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Redefining Digital Inclusion

During his speech at ministerial program during this year's Mobile World Congress (MWC2019), Huawei's Deputy Chairman, Ken Hu, unveiled a new Digital Inclusion initiative, Tech4ALL. Hu outlined Huawei's plans to help 500 million additional people around the world benefit directly from digital technology in the next five years. He called on governments, industry organizations and business partners to act together to promote Digital Inclusion for all.

By Ken Hu, Huawei's Deputy Chairman

Technology is changing the world so fast. But how can we make sure that all people and all organizations can benefit from this change? I think this is one of the most important challenges we're facing today. And I would like to share some of our thoughts on how to deal with it.

There is a small village in Nigeria, called Tobolo. It's 550 kilometers away from the capital city, Abuja. The grand opening of the first mobile base station in this village was a great cause for celebration. It's a big deal because this single base station will change their lives forever. With connectivity to the rest of the world, new shops have opened, trade has increased, and people can get medical help when they need it.

Connectivity is the bedrock of Digital Inclusion

The villagers in Tobolo are fortunate. However, in Nigeria, there are still 36 million people who don't have access to the Internet. That's about 20 percent of the population. This is a huge gap.

Globally, the gap is even bigger. According to GSMA, more than 1 billion people are not covered by mobile broadband services. And 3.8 billion people are still offline. That's half of the world's population. Clearly, connectivity is still the bedrock of digital inclusion. At Huawei, we have been working hard to fill this gap through innovation.

For example, we have developed innovative transmission and energy solutions for special rural base stations. They are small, easy to install, and they can run on solar power. This makes wireless networks easier and cheaper to deploy, and helps rural carriers get their investment back faster.

With those innovations, we've helped more and more people access reliable wireless services for the first time. We're all working hard to connect more people.

However, even if we have the whole world connected, is that enough? I'm afraid not.

We have to expand the definition of digital inclusion from connectivity to applications and skills. By redefining digital inclusion, we can go beyond access, and move to empowerment. Let me give you more details.

Think applications, not just connectivity

Many people don't know this, but when deaf children learn to read, it's a real challenge. It's difficult for them to connect sounds with letters. At Huawei, we're excited to help with technology.

Last year, we worked with the European Union of the Deaf to create a mobile application called StorySign. With this application, you hold your phone up to a book. Using AI, a cartoon will sign the story and highlight each word on the screen. This helps deaf children overcome reading barriers, and it also

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makes storytime in the family more interactive and more fun.

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We're so proud of what we've achieved with StorySign. Like deaf children, all communities have different needs. As an industry, we can provide unique value for each community to make sure nobody is left behind.

Think businesses, not just people

When we talk about value, we should also think about business, particularly SMEs, because they play a huge role in world economies. They account for more than 90 percent of companies. They provide more than 70 percent of job opportunities.

However, for SMEs, going digital can be very challenging. They don't have the right capital and talent, and they don't have equal access to key technologies. For example, cloud is a key enabler that helps smaller businesses overcome challenges with scalability, costs, and efficiency. However, in the EU, 70 percent of SMEs

don't use cloud. We need to understand the reasons and fill this gap.

Think skills, not just coverage

There is a lack of digital skills at all levels of society, and that gap is increasing because technology is changing so fast. According to the EU's Digital Progress Report, by 2020, 90 percent of jobs in the EU will require digital skills. This is a huge demand. However, the fact is that 43 percent of EU residents lack basic digital skills, such as searching for information online. And 17 percent have no digital skills at all.

This is a big challenge for Digital Inclusion. And it will also become a major bottleneck for the EU's digital economy.

Building skills at all levels of society

We need to take immediate action. Through joint efforts, we can bring digital skills to all people in society. For example, if the government can make digital skills a strong part of K-12 education, that will provide a solid foundation for digital skills across society.

The community as a whole needs to help each

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member understand the importance of digital skills, particularly senior citizens, and provide help when they need it. The business community can do a lot. They need to upskill their employees for future jobs. They can also work with local communities to raise awareness of digital technologies and provide help to schools and training organizations to enhance digital skills.

Tech4ALL: Technology is good. Pass it on.

At Huawei, we believe that technology is good, and it should be used FOR good. To promote full Digital Inclusion, we have put together an action plan. We call it Tech4ALL. This plan focuses on the three priorities: Connectivity, Applications, and Skills.

- **For connectivity**: We will continue to lower the barriers in terms of cost and coverage through technological innovation.

- **For applications**: We will empower the ecosystem, and help developers to create more applications for different communities and industries.

- **For skills**: We will work with governments, local communities, and other industries to enhance awareness of digital skills and provide necessary help.

We have already made some progress in all of those areas. For example, through our Seeds for the Future program, in the past ten years, we have helped more than 30,000 students from more than 100 countries to enhance their digital skills.

But this is just the beginning. We hope that more people will join us to amplify these efforts. Over the next five years, our goal is to help another 500 million people directly benefit from digital technology. We will release more details about this program very soon. This is our mission, and we hope you will join us. Together, we can bring digital to every person, home, and organization for a fully connected, intelligent world. ▥▥▥