COVID-19

& DIGITAL
EMPLOYABILITY

January 2023

KFCB

UKaid
from the British people

ACWICT
technology transforming lives

Background

The main focus of the third phase of funding for the COVID-19 and Digital Employability project was to refine, enhance and test three project models deployed in the first and second phase of the project. The request for funding aimed at enhancing Livelihoods for 2832 Vulnerable Women from informal settlements and rural areas who were who were rendered jobless, desperate and vulnerable by the negative effects of COVID-19 pandemic. The third phase of the project expanded to incorporate digital creative space as an additional pathway to digital jobs, a component that was implemented in partnership with Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB). The phase I & II of the COVID 19 & Digital employability project was implemented in June 2020 to August 2021 with support from the UK Government Digital Access Programme.

To improve employment prospects and income generating capacities for the 2832 vulnerable young women, several project components were factored and achieved diverse outcomes which include; training/skilling, mentorship and job linkages. Pyscho-social support and specialized counselling played a significant role in reducing anxiety, economic tensions and gender-based violence resulting from loss of economic livelihoods. The creative space/ digital content creation project participants were privileged to benefit from an additional project component whose need arose during the virtual trainings. This was made possible through ACWICT partnership with Kenya Film school and Grayspace studio. The two institutions offered practical exposure to photography, audio-visual and podcasting equipment's, as well as physical interaction with instructors, mentors and specialized experts.

The project goal was to empower 2,832 high potential young/vulnerable women with market driven digital skills in order to pursue career opportunities in the digital, online and creative work spaces by December 2022. A total of nine additional project partners with very clear & specific roles to serve in the project were mobilized, sensitized and signed an agreement to support the project. The different roles of the project partners ranged from mobilization, mentorship, practicums, psycho-social support and job placement.

This graduation ceremony was organised to award and celebrate all the young women who successfully completed the programme.

Highlights of speeches at the graduation ceremony

Constantine Obuya
Executive Director, ACWICT

I t was the first time the African Center for Women, Information and Communications Technology (ACWICT) had staged an award ceremony of this magnitude.

ACWICT felt it was important to acknowledge the effort and hard work that all the graduands have put in, especially during COVID-19. The graduands took a leap of faith and wanted to make a change in their livelihoods, which were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The graduands are technology natives, born and educated in a

technological world that is ever evolving and witnessing the changing workspace, which is affected by tweeting and reading books and news online. Electronic social networking has shrunk the known world as it is known. This generation will take the technology of today to new and disconcerting dimensions. ACWICT is pleased to start this journey with the graduate and to be part of the celebration. ACWICT is more committed to preparing young women to succeed in the digital workplace.

The journey to the event started when COVID-19 wreaked

havoc on the day-to-day way of doing things. The pandemic compounded the existing gender inequality and vulnerabilities for women and girls, which increased the risks of abuse, gender-based violence at home, economic tension, and other forms of tension. An immediate need to help young women develop market-driven digital skills to enable them to secure employment and get reemployed, or at least to suppress the effects of COVID-19, arose. With the UK Digital Access Program and Microsoft, ACWICT explored ways that work could be resumed

remotely. There was a massive loss of jobs and business opportunities that was occasioned by the pandemic. ACWICT felt that they could provide a solution in one way or another, and after three phases, the organization is happy to conclude it with the ceremony. As part of sustainability and increased reach, ACWICT has, over the last year, integrated an e-learning platform that gives students everywhere an opportunity to scale their essential skills in the comfort of their homes and at their convenience. The platform is ACWICT S4E and was established at the peak of the

COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 influenced the way ACWICT delivered its training, and ICT is integral to that delivery. ACWICT began exploring technology-powered solutions that would help shift training models and standard approach implementation, leveraging a long-standing partnership with their funding partners. The S4E contains over 50 courses that have been curated to relevant learning parts, and it provides learners with easy access to a web browser as well as the ability to download. The course can also be accessed offline using a mobile phone or a computer, and it can track a learner's progress when they go back online after working on it offline.

