

REPORT ON ICT4D FORUM ON THE ROLE OF ICT IN PROMOTING TOURISM IN NORTHERN REGION (APRIL 2012).

The monthly ICT4D forum which is organised by Savana Signatures (Savsign) in collaboration with the Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS) at the Northern Regional Library attracted audience from various sectors within the Tamale Metropolis.

The Director of Savana Signatures welcomed the audience to the forum to share knowledge on the above topic and called on them to inform and invite others to subsequent forums as attendance is free. He also extended his gratitude to the Officers from M & J Travel and Tours for accepting the invitation to speak on the topic.

The General Manager of M & J Travel and Tours, Mr. Rusmond Anyinah speaking on the topic mentioned that tourism in Ghana is administered by three main institutions; Ministry of Tourism (Policy formulation and direction), Ghana Tourism Authority(Policy implementation and compliance) and the Ghana Tourism Federation (Private institutions) Some of the institutions that make up the federation include;

- Tour Operators Union of Ghana (TOUGHA)
- Ghana Association of Travel and Tour Agents
- Ghana Hotels Association
- Car Rental Associations of Ghana

Mr. Rusmond Anyinah added that Northern Ghana abounds a lot of tour sites that if properly tapped can contribute to poverty reduction. He mentioned some of the tour sites to include the Mole National Park which is the largest National park in Ghana with a size of 4,840KM square. In 2007, the Park was able to raise 41,859.50 as revenue. This was raked in from about 13,520 people who visited the park during that year. (Source; Ministry of

Tourism). The others are Larabanga Mosque, Salaga Slave Market, Mognori Eco Village, Gwolo slave Wall, Paga Crocodile ponds, Wecahiau hippo Sanctuary, Wa etc.

Speaking on the role ICT can play in promoting tourism in northern Ghana and the country as a whole, Mr. Anyinah mentioned that;

- ICT can facilitate easy reservations of hotels, car rentals and tour products among others.
- Increase client numbers and revenue. Operators that use ICT effectively and efficiently will have increases in patronage of their services thereby increasing their revenue.
- The use of ICT in service delivery is less stressful and saves time for other activities.

He opined that despite the opportunities enumerated with the use of ICT, many operators are not able to take full advantage of the benefits of ICT in their operations because of some of the following factors;

- Lack of awareness of the various stakeholders about the role ICT plays
- Inadequate ICT infrastructure and resources in Northern Ghana
- Lack of active email addresses of some of the stakeholders.
- Unqualified staff at the various stages of the value chain in the industry to make use of ICT.
- Delay in responding to enquiries from various stakeholders of the industry via email.

To tap the full benefit of ICT in the tourism sector, Policy makers and tourism enterprises today need to understand the implications of ICT for developments and the importance of their role in developing and maintaining a strong sustainable tourism industry.

During the question and answering session, Mr. Baba Salifu of Dabokpa Vocational Technical lamented that, the efforts of advocates may be in vein if Tamale and for that matter some of the important sites are not properly identified on the Google maps which most tourist rely on for directions during their visits to any place. He urged the M & J to collaborate with the Google Technology Users Group in Tamale to remap Tamale on Google.

A staff of the Ghana Tourist Authority in Tamale informed the gathering that efforts were being made by government to integrate ICT into their work and promised the audience that very soon some of the problems faced by the tourism sector in terms of ICT would be a thing of the past. The Director of Savana Signatures expressed his regret at the slow response of hotels with online bookings and called on hotel management to engage the services of experts to man their online services.

A participant who represented one of the hotels in Tamale however was quick to react that, it was not as though the hotels do not have qualified staff that can use ICT to its benefits but blamed the delay in responding to hotel booking online on the poor services provided to them by their main internet provider VODAFONE. Another participant who represented a guest house in the region advised the colleague to recommend Airtel modem which they could rely on when the VODAFONE fails them as that is what they do.

Mr. Stephen Agbenyo, Director, Savana Signatures introduced a new sms system that Savana Signatures was now relying on to invite participants to the forum and as well allow for the organisation to interact with participants even after the forum. He asked participants to text **forum** to **1902**. After this, most of them received short messages containing questions that requested participants to text their responses to the same short code.