

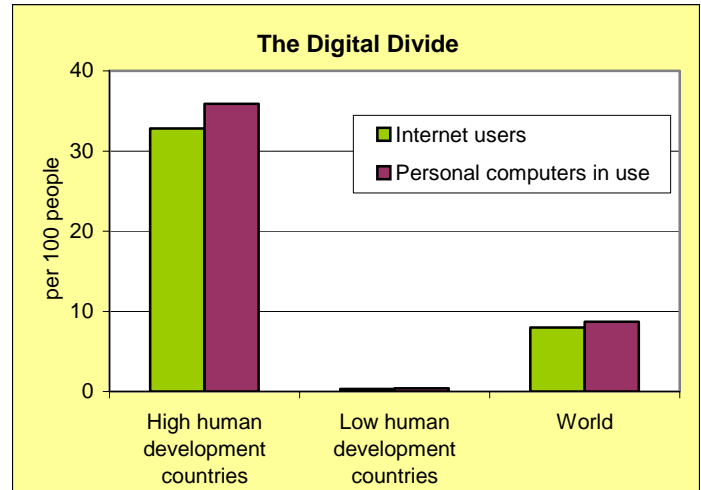
# Youth and Technology

## ▶▶ The digital age ▶▶

Information technology is one of the major forces influencing opportunities for youths. Young people have better educational, economic and social opportunities if they have access to computer and information technology.

Unfortunately, the benefits of technology have accrued largely where “the digital revolution” began. Developed countries still have far more computers and Internet users. For example, the United States has more computers than the rest of the world combined. By comparison, less than 1% of African youth have access to information technology.

The YMCA youth and technology initiative strives to bridge this divide through information technology programs that create access to education, employment, and civic engagement. In turn, these initiatives enhance young people’s confidence and life skills.



Source: UNDP, 2003

## ▶▶ Bridging the divide ▶▶

Technology is an essential tool in youth development. Access to information technology allows youths to learn marketable skills, find required information and be heard by others. Ultimately, young people can make healthier life choices and alternatives if they have access to technology.

YMCAs are connecting information technology initiatives with youth and community development. Experience has shown that when new or improved access to information technology is introduced to disadvantaged communities, youths benefit in a number of ways, including:

Despite isolation and lack of opportunity, young people can be engaged through information technology in ways that transform their local reality into new opportunities.

- ↑ Increased self-esteem
- ↑ Increased understanding of their own potential
- ↑ Raised educational levels
- ↑ Higher ability to obtain employment
- ↑ Increased motivation and ability to create their own businesses

## ▶▶ Benefits to communities ▶▶

Youth and technology initiatives benefit communities because computer-literate young people are an important asset to local technology businesses. They are also a needed source of skills and labor.

By linking skilled participants with potential employers through internships and job placement, YMCA technology programs are breaking down social barriers between disadvantaged youth and local businesses.

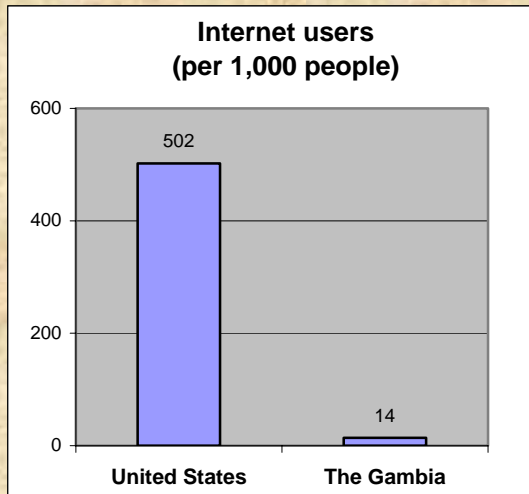
In turn, the linkages are sustaining these same programs by leveraging community resources and infrastructure (for example, computer donations from local businesses) to support YMCA initiatives.