In the third phase, ACWICT was glad to be joined by their co-implementing partner, KFCB. ACWICT is alive with the opportunities young girls have online, and all bases of workspaces need to be covered. In the third phase, out of 2800 participants, 981 secured work. The work of ACWICT also intervened in the areas of health and agriculture. The first pilot was in Laikipia, where farmers had limited access to extension services. The movement was restricted, and the newly available extension officers could not access needy farmers. It was essential to provide farmers with digital skills so that in addition to reaching out to the extension officers for support, they could also explore the available information online on their own as long as the information was relevant to the extension service they needed at that time. The quest set many things in motion. In partnership with the Kenya Agricultural Livestock Research Organization, ACWICT worked to ensure that farmers had access to locally relevant agricultural information and translated it into the local language where language could have been a barrier. ACWICT

developed applications that would help farmers access e-extension services. In total, 32,000 farmers were reached with that information, creating awareness for about 1.4 million farmers.

In the area of health, there was a lack of internet connection, and there was a need to travel far to deliver reports. ACWICT noted how ICT could be able to improve healthcare and health information systems on many levels, for example:

- It would connect remote health centers with expertise in improving diagnosis and patient support.

- It would improve patients with better information and accessibility.

- It would improve data management for reporting and monitoring.

- It would facilitate communication between frontline health workers, specialists, and patients.

There was an inclusion of conducting continuous medical education virtually. This digital encounter opened up possibilities for Laikipia's health counterparts, and the UK Digital Access Program supported all these initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic and the year after. It is exciting to see how the government is taking the digital economy.

ACWICT noted that the requisite devices, such as computers and mobile phones, are expensive, making the project difficult to implement since 100% of it was delivered virtually. The students needed to access the devices to access the courses offered using the digital platform. ACWICT witnessed this mainly in underserved communities. On the other hand, internet connectivity in rural areas

remained challenging regarding availability and affordability. There were over 9,000 participants in this program, and only 2,800 completed it. Key reasons for dropping out were the access to devices and internet connectivity. When ACWICT provided access to internet services, there was a significant increase in the number of completions from around 80% to 99%. There was an increased demand for additional skills in some cases, especially those in higher learning.

Beneficiary Remarks

Paula Muchai

Before COVID, she was a full-time student at KU. She made sales for different products to earn an extra coin. COVID affected her education greatly since the government ordered the closure of schools indefinitely to curtail the spread of the virus, meaning she could get her degree later than expected. It devasted her since she was looking to kick-start her career and gain financial independence. Due to the lockdown, she could not engage in sales to earn some extra income; therefore, she was at home doing nothing. She got a job as a casual worker provided by the government, the National Hygiene Program. This helped her to help her parents sustain their livelihoods back home. Later, her aunt sent a link to their family WhatsApp group. She then enrolled in the online writing train-

ing via the link provided by ACWICT. She started her classes immediately since she was at home doing nothing. The training experience was unique since they had very skilled teachers and mentors who took them systematically through the learning process. The aspect that stood out for her was the mentorship process. The classes took 2hrs a day, and they were required to have laptops or smartphones and a stable internet connection to which she was privileged to have access. They taught how to get online work through Upwork and Fiverr and social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn. They were also taught how to cold pitch to potential clients and how to supplement their writing income through eBooks and much later, they were taught how not to be scammed

online by different clients. After mentorship, she practiced all the skills she had learned across all the platforms she had known. She was able to secure four contracts in a month from Upwork and two extra contracts from networking through Facebook and LinkedIn. The mentorship enlightened her on how to present herself professionally to a potential employer in terms of having a solid portfolio and good communication skills. ACWICT training has influenced her life positively, as she can earn an income to sustain herself financially. The training opened her up to a vast number of employment opportunities in the digital space. She can now combine both skills learnt at school and the ACWICT program. She urged ACWICT to continue providing more programs and empowering the youth and society.

