MINISTRY OF ICT AND NATIONAL GUIDANCE

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UJ-CONNECT PROJECT PROGRESS REVIEWED AT FIFTH JCC MEETING

Uganda's digital journey through the UJ-Connect Project continued to gain ground today as the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), convened the fifth Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) meeting. Held at the National ICT Innovation Hub in Nakawa, the meeting brought together key stakeholders from both the public and private sectors to reflect on the project's achievements and align on the next steps for advancing the country's ICT sector.

Presiding over this meeting, Sophia Nantongo, the Under Secretary of the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, highlighted the importance of structured collaboration and shared learning between institutions in both countries. She applauded the tangible milestones achieved under the project and called for deeper integration of private sector voices in shaping digital capacity and innovation. JICA's Chief Representative in Uganda, Mr. Yoichi Inoue, reaffirmed Japan's long-standing support toward Uganda's vision of becoming a regional ICT powerhouse, commending the local ownership and commitment shown throughout the project's implementation.

'This year, the ninth Tokyo International Conference on African Development, TICAD, will be held in August in Japan and much focus will be on Co-creating Innovative Solutions with Africa. At the same time, the recent approved NDP IV themed Sustainable Industrialization for Inclusive Growth, Employment, and Wealth Creation. The two development strategies place ICT at the center of national growth' he said.

UJ-Connect, a four-year technical cooperation initiative running through March 2027, has become one of Uganda's key strategies to professionalize its ICT workforce, stimulate enterprise growth, and foster meaningful international partnerships. Since its inception in 2023, the project has continued to make steady progress in shaping a sustainable growth model for key ICT sub-sectors through policy reform, training, business exchange, and entrepreneurial mentorship.

One of the project's early wins was the development of Uganda's first ICT Skillset Standard Booklet in January 2024, a practical tool under output 1 of the project that identifies critical competencies needed for ICT human resource development in Uganda. After undergoing expert review, the finalized version is expected to be published soon. In parallel, dissemination workshops for the newly developed Intellectual Property Guidelines are being rolled out in regional hubs, aimed at iimproving awareness and protection of local innovations. These efforts have been accompanied by the creation of the Uganda ICT Private Sector Task Force, a platform that brings together business leaders and technical experts to influence national ICT priorities and ensure skills development aligns with real market needs.

Capacity building remains a core focus of UJ-Connect under Output 2. Since late last year, Training of Trainers (ToT) sessions have been conducted in key areas including Information Security, Data Management, Web and Mobile Application Development, and Artificial Intelligence. Faculty members at the Uganda Institute of Information and Communications Technology (UICT) who completed these earlier ToT sessions are now developing new short-term courses—such as Web Application Development, Introduction to Data Science, and Data Management in collaboration with JICA experts. Additionally, Faculty Development (FD) special sessions on Business Leadership Practice are also being developed with JICA's expert guidance to strengthen students' readiness for employment.

As Uganda seeks to elevate its ICT sector on the global stage, UJ-Connect has played a big role in creating strong ties between local Ugandan ICT firms and Japanese companies through Output 3. Following a successful business matching event in April 2024, six pilot collaborations were completed by early this year, underscoring the potential for fruitful international partnerships. The recently launched Business and Human Resource Matching Platform, "Bizlink," is now being piloted in preparation for the upcoming Business Matching event and the second pilot offshoring project.

Additionally, several Ugandan companies are gearing up for a study and engagement tour to Japan this August 2025, where face-to-face meetings with potential partners are expected to deepen cross-border cooperation.

Mentorship for emerging entrepreneurs remains a vital part of UJ-Connect's impact under Output 4. Earlier last year, a mentorship program based on the UJ-Connect curriculum provided 11 Ugandan start-ups with a structured learning experience. Of these, four start-ups received proof-of-concept support, and two went on to showcase their innovations at the Expand North Star 2024 expo in Dubai, one of the world's largest platforms for emerging technology. Building on this success, a second mentorship cohort focused on UICT students was launched in November 2024. During this phase, Training of Trainers (ToT) sessions have been conducted to equip UICT instructors with the UJ-Connect mentoring curriculum. Six groups, comprising 12 students, completed the program and were awarded certificates. In June 2025, applications officially opened for the third mentorship batch, signalling continued commitment to nurturing Uganda's next generation of tech entrepreneurs.

The fifth Joint Coordination Committee meeting held today offered a valuable opportunity to review the project's achievements, realign strategies, and set clear priorities for the remaining 18 months of implementation. Participants expressed the critical need to institutionalize key project outputs such as the skills standard booklet, the Bizlink platform, and the mentorship curriculum to ensure their sustainability well beyond the project's lifespan.

With every coordination meeting, UJ-Connect continues to reinforce the strong partnership between Uganda and Japan, while laying a solid foundation for an ICT sector that is competitive, youth-driven, and globally connected.

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