it comes to staff recruitment, appointment and promotion. We also strive to include more girls in our training and development schemes," Kanime said.

The HR chief also shared the career opportunities available at Telecom Namibia in the areas of marketing, finance, human resources and, more importantly, IT.

Globally, it is estimated that the world shortfall in skilled ICT professionals exceeds two million. Namibia is experiencing an acute shortage of IT/IP related skills and knowledge.

The participants were taken on a tour of Telecom Namibia to show them the behind the scene systems and people that make possible the practical applications of ICT in such areas as education, banking, public administration, transport, and commerce for the benefit of citizens, consumers, and businesses at large.

The facilities visited included the Network Operations Centre, Data Centre, Co-Location Server Room, EWSD Local & Trunk Exchange, Windhoek's CBD Main Distribution Frame and the Support Systems (Genset Room).

"It is awesome to see such a large number of female IT students these days. In my time we were very few in numbers," Hedwig Kareenatjo, Application Specialist: OSS at the Network Operations Centre, remarked.

And when the female IT students left Telecom Namibia, they had one question on their minds, "Are you leaving IT to the boys?"