Grace Rao

When COVID struct, she was in her final year studying International Relations and Diplomacy with IT. The pandemic made them restructure how they were studying, and classes were put on hold. She was trying to figure out what she would do next within that time. She had started freelance photography while in school. She got information about ACWICT through her father, who convinced her that it would greatly help her career in the digital space. She then applied, and she was lucky to qualify. There were six categories, and she chose audio and video production since she already had skills, and during the pandemic, there was a paradigm shift toward the digital space. The program was very detailed and thorough, taking them through the basics of video production and script writing. Towards the end of the program, they were required to come up with a story, write it, send it for approval and then shoot, edit and produce it. This built her confidence in what she can apply for and what she can do. She then started going through applications and looking for something to do. She came across a communication-related role in an NGO, which luckily required her to have the skills she had already gained through the program. She then shared her portfolio and CV and during the interview, they played the short film that she did during the program; her employers were impressed with the work since she shot it using her phone. That is what she is currently doing.

William Barasa
Executive Director, AFRALTI

AFRALTI is honored to have participated in the program to enhance livelihoods for vulnerable women through digital skilling and developing locally relevant digital media content. Through the program AFRALTI as a reading ICT, capacity building consultancy research institute in sub-Saharan Africa, took up the mentorship role focusing on information technology infrastructure. Sixty-six young women went through the program in this niche: help desk, ICT tech support, IT security, system administration, network administration and security, and consultancy in IT and ICT-related fields as freelancers with elements in entrepreneurship.

Apart from the technical skills, the beneficiaries were impacted with soft skills whose main purpose was to help mentees communicate effectively, demonstrate professionalism, and develop relationships. AFRALTI suggested that only 14% of those working in cloud computing, 20% of engineers, and 32% of data and artificial intelligence professionals were women, which was a low figure. AFRALTI applauds the UK government for funding the program through DAP, which aims to change their formation statistics.

ACWICT is recognized for taking the initiative to test effective interventions and models that would bring about a high-level impact in the lives of beneficiaries by changing the income and livelihoods and enhancing service provision

in the target communities. AFRALTI remains committed to collaborating with partners to transform the ICT landscape for women in Africa by impacting skills and having them take leadership roles and representation in the digital sector.

When doing innovation in ICT, especially application programming, one needs to take care of two things;

Co-innovation, ICT development is not a stand-alone process. One needs to work with others, and co-innovation emphasizes collaboration. When there is collaboration, you achieve more and achieve faster.

Adoption value chain – when you innovate, you need to

impacted with soft skills whose main purpose was to help mentees communicate effectively, demonstrate professionalism, and develop relationships.

ensure that what you innovate is applicable to the market where you belong. The consumer must be able to apply it and refine it to be beneficial to their day-to-day lives.
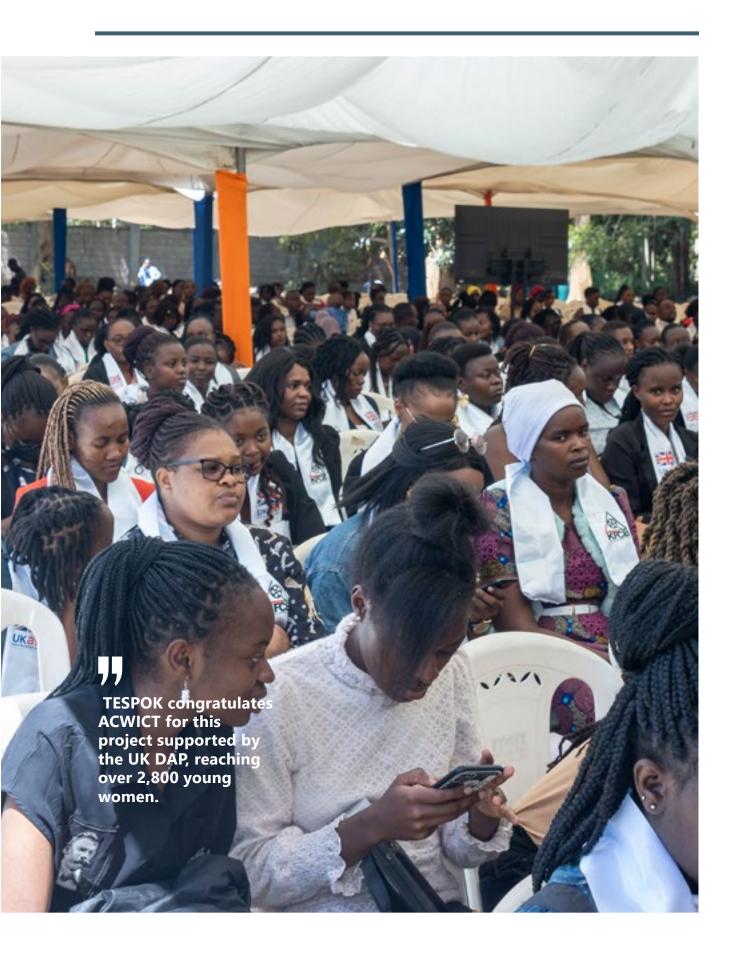
This will enable you to succeed in your ICT career.

