



Knowledge|Community|Solutions



Extending Reliable Connectivity to Schools Under UCC-RENU Collaboration

As the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) commemorates 25 years of overseeing and impacting Uganda's Communications landscape, one of the standout achievements is the impactful collaboration with the Research and Education Network for Uganda (RENU) in connecting schools. This initiative, aimed at bringing the benefits of information and communication technologies to educational institutions has ushered in a new era of learning and empowerment across the nation.

Project Overview:

The UCC and RENU partnership to connect schools was first launched in April 2019 through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to bridge the digital divide and empower 54 schools through access to modern communication technologies. The project's primary goal was to provide reliable Internet connectivity to schools, ensuring that students and educators could leverage digital resources for enhanced learning experiences. The success of this project later in 2022, ushered in another project in which RENU and UCC collaborated to connect 90 more schools to the RENU network.

"RENU delivered the first project in a short space of time and to the required standards, even though implementation was done in 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. All the schools connected so far through RENU are operating as we had planned, and that has given us confidence to work with RENU to extend quality connectivity to more schools," said Mr. James Beronda, Acting Director, Uganda Communications Universal Services and Access Fund (UCUSAF).

Successes and Milestones

Over the years, the initiative has achieved significant milestones, showcasing the tangible impact on education in Uganda;

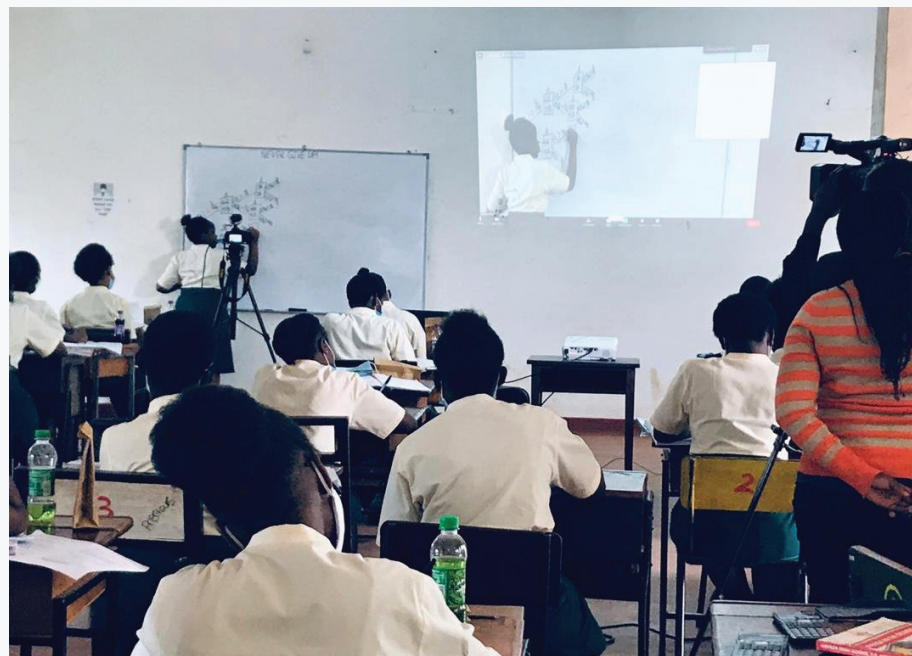
Internet Connectivity: Through UCC and RENU's collaborative efforts, numerous schools across the country have gained access to high-speed Internet connectivity. This has transformed traditional classrooms into digital hubs, enabling students to explore a wealth of educational resources.

e-Learning Platforms: The project facilitated the establishment of e-learning platforms in several of the connected schools, allowing them to adopt modern teaching methodologies. This shift has not only improved the quality of education but has also prepared students for a future that demands digital literacy.

Teacher Training Programs: Recognizing the importance of empowering educators, UCC and RENU supported teacher training programs. These workshops equipped teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively integrate technology into their teaching methods. Also, trainings have been conducted for ICT managers of the schools to equip them with basic skills to maintain the schools' Local Area Networks (LANs).

