

5.2 Skilled Workforce

In The Gambia the proliferation of ICT training will provide a future base but at this point in time it is important we recognize that the relevant knowledge base and therefore skills required to be competitive or have the competitive edge are lacking. Without an appropriately skilled workforce we have no chance.

Before we even get in to the IT fields or the lack of it in schools, what first comes to mind is the ongoing debate about the atrocious level of English proficiency in schools. Language forms a fundamental part of development and it is through this that the principle of skill acquisition is based on regardless of which skill one needs to acquire. Imagine trying to study computing without a basic understanding of English, French or some other language that the course is based on. It becomes increasingly difficult to generate a skilled workforce if this most basic of fundamentals is non-existent.

The basic understanding of mathematics, languages and the sciences are certainly prerequisites and it is high time that a lot of thought is put into revitalizing this part of the education system as way of pushing access issues forward.

Educating the non-educated people in benefits of ICT is a solution to access at another level. It is no point taking a computer to a village community centre and telling them that they have access to the Internet, which can help solve their problems. The solution is to first analyse the problems maybe they have in getting the right prices for their crops. It is at this point that ICT solutions that help in this area can be discussed. Eventually the solution is to put in place mechanisms allowing the villagers to have access to latest market prices before selling their goods and thus eliminating the middle man to maximize profits.

*In a nutshell access to technology must mean more than just computers and connections: (bridges.org's 12 **Real Access** criteria)*

Providing access to technology is critical, but it must be about more than just physical access. Computers and connections are insufficient if the technology is not used

effectively because it is not affordable; if people do not understand how to put it to use or if they are discouraged from using it; or if the local economy cannot sustain its use. The following issues are the determining factors in whether or not people have Real Access to ICT -- access that goes beyond just physical access and makes it possible for people to use technology effectively to improve their lives.