Milka Muga
TESPOK

This is a journey that TESPOK and ACWICT embarked on slightly more than a year ago to offer basic training and skills to young women and the youth. TESPOK agreed to come to this program and empower women by mentoring them to better their lives. At TESPOK, there is a 50/50 staff gender ratio, meaning there are job opportunities. This is inclusive of the technical field. TESPOK believes that when well equipped, women can deliver as well as their male counterparts. One of the areas TESPOK is still working on is internships. TESPOK hopes that the young graduands can apply what they have learned during the program sessions. We are also interested in partnering with ACWICT in other outreach programs to empower communities promote the use of ICT for development.

TESPOK is becoming more and more part of our daily lives as we cannot afford to not have skills in ICT, especially in this world of the digital divine. The government is putting up 25,000 hotspots as the agenda in which we are partnering with them in our communities to use this connectivity for social and economic development. TESPOK congratulates ACWICT for this project supported by the UK DAP, reaching over 2,800 young women. With digital skills training, mentorship, and psychosocial support, the program is not only providing the young ladies with much-needed life skills by guiding them towards self-employment by taking online jobs. TESPOK hopes to see more young women go through the program and commit to continue to support the program. TESPOK hopes they continue improving the program delivery in every cohort.

"" TESPOK congratulates ACWICT for this project supported by the UK DAP, reaching over 2,800 young women.

Lincoln Ndogoni
Psychosocial Support Centre

When COVID struck, the center did not know how to deliver psycho-social support until ACWICT came and asked them if they could provide mental health support services online. At that time, the government struggled to provide tele-counseling, and the center gladly took the challenge. There was a spike of over 25% in mental health challenges. The center repurposed its interventions and went online. They created online psychological and mental health support services that could diag-nose through digital tools that could provide a wellness service.

Three hundred eighty ladies joined the center's awareness program to understand what was going on in their lives. From the feedback the center got, 90% who attended the online psychological services re-ported a significant improvement in communication and reduced symptoms of depression and functionality.

Christopher Kimei
Director, Universal Service Fund, Communications Authority

The DAP program has been very impactful where within a matter of months, something is conceived, implemented, and the results are seen. The CAK has been a beneficiary for the last few years. CAK's role is to promote infrastructure across the country to ensure that nobody is left behind. CAK has recently taken responsibility for promoting digital skills. One of the Authority's pillars in the next USF is e-inclusivity and digital skills, particularly for women, youth, PWDs, and vulnerable people in the country. The Authority seeks to upscale the program and continue to work with the UK government to roll out the program. This sits well with the government's digital transformation agenda, which seeks to breach 80% automation of public services in the next six months. The main focus of CAK is to promote digital skills, which are currently low in the country, to enable citizens to embrace the technologies while avoiding the negative aspects of the same.