### Ask us about...

- [The YMCA of the Gambia's Summer IT Camp, a program supported by local businesses](#)
- [YMCA cybercafés](#)

## ► In practice ►

The YMCA of the **Gambia** is bridging the digital divide in innovative ways. A digital communications studio provides innovative training in graphic design and web development to youths interested in pursuing careers in information technology. The studio is a model for youth development, private sector linkages and program sustainability. Over 10,000 young Africans have benefited from the studio.



**In an area where few youths have access to the Internet, the YMCA of the Gambia digital communications studio has:**

- Trained over 6,000 young people in basic computer skills
- Provided outreach computer training to primary and secondary schools
- Trained government officials
- Raised 30% of YMCA operating costs
- Created links between youth technology and HIV/AIDS education

Source: UNDP, 2003

## ► Technology for democracy ►

Information technology is not only about employment and resource mobilization. YMCAs around the world are utilizing technology in creative ways. For example, an initiative piloted by the YMCAs of **Guatemala** (see inset) and **Honduras** uses information technology programs to achieve a number of youth development goals.

Through this initiative, schools for Information Technology and Citizens Rights are increasing democratic access to information technology for members of low-income communities. At the same time, the schools integrate principles of civic engagement, community participation and empowerment through a popular education methodology.

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YMCA technology programs increase youth access to information and youth-friendly material.

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The Committee for Democratization of Information and Technology (CDI), a YMCA strategic partner, has been developing such schools since 1995. Schools are initially provided with technical assistance, teacher training and curriculum development, as well as hardware and software obtained through donation campaigns. Each computer school becomes a community-based operation, reliant on local leadership, community infrastructure, volunteerism and private sector collaboration.

The benefits of the schools are numerous. While learning basic software packages necessary for obtaining employment, youths can also learn about human rights, leadership and health issues.

By learning technical skills, youths build self-esteem and are able to obtain employment, pursue educational goals, participate actively in civic life and launch their own income-generating activities.

The **YMCA of Guatemala** is democratizing access to IT by empowering youth from marginalized indigenous communities with skills, knowledge and confidence. In the rural village of Pachay Las Lomas, where electricity was only installed two years ago, a CDI/YMCA computer school is now in place and its services are in high demand.

*The setting:*

- Most populated country in Central America
- 59% of Guatemalan children do not finish primary school
- 60% unemployment rate (and an even higher youth unemployment rate)
- Over 1,000,000 refugees – a legacy of 36-years of civil conflict and continued violence
- Widening gaps between economic classes and communities

*YMCA goals:*

- Develop skilled, confident and healthy young people
- Engage young people to drive positive social, political and economic change in their communities
- Reduce social exclusion

*The outcome:*

- Six active Information Technology and Citizens Rights schools in rural indigenous villages
- Over 9,000 participants, mostly indigenous children and youth, benefit from the schools annually
- 60 teachers, ages 15- 27, are trained annually (35% female)

In Pachay Las Lomas, the YMCA of Guatemala helped train teachers, obtain equipment, and raise community awareness about the school. Participants learn computer skills and gain knowledge about their country's national and community history.

Through initiatives such as cybercafés, technology training, digital communications studios and community computer schools, YMCA technology programs engage and educate youths in these underserved areas. The results include measurable impacts on life skills development, civic education, violence prevention, recreation and reduced social exclusion. In addition, youths acquire information technology skills critical to employment, education and communication.



*A volunteer teacher at the "Center for the Democratization of Information Technology" – YMCA of Guatemala*

To achieve our common goals in youth and technology, the YMCA of the USA partners with national YMCA movements in Africa, Latin America and the Commonwealth of Independent States. YMCAs everywhere work jointly with local communities, local and national governments, faith-based organizations and NGOs, the private sector and the international donor community.

YMCAs have collaborated with:

aidsweb • Accenture • Africel • Committee for Democratization of Information and Technology • De Paul University • Microsoft • Petro-Angol • United States Agency for International Development • World Bank