Enhanced Collaboration and Digital Inclusion: While some schools can afford to create or access quality education resources, the majority cannot even afford the minimum package of Internet connection. The provision of quality Internet by RENU to such schools enabled them to collaborate with other schools to share knowledge, through online seminars. With the quality Internet provided by RENU in partnership with UCC, we have seen students and pupils from rural schools share virtual rooms with learners from schools considered to be of a higher standard, all learning together. This is something that UCC and RENU would like to see happen more often, through connectivity initiatives to bridge the rural-urban digital divide.

Digital Inclusion: The project has played a vital role in promoting digital inclusion. Students from previously underserved areas now have equal access to educational



resources, leveling the playing field and fostering a more equitable education system.

Increased Utilisation of other ICT services: The Internet connection provided through the RENU-UCC collaboration has enabled the schools to utilize a range of other services that can make learning and teaching easier. For example, 85 of the schools connected to the RENU network are now on eduroam. We have also noticed several schools starting to take up more services besides Internet connectivity, such as web conferencing, Web Hosting and Domain Registration services, etc.

eduroam: As much as the project for the schools was designed for mere Internet access at the school premises, RENU took it further and introduced the eduroam service, which enables students and staff of education institutions to access the secure and trusted Wi-Fi outside their school premises at no cost in over 500 locations countrywide. This has helped address the issue of limited access to the Internet when students and staff are outside their institutions, and it will go a long way in supporting Uganda's digitization agenda in education.

Impact on Communities: The ripple effects of connecting schools extend beyond the classroom walls. By bringing essential technology to schools, UCC and RENU have empowered entire communities, that is, staff, students, parents, community leaders, and local businesses, especially those in remote areas in Uganda to benefit from the increased Internet connectivity, fostering economic development and community empowerment.

Challenges

The success in connecting the schools didn't come without hitches. Below are some of the challenges and how we have tried to mitigate them.

Lack of LANs: For many of the schools, the Local Area Networks (LANs) were almost non-existent and RENU thus had to go the extra mile to support those schools to improve the LANs for them to fully benefit from the fast, secure, and seamless Internet.

Limited reach: Secondly, for most of the schools, Internet was locked in a single place, mostly, the computer lab, hence limited usage. At a later stage in the project, RENU came in to support the schools with network equipment in the form of free Access Points (APs) to extend the Internet to areas where it could be accessed by more people, e.g. the administration blocks and staffrooms.

Skill gaps in network management: Another big challenge experienced during the previous project was the schools' inability to manage their networks. This was because most of them did not have technical ICT staff and most of the networks were being managed by teachers. RENU, therefore, had to support a number of the schools by building their staff's technical capacity to manage the school networks through organizing both online and physical sessions on relevant topics.

Looking Forward:

As we celebrate UCC's 25 years of impactful service, the commitment to connecting schools as well as other education and research institutions remains steadfast. The collaboration between RENU and UCC continues to shape a future where every student, regardless of their location, can access the transformative power of information and communication technologies. Here's to more years of connecting schools and transforming the future!

About RENU - www.renu.ac.ug

RENU is a not-for-profit membership-based organization established to enhance collaboration among research and education institutions through the provision of high-speed Internet connectivity and other ICT services uniquely designed for the research and education community. The expected outcome from this collaboration is improved quality of education and research.

Founded in 2006 by Vice Chancellors of Uganda's universities and Executive Directors of Uganda's research institutions, RENU's first focal issues were the reduction of the cost of international bandwidth and the improvement of the quality of Internet connectivity for member institutions. Affordability and the quality of the Internet remain high on RENU's agenda.

Since the acquisition of a license from UCC in 2010, RENU has connected over 600 sites from a total membership of 306 institutions, which include schools, universities, Other Tertiary Institutions (OTIs), health facilities, and research organisations.



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