Christopher Wambua
Ag. CEO, Kenya Film Classification Board

The program has undoubtedly proven that ICTs can enable or propel economies to grow and change the livelihoods of citizens. ACWICT was crucial in their commitment and ingenuity to the program's success. The program was relatively attractive in several forms;

Women's participation in the creative space, just like in ICTs, has for far too long lagged behind that of their male counterparts. Citing the economic survey of 2019, female filmmakers constituted 30% - 40% of the country. Phase 3 of the COVID-19 and digital employability project incorporated a component of

creative space. It presented an irresistible opportunity for control to contribute to bridging this gap while the simultaneously

COVID-19 occasioned massive distractions in the creative economy, locally and abroad. The protocols and other measures instituted to contain the spread of the pandemic saw the closure of cinema theatres and literally stopped filming activities across the country. As a result, film consumers found new avenues for consuming content through online platforms. This program presented yet another opportunity for female creatives affected by the pandemic to learn how to repurpose

their crafts to herness the limitless possibilities in the digital economy.

KFCB leveraged this program to sensitize beneficiaries, especially those in the creative space, on the laws and trajectory requirements governing the film sector in Kenya. KFCB saw this sensitization as key in ensuring program beneficiaries would ultimately harness the medium of the film to promote our culture to the rest of the world in line with article 11 of the Kenyan Constitution, which recognizes culture as the foundation of the Kenyan people. Most of the goals the government had for the program were met. For those that were not met, a good foundation is laid to ensure the same goals or objectives are met in the future. KFCB is keen on facilitating an enabling environment to ensure that the graduands monetize their content and talent. The Nairobi Film Centre, which KFCB operates, is one such avenue. At a small fee, the creatives can hire the facility located at the heart of the CBD and use it to showcase their works, be it a film screening or a stage performance. In addition, KFCB is reviewing the applicable license fees across all market segments of the film sector to ensure that more young women and men venture into the creative economy.

To encourage commercial online platforms to invest in the country or display their content within the country, KFCB is working closely with the parent ministry to introduce a self-regulatory framework. It will enable online streaming services like OTTs and DODs to self-classify content with local broadcasters. This will make the operating environment for businesses more friendly so that the graduands in the digital space can create content and sell to the multinational commercial service providers that are multinational can be done very fast.

The framework will promote the ease of business in the sector by ensuring broadcasters and commercial online streaming service platforms. The framework is in tandem with the government's objective to ensure that creatives earn from their talent and an initiative in the ministry of youth affairs, sports, and arts known as "Talanta Hela." KFCB urges the graduands to create impact by creating content that promotes the Nation's culture and does not expose children prematurely to adult experiences or content.

Josephine Gauld
Deputy High Commissioner, British High Commission

The program that has brought us today has brought together many strands that the UK is supporting. The UK government is committed to working with all partners to build more open, inclusive, and resilient societies, mainly supporting women's participation and girls' education and promoting gender equality. The UK government also wants to encourage women's empowerment as part of the process. The UK government also wants to promote media freedom and appropriate protection against online harm, tackling online violence, mainly directed against women and girls. This is another opportunity for us to work collaboratively to harness the power of inclusive digital transformation as an enabler for economic and social development to improve governance, drive innovation and enable poverty reduction and wealth creation.

Five years ago, the UK government designed the digital access program in partnership with the stakeholders in five countries for this fallen in-depth diagnosis of Digital Inclusion barriers and opportunities. The program was developed to increase digital inclusion by supporting systemic enablers and scalable models for affordable last-mile connectivity, digital literacy and skills, and locally relevant digital content and services. The main aim of the Digital Access Program is to catalyze inclusive, affordable, safe, and secure digital access for excluded or underserved populations and to support the local digital ecosystem to thrive. The program focuses on developing models and enablers to facilitate the sustainable expansion of connectivity, digital literacy, and skills; it also builds trust and resilience to prevent and respond to cyber security harms. And thirdly, we've developed a network of tech cubs to support sustainable digital ecosystems, stimulate local digital economies, and support tech entrepreneurs to find solutions for local development challenges. Perhaps we'll see some graduates working with the tech hub in the future.

