UBUNTUNET-CONNECT 2018 TOWARDS AFRICAN SMART UNIVERSITIES – SERVICES THAT MATTER

The 11th UbuntuNet-Connect conference couldn't deny one of the hottest topics on the continent: digital transformation. Therefore, this year's conference, held in the beautiful Zanzibar, focused on the concept of SMART education and research. This topic was not just exploited during the two-day conference, but also during co-located events days before.

UbuntuNet Alliance

"We are aware that despite the progress the global world is making Tanzania continues to lag behind in the uptake of ICT and innovation and this is mainly due to the prohibitive cost of bandwidth as well as slow speed internet. We are happy that organisations like UbuntuNet Alliance are helping local entities like TERNET to help us solve this problem. As government we are committed to helping TERNET have the required resources to reach the acceptable levels of ICT advancement that can allow the country participate in global agendas as we cannot afford to continue to lag behind." - Prof. Joyce Ndalichako, Minister of Education, Science and Technology for Tanzania who officially opened the conference

With these powerful and promising words, the conference contained an energised vibe, sustained by the speakers who shared their challenges, results of studies, and perhaps most importantly, solutions and recommendations. These aim to help not only Tanzania, but the entire region to develop even better in terms of innovation, and decrease the digital divide of Africa with the rest of the world.

Co-located meetings and workshops

An important meeting around the conference theme was the Vice Chancellor's ICT Forum, where several universities from the Eastern and Southern part of Africa gathered to discuss and brainstorm all things digital in today's research and education environment. Sessions covered topics ranging from challenges of emerging digital transformation, learning and teaching innovation in a digital university, the future of ICT in African higher education, a SMART university administration concluding with a roundtable discussion on how to tackle these topics.

Pictures

Clockwise from top: Attendees of UbuntuNet-Connect 2018.

Attendees of the VC ICT Forum.

Attendees of the Networking workshop.

Attendees of the Communications workshop.

Furthermore, librarians gathered for the LIBSENSE workshop to convene library and NREN stakeholders to explore how repositories can operate embedded in NREN e-infrastructure and provide a foundation for an innovative, open, distributed and networked resource for scholarly communication and open science in Africa.

Next to that, there were workshops on identity, networking and one on communications. The identity workshop covered the concepts and practical implementations of identity, authentication & authorisation using a federated approach. Participants of the technical networking workshop developed skills in Interior Gateway Protocol (IGP) and Border Gateway Protocol (BGP) required for the configuration and operation of the large scale networks that make up the internet according to current industry best practices. The skills learned during this course will help improve the performance of the NREN and the campus networks connected to them.

During the communications workshop attendees were stimulated to view communication activities as important ways to inform stakeholders about the importance of having an NREN and not to shy away from it.

"How can I even think about communicating when I'm insecure about being considered a Research and Education Network or not, as I am not connected yet?" An important question raised during the communications and visibility workshop on the 23rd of November co-located at the 11th UbuntuNet-Connect conference held in Zanzibar.

Being part of a community that strives to support students and researchers to have the best toolkit for their studies and careers, shouldn't demotivate members on sharing content, albeit stories that show challenges rather than successes. A response that quickly came up, which lead to a stimulating discussion where all participants of the workshop shared their views on these topics. This was exactly, what this first workshop was intended for: African NRENs empowering each other, brainstorming on how to go about communication activities, and identify the needs of communications support.

Just before wrapping up, GÉANT CEO Erik Huizer managed to attend, as the first ever GÉANT CEO to attend an UbuntuNet-Connect conference. His attendance sparked great enthusiasm across the room, as GÉANT is one of the main partners of the AfricaConnect2 project that supports the UbuntuNet Alliance in the Eastern and Southern African region with high-capacity internet networks. By collaborating with AfricaConnect2, the pan-European GÉANT network strengthens Europe's links with the African continent and provides African research and education communities with a gateway for global collaborations.

Curious to learn more about the Tanzanian Research and Education Network or the regional UbuntuNet Alliance? Read more on their respective websites:

https://www.ternet.or.tz/
https://ubuntunet.net/