

Growing digital literacy in Africa

Equipping Africa's large and rapidly growing youth population with the digital literacy and coding skills they need to succeed in the digital economy is no small task. With more than 60% of its population aged 25 and under and the fastest-growing youth population in the world, Africa is expected to add 15 to 20 million youth to its workforce every year for the next three decades.



Frances Ahene-Affoh.

But as one innovative social enterprise in Ghana has shown, when public and private sector partners collaborate to solve key societal problems, there is virtually no limit to what can be achieved, including getting Africa's large and growing youth population ready for active roles in the global digital economy.

"Our continent is a wealth of innovation and youthful talent, but there is some work to be done to ensure our youth are equipped with access to the knowledge and tools they'll need to chart their own course in the 21st century digital economy," says Frances Ahene-Affoh, SVP at [DreamOval Foundation](#). "Recognising the role of public and private sector collaboration and the potential for greater impact when everyone works together to solve key societal challenges, we established the DreamOval Foundation in 2013 to support the spread of digital literacy in Ghana."

Focused on driving digital literacy in Ghana, the DreamOval Foundation is a social enterprise that manages all the corporate social responsibility initiatives of DreamOval Limited, one of Ghana's largest and most successful fintech companies. Set up in 2013, the DreamOval Foundation aims to bridge the knowledge gap in Ghana through the creation, sharing and utilization of knowledge within the education and technology sectors.

Supporting greater digital literacy among youth, teachers

The Ghanaian government has introduced a range of interventions aimed at rapidly improving the country's quality of education in an effort to prepare its youth population for work in the global digital economy. An estimated 57% of Ghana's population is aged 25 and under. In 2017, the government introduced free secondary education which has already increased enrolment in secondary education from 57% in 2012 to 65% in 2017.

But, says Ahene-Affoh, addressing youth education access is only one part of the challenge. "One of the biggest challenges we face as a country is equipping our teachers with the skills and tools they need to inspire our youth to pursue careers in technology-related fields," explains Ahene-Affoh. "Often, teachers will not have been exposed to even basic technology - not to mention coding and robotics, which we see as key to the success of our country's youth - and classrooms have little to no technology."

He adds that it's nearly impossible to instil a sense of excitement at the possibilities of technology when access to technology is limited or non-existent. "Many schools, especially in rural areas, lack access to PCs and the basic materials needed to learn coding. Recognising an opportunity to play an important supporting role in driving digital literacy in Ghana, we introduced the iTeach initiative with the support of the Ghana National Association of Teachers, working in close partnership with the government to provide teachers with free ICT training. Over the past few years, we have trained 850 teachers across the country, and are now looking to expand our efforts to neighbouring countries, including Togo, Liberia and the Gambia."

DreamOval Foundation is also a key partner to SAP's Africa Code Week, continent-wide digital literacy and coding skills development initiative that has introduced more than 4.1 million young Africans to basic coding skills since its establishment in 2015. According to Ahene-Affoh, the Ghanaian government has adopted coding as a part of the official school curriculum since the first Africa Code Week was held in 2015.

"Initiatives such as Africa Code Week draw in multiple collaborators from the public and private sectors to solve very specific problems - in this case youth access to coding and digital literacy skills. As a social enterprise, we believe this collaborative approach holds the greatest potential for long-term sustainable impact."

Closing gender gap in ICT access

One of DreamOval Foundation's flagship programs is the FemlTI, a project that aims to train young girls to use coding and robotics to solve problems and build technology solutions to some of the prevalent social challenges in Ghana and across the continent. FemlTI was introduced to address the challenge of declining female enrolment in secondary and tertiary education and to encourage more girls to pursue STEM-related subjects

"Three-quarters of young girls in Ghana attend primary school, but there is a significant drop in enrolment in secondary and university education," explains Ahene-Affoh. "We introduced FemlTI with the aim of training 50 000 girls across the country over the next few years, in line with our commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goals 4 (Quality Education) and 5 (Gender Equality)."

FemlTI often works in rural and deprived areas in Ghana where access to even basic technology can be challenging. "We're running a big project in the Volta region that aims to train 2500 girls for two weeks, giving them exposure to new ideas, new approaches to problem-solving, and access to basic digital literacy. However, the topography of the region makes access difficult, so we are partnering with the Nneka Youth Foundation which has a youth training centre in the region which we'll use as the venue for our training. These types of partnerships or opportunities to collaborate are essential to our work. Without them, we simply would not be able to deliver on our mandate."

Asked about future plans for DreamOval Foundation, Ahene-Affoh says they are currently exploring greater scope for collaboration with partners from the public and private sectors. "Knowledge-sharing is core to our purpose and mission, and

core to what we believe is necessary for us to solve some of the more pressing challenges in our country and across our continent. Often, our most successful collaborations do not revolve around donations or financial support: instead, it is when people volunteer their time, knowledge and expertise in the service of addressing key challenges that we see the greatest positive impact."

Ahene-Affoh is heading to the Social Enterprise World Forum, taking place in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia from 23 to 25 October. "We're looking forward to speaking to other social enterprises to learn how they work, what impact they have on their communities and how to better collaborate to solve problems in Ghana and across the continent."

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