

KIC-Start: The Kobe-Kigali Connection



Yves Cyuzuzo in the KIC common room

Centered on the Kobe Institute of Computing, Graduate School of Information Technology (KIC), the City of Kobe and the Rwandan capital of Kigali have forged a dynamic and mutually beneficial partnership.

ALEX HENDY

LOCATED on Flower Road just a ten-minute walk from Shin-Kobe Station, the Kobe Institute of Computing, Graduate School of Information Technology (KIC) is emerging as an important center for human resources development in Africa. Seventy-two international students are presently studying at KIC, the majority of them from Africa on master's degree scholarships from agencies of the Japanese government.

The big breakthrough in KIC's relationship with Africa came with its implementation in 2012 of the JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) training program "Problem Resolutions for Development Issues by ICT."

KIC is examining and inventing ways that information and communication technologies

can enhance African people's capacity to acquire truthful information; strengthen their resilience to cope with poverty, illiteracy, disease, conflict and corruption by improving their capacity to communicate; and provide platforms to counteract these challenges and find means of reconciliation and community building.

To realize this goal, "Tankyu for Africa" has been introduced as the key technology-driven problem-solving approach. "Tankyu" is a Japanese term meaning "inquisitive learning." The idea is that students begin by learning the fundamentals of open source software and, having acquired them, become creators of new concepts for society.

Among the participants in the 2012 Tankyu program was Clarisse Iribagiza from Rwanda, the founder in 2010 of HeHe Limited, a developer of mobile applications. HeHe Limited implements Tankyu Practice through its staff and local students. HeHe's Girl Hub client for example has empowered thousands of teenage girls in Rwanda through the provision of educational and vocational opportunities via their mobile application. HeHe is a shining example of Rwandan prowess in the ICT field.



KIC Associate Professor Chika Yoshida with master's students on the "ICT for Development" course

Clued in to Rwanda's potential as one of the fastest growing African countries in ICT, the City of Kobe has been working closely with the capital, Kigali, to nurture the first buds of their special relationship. In 2014, an ICT skills development tie-up between KIC and the Kigali private sector was announced, and later that year saw the start of the K-Initiative economic collaboration project, which aims to create jobs for 1,000 people in Rwanda by 2020.

"The Tankyu for Africa program at KIC and the ICT Innovator course we established to implement development-oriented study marked the start of interest in Japan about working with Africa in the field of ICT," says KIC Vice President Kenji Fukuoka. "What we are aiming at is in line with the objectives of the ABE Initiative."

ICT for Development

The African Business Education (ABE) Initiative for Youth was launched based on recommendations announced at the 5th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V) in 2013 further to a proposal by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The ABE Initiative offers opportunities for young Africans to study for master's degrees in Japanese universities and experience internships at Japanese companies, specifically to develop

All photos: Yuichi Itabashi

skills that can contribute to African industry. Over the five years of the ABE Initiative's duration, universities including KIC will take in a total of 1,000 participants from African countries.

Yves Cyuzuzo (28) is a second-year student at KIC on the "ICT for Development" master's course and is one of the first batch of ABE Initiative students at KIC. A graduate of the Adventist University of Central Africa in Kigali, Cyuzuzo beat off stiff competition across Africa to win one of the prized scholarships at KIC.

"Japan is the best in the world in automation, or robotics, so for me that was the best thing to learn here. It has been a good experience to see Japanese technology and companies firsthand," Cyuzuzo says. "I'm looking forward to going back to Rwanda to apply what I have learned. With these skills, I can develop a system in any field."

In May, a seventeen-strong delegation of business leaders from Kobe led by Mayor Kizo Hisamoto visited Kigali and announced a "Joint Declaration of Partnership toward Creating an Innovation Eco System and Bridging Africa and Japan."

"Rwanda and Japan have a strong relationship now," says Cyuzuzo. "If we can implement the knowledge we have gained here [at KIC] it can help Japan as well."

From Kobe to Kigali and into Africa, the Flower Road is open to traffic. **1**