



Promoting Youth-Led Innovation and Sustainable Development: The Role of the Makueni Technology and Innovation Hub and the Ajiry Centre.

County:	Makueni County		
Sector/s:	Youth	Sub-sector/Theme:	ICT
Keywords: (for search in the online platform)	Innovation challenges Youth Innovation Hub The Makueni Ajiry Centre Technology gaps/ digital divide		
Target Audience:	Counties Youth in Makueni County		
Authors (contacts and their institutions can be included as well)	Nzei Mwende – Program Assistant Maarifa Centre		
Resource Persons (include their designations)	Daniel.K.Nyala – County ICT Project & Capacity Building Officer Purity Mutinda- ICT Officer, Makueni Innovation Hub		

Introduction

Technology gaps, also known as the digital divide refer to disparities in access to and use of technology, particularly Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the internet. These gaps exist on various levels and have social, economic and educational implications. Some of the key aspects of technology gaps include:

1. **Access to Hardware and Infrastructure:** This is brought about by geographic disparities, especially in regions with inadequate technological infrastructure, such as broadband internet access or mobile networks leading to limited access to technology. In some areas individuals and communities lack access to essential devices like computers, smartphones



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS



and tablets.

2. Internet Connectivity: This includes affordable broadband access and high-speed internet for various online activities especially in rural areas.
3. Digital Literacy: Lack of digital literacy or computer skills can create a significant gap as those with inadequate knowledge may struggle to use technology effectively.

Covering an area of 8,008.9 square kilometers (3,092.3 square miles) and housing a population of 987,653 residents, Makueni County, like numerous rural regions in Kenya, faces ongoing challenges with limited network connectivity and internet access. Further, a significant portion of the population encounters challenges related to the affordability of Internet services and the acquisition of computer-related skills.

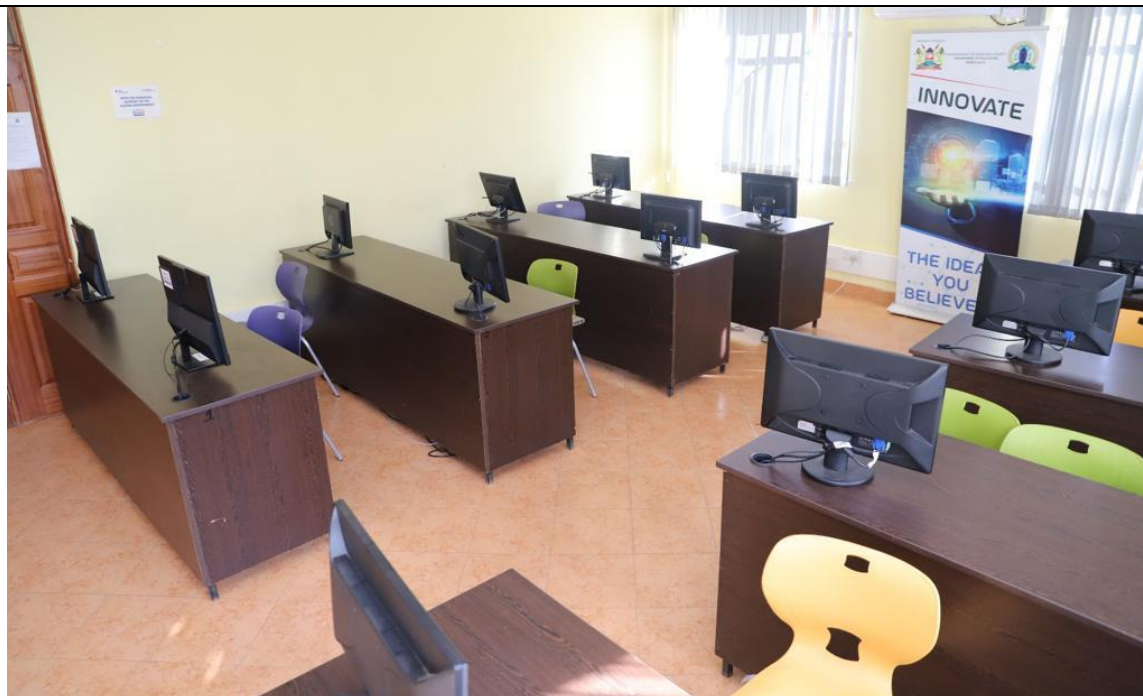
To address this digital divide, the County Government has established the Makueni Technology and Innovation Hub within Wote Green Public Park. This hub offers a range of services, including free Wi-Fi coverage throughout the park, free computer classes, and hosts various innovation challenges to inspire young individuals to become innovators.



