

Sun and the United Nations cooperate to bring African Participation Fellows to Pop!Tech Conference

A report by Clement Bwalya

Sun Microsystems and the United Nations New York Office of Sport for Development and Peace collaborated to create the UN-Sun Participation Fellows Program for the 2005 Pop!Tech conference. Five of the 12 Fellows from Africa were selected from among the delegates to the Second Pan Africa Youth Leadership Summit in Ifrane, Morocco.

The program is part of the follow-up to the Pan African Youth Leadership Summit, and reflects Sun's partnership with the United Nations in helping young African leaders mobilize in support of the Millennium Development Goals.

The theme of the conference -- held in Camden, Maine, in the northeast United States on 19 – 22 October 2005 -- was "Grand Challenges," and the event focused on technology and the key issues shaping the global future.

Pop!Tech drew together world-class, visionary presenters. Over 450 delegates from the highest ranks of science, business, the arts and culture attended. They discussed the nature of technology and its impact on people, society, culture and the future. These visionaries were joined by influential members of the media, including the New York Times, BBC, and Fortune Magazine.

The Fellows reflected the energy that today's African youth bring to tackling issues facing Africa, and pointed out that sport is widely used in mobilizing communities for social change. They emphasized that these efforts cannot not be fully effective, however, unless Africa advances in the area of technology. Technology can play a critical role in sustainable human development and poverty eradication. The conference showed, however, that the gap is widening between those empowered by access to technology and those in Africa and other regions of the developing world who lack access.

The participation of these young African leaders at Pop!Tech helped in advancing an appreciation among those at the conference of the challenges facing the global village.

Technology can be a catalyst for resource mobilization for accomplishing the Millenium Development Goals, and the Fellows lobbied attending visionaries to support it's use to help in many areas, including the prevention and treatment for HIV/AIDS and other infectious and communicable diseases. The conference also showed how access to medical information through technology has generated a coordinated environment for research activities that links people from different parts of the world more effectively.

The challenge the Fellows pointed out is that technology gap facing Africa is widening, and the continent is at risk of being excluded from a global revolution in technology.

The Fellows would like to thank the sponsor, Sun Microsystems for inviting young African leaders to this years Pop!Tech conference. Also, we would like to thank the

people that made this possible for the Fellows to participate at the conference to advance ideas to build a strong network of support.

The UN-Sun Participation Fellows for the Pop!Tech conference included:

Neema Mgana, Elleni Muluneh Gebremariam, Lydia Muchodo, Khaddiatou Diedhiou Diop, Rotimi Olawale, Clement M. Bwalya, Brian Longwe, Eric Osiakwan, Ndesanjo Macha, Ory Okollah, David Gyewu, Emeka Okafor

UN Sun Africa Participation Fellows

From the second Pan-African Youth Leadership Summit:

Clement M. Bwalya

Zambia; area of specialization: social change through sport; health sector

Khaddiatou Diedhiou Diop

Senegal; the youngest Member of Parliament of Senegal; areas of specialization: reducing child mortality and improving maternal health

Elleni Muluneh Gebremariam.

Ethiopia; areas of specialization: education, communications

Lydia Muchodo

Uganda, areas of specialization: promoting peace and tolerance through sport

Rotimi Olawale

Nigeria; areas of specialization: private sector, partnerships, media

Ndesanjo Macha

Other Fellows:

David Gyewu

Ghana; former Deputy Minister for Communications and Technology for Ghana; telcom reform activist.

Brian Longwe

Kenya; Chief Technology Officer for the Africa Internet Service Provider Association (AfrISPA); his business is known as Internet Exchange Point.

Ndesanjo Macha

Tanzania; blogger, Digital Africa, human rights lawyer and activist, one of the key figures of Swahili language blogging.

Neema Mgana

Tanzania; the youngest of 1,000 globally involved peace activist women collectively

nominated for the 2005 Nobel Prize for Peace. The nominated women were picked on the basis of their active commitment to the cause of peace and justice, often under the most difficult circumstances. Founder and director of African Regional Youth Initiative, and the Co-Executive Director of the International Council for Global Initiatives (www.intcouncil.net); presently completing an internship/fellowship program at the United Nations secretariat in New York. "I am a Tanzanian by birth but an African at heart. My interest is in the development of Africa's future by mobilizing youth efforts to combat present day challenges while giving rise to hope and unity. Something extra about me... I am a last born, which means that I pretty much get my way!"

Emeka Okafor

Africa Blogger -- The Timbuktu Chronicles; a consultant and entrepreneur with a background and interest in finance and sustainable technology. Timbuktu Chronicles is "a view of Africa and Africans with a focus on entrepreneurship, innovation, technology, practical remedies and other self-sustaining activities." Currently lives in and runs his blog from New York City.

Ory Okollah

Kenya; the country's leading blogger, telecommunications reform activist.

Eric Osiakwan

Ghana; ICT consultant, journalist, blogger. "I have come to believe what I am expressing by virtue of my work and research in ICT in Africa and around the world (that) the only way Africa can leapfrog the industrial age to become competitive and enabled to play a role in the global space is to trade more in ICT information and knowledge products and services; our traditional exports can only help us survive. By 2015 Africa must develop her ICT and Educational infrastructure. It is clear that we are in an emerging knowledge society where ICTs are playing a critical role in economic development, however, with regard to the "Digital Divide" Africa seems to be on the losing end. The question is can Africa close the gap and move to the other side? My answer is a resounding yes. Africa has no choice."