Last year in Kenya, the UK DAP program and its partners continued to achieve tremendous and commendable results. The results include supporting digital, including policies, regulations, and strategies, raising awareness among institutional stakeholders or Digital Inclusion priorities and approaches, and testing digital inclusion models for scalability and sustainability. More than one and a half million people benefit from improved digital connectivity skills, content, and government services. Over 50% of these were women.

We've also managed to reach more than 1,500 communities in digitally under-served areas. It is not just about the statistics but about the positive change in the lives of beneficiaries. Being witnesses, some of these projects include collaborating with the CAK in developing the next-generation USF strategic plan. And, of course, with this COVID-19 and digital employability project, we are hopeful that the government will continue to speak such impactful, tested Digital Inclusion models and scale them to deserving cases like we've seen today.

The UK government will continue to collaborate with the government of Kenya, the Ministry of ICT and digital economy, other ministries, departments, and agencies like the communications authority of Kenya and support such noble courses. My message to the young women graduating today is to urge you to continue pushing the ceiling in this competitive digital transformation area. You've already shown what you can do and can do more. I challenge you now to mentor, orient hand-hold and create digital opportunities for other young women the same way you're being supported by your partners today and through the UK digital active program.

David Lusava
Deputy Secretary of Administration, Ministry of Youth Affairs, Sports and Arts

The digital employability program is in tandem with the government's bottom-up agenda. The digital super highway and the creative economy have been identified as one of the five sectors that the government has prioritized as having the highest impact on our economic turnaround and inclusive growth.

In this regard, the ministry will work in short, and medium-term channel resources in the creative sector to address youth unemployment which is one of the most long-standing challenges of our time. Identifying a creative economy as the key driver of economies is not misplaced. Global research indicates that the creative economy contributes over 6.1% to the global gross domestic product averaging between 2% and 7% of the national GDPs worldwide. According to UN estimates, the creative industries generate annual revenue of over 2 million US dollars and account for nearly 50 million jobs worldwide.

According to the KNBS 2019 economic survey, the Kenya Film industry directly employs 129,824 people. In the same period, the Kenya Film and audiovisual sector contributed an estimated Ksh 14.07B to the country's GDP. It is the government's conviction that Kenya has been pushing way below its weight in the creative space. The ministry is keen to turn the situation around.

We note with pride that over 54% of mobile users in the country have access to smartphones. The level o penetration, coupled with over 96% coverage of 3G connectivity, puts the country in a bold position to harness the digital economy to grow the local creative sector and other sectors of the economy. Those in the creative space should leverage this opportunity to create wealth and create more jobs in the digital space. The government is keen to empower young people to tap into opportunities in the digital and creative sector by providing a facilitative policy and legal environment.

The government has developed a film policy and bill, which are in the final stages of approval. The bill proposes the establishment of a film fund geared towards supporting our local creative sector and promoting the development of growth in the local film industry. The bill will also address most of the challenges facing our creative economy. The government also plans to tackle piracy on intellectual property to tackle piracy to ensure maximum returns to artists for their effort and returns. The government will continue to incentivize the creative sector to live up to its full potential. Plans are underway to support the growth of the entire creative economy, including the arts, craft, design, fashion, film, video, photography, music, and performing arts. The government is keen on investing in music theatres and art galleries.

> **This Graduation Ceremony and the impact of this Project are testament to the transformational power of technology. In total, 2,874 young women have been trained, 2,012 have been mentored and 981 have since been placed into jobs. This is such a remarkable outcome.**

Mrs. Mercy Wanjau
Secretary to the Cabinet

Key Note Address

I ndeed, the journey that these women have walked, which today culminates in the award of certificates, is one that calls for celebration.