A photo of the Makueni ICT and Innovation Hub



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS



A photo of a fully furnished and equipped computer classroom in the Makueni Tech and Innovation Hub

Implementation of the practice

- In 2017, the County Government of Makueni convened a stakeholder workshop, engaging more than 500 ICT professionals, including 258 university lecturers. During this meeting, they collaboratively formulated a roadmap outlining the steps for implementing the innovation center.
- In the financial year 2020/2021, the County Government of Makueni collaborated with World Bank to construct the youth innovation Centre within the Wote Green Public Park.
- The same financial year the County equipped the Centre with modern furniture and classroom materials.
- On 2nd September 2021, the County launched the Centre allowing people from the park to walk in and access different services.
- In the same year, the Center initiated innovative challenges , as an activity to inspire young individuals to harness their creative abilities.
- From 2021 to 2023 the Centre has hosted the following innovation challenges.
 1. **The Economic Recovery Amidst Covid-19:** This innovation challenge had 15 innovators but only three proceeded to finals with innovations like E-fundi where drivers can access the



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS



nearest mechanic in case of a car breakdown anywhere in the County.

2. The second innovation challenge centered on the theme of **Harnessing Digital Transformation for Climate Action** and drew 30 innovative submissions, ultimately recognizing and awarding the top five entries.
 3. The third innovation challenge, centered around **Building Economic Resilience Through Innovation**. In this challenge, 18 innovations were considered, with the top three receiving seed capital awards.
 4. The fourth innovation challenge was dedicated to **health innovations**, and the top three contestants introduced various innovations, including "VACCI BOX," a system designed to facilitate timely vaccine deliveries.
- The County Government of Makueni budgeted Ksh4 million in purchasing equipment and furniture for the innovation hub.
 - The Centre has trained over **1000** young people in computer packages and different skills.
 - Through a collaborative partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, the County has established the Ajiry Centre at Wote Green Public Park. This Center serves as a dedicated workspace for young entrepreneurs who run online businesses and lack suitable working facilities.
 - The Ajiry Centre offers additional services such as nurturing talent, a music recording studio and providing DJ classes.
 - Since its inception in March 2023, the Ajiry Centre has significantly contributed to the development of **76** artists by facilitating music recording and has imparted life skills, particularly in financial management to more than **200** young individuals.
 -



Students recording music at the Ajiry Centre



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS



- Housing the Ajiry Centre and Innovation Hub at Wote Green Public's Park is a strategic idea to transition youth who undergo training at the Makueni Innovation Hub to a practical space that empowers them to express and cultivate their talents.
- The County is in the process of formulating a policy to secure the long-term sustainability of these initiatives targeting the youth.



A photo of the Wote Green Public Park

Results of the practice

1. Knowledge and Skill Development: Both Ajiry and the Makueni Innovation Hub Centres have trained over 1200 youth in different skills.
2. Talent Nurturing: Both Centres have helped discover and nurture talent and other creative abilities.
3. Research and Innovation: Through the Innovation challenges, the County has generated new knowledge and innovative ideas including E-fundi, which serve as a solution to local community challenges.
4. Networking and Collaboration: Having both Centres at the Wote Green Public Park has promoted networking and collaboration among young people, mentors and organizations leading to new partnerships and joint initiatives.
5. Global Connectivity: Internet connectivity in Makueni County has fostered global awareness among the youth, enabling them to explore various emerging global challenges and craft solutions tailored to their local context.

Lessons learnt:

1. Community Involvement key : Engaging residents and stakeholders ensures that projects align with community needs and values.
2. Establishing youth-related facilities within the Wote Green Public Park: This makes access to various resources and services more convenient.
3. Introducing innovation challenges can help in bringing forth new solutions to existing



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS



challenges.

4. Internet accessibility helps the youth to connect and understand different global emerging issues and become teach-survey

Conclusion

In conclusion, establishing youth centres, such as the Makueni County Ajiry Centre and the Innovation Hub has significant importance. These centres serve as vital catalysts for community development and empowerment with a particular focus on the youth. Further, careful planning, stakeholder engagement, adaptability and effective resource management are essential for success. By actively involving communities, providing youth-friendly infrastructure, collaborating with various stakeholders, promoting innovation and facilitating access to information, Counties can pave the way for a more prosperous and interconnected future.

Photos



A photo of the Wote Green Public Park



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS



A student during a DJ class session