This Graduation Ceremony and the impact of this Project are testament to the transformational power of technology. In total, 2,874 young women have been trained, 2,012 have been mentored and 981 have since been placed into jobs. This is such a remarkable outcome.

We are all cognizant that while these numbers speak to those that have been directly impacted by the Project, there are a lot more people who are not here today whose lives are better off as result of those we celebrate today.

It was heartwarming to listen to the stories of some of the beneficiaries and while each of them is unique, this Project has for all intents and purposes, opened up the world for them. The possibilities are endless and I urge the graduands to seize them. From Kenya to the world!

As a country we have made significant strides in the digital space. Like many other countries in the world, it is because of ICT technology that we were able to remain resilient despite the difficult

operating environment at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. This Project, as we all know, was actually birthed at the height of the pandemic. It is a silver lining, as a result of which, these young women can now eke a living and by extension, actively contribute to nation building.

Kenya's population is young and growing and according to the World Bank's Economic Update of December 2021, the working age population (18 - 64) will increase by 1 million individuals annually between 2020 and 2029. Yet, based on national statistics, the formal sector is only able to take in about 50,000 new employees every year. About 150,000 others end up getting jobs in Micro, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (MSMEs). The others, who form the majority, make a living in whichever way possible – hawking, construction, farming and others. This category of Kenyans are not able to adequately meet their needs, which in turn leads to frustration. Frustration in turn may lead to depression, partially contributing to the increase in psychosocial cases in this country.

You will agree with me, that when almost half of the working population is not able to make an adequate income, there is no way we can thrive as a country. All hope is not lost though. The redress to these challenges presented by lack of adequate jobs, is at the very heart of the Government's social economic transformation agenda.

The Government is committed to pushing the needle forward by creating an enabling environment, through implementing complementary programmes that will not only revive the economy, but also provide opportunities for the mwananchi to thrive regardless of their trade. You will agree with me that ICT is the transformational catalyzer across all sectors of our economy. Thus, digital transformation is at the core of the Government's agenda with the intention of easing business, creating jobs and leveraging emerging technology.

Today, we celebrate graduands in the digital creative space. The talent acquired by these young women is boundless. It actually presents very interesting possibilities, across all sectors of our economy.

I was delighted to learn that one of the objectives of this Project, was to develop solutions for farmers through the creation of digital content relevant to good agricultural activities. That this endeavor then birthed the one stop shop Wakulima Market in Laikipia County.

The success of this Project thus calls for an in-depth analysis by all relevant actors, with a view to leveraging on its model and scaling it for the benefit of our country. This Project was implemented by the African Centre for Women Information and Communications Technology (ACWICT) and the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB), with the support of the UK Digital Access Programme. In addition, its execution model facilitated the learners to access practicums, connected them with mentors and job placement partners, and provided psychosocial support. These additional facets were made possible by Project Partners such as AFRALTI, TESPOK and OpenSpace amongst many others.

I wish to most sincerely thank the Project Implementers, Partners and Sponsors, because without you we would not be here today. We would have no reason to celebrate the graduands. The dire situation experienced by most of these young women at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, because of a lack of income would have remained as such.

As the Government tirelessly works towards delivering the commitments it has made to Kenyans, it is cognizant that a collaborative approach is required to achieve its goals, as has been ably demonstrated by each party that took part in this Project.

As I come to a close, congratulations on this great achievement. It is because of you that we are here today. It is because you decided to bet on yourselves and take an opportunity to grow yourselves, that we are here today. The society and the country are better off because you made that choice. You have now taken a step up in the ladder. Do not look up and forget about those who are behind you on the ladder, or those who haven't gotten onto the ladder at all. You have now assumed the role of mentorship. Hold out your hands and walk the journey with those who are starting out.

COVID-19 & DIGITAL EMPLOYABILITY III

A partnership between the African Centre for Women, Information and Communication Technology and the Kenya Film Classification Board.
Funded by the UK Digital Access Programme