Press Release

REGIONAL ALLIANCE KEY TO ADVANCING DIGITAL SKILLS, RESEARCH, AND INNOVATION IN THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY

Arusha, Tanzania – August 13, 2024: The Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA), and the East African Science and Technology Commission (EASTECO), supported by GIZ under the EAC Digital Skills for an Innovative Industry project (dSkills@EA) have successfully concluded a co-creation workshop on the establishment of an **East African Digital Skills, AI Research and Innovation Alliance** - in Arusha, Tanzania, on August 12, 2024, at the sidelines of the Regional Education Conference.

The conference was organized in response to the deliberations of the 19th meeting of the EAC Sectoral Council of Education, Science and Technology, Culture and Sports (SCESTCS) held on June 22, 2024, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where the council emphasized the need to engage stakeholders and Partner States in establishing a digital skills alliance.

The workshop brought together key stakeholders from across the region, including representatives from academia, the private sector, civil society, and partner states, to discuss the creation of a regional alliance aimed at enhancing digital skills, research, and innovation.

Dr Irene Charles Isaka, the Director of the Social Sector at the EAC, informed the meeting that the EAC pre-conference workshop not only aligns with Article 105 of the EAC Treaty and responds to the EAC Strategic Plan 2025 but Sectoral Council Directive to implementation of the directives. These emphasize advancing digital transformation in the region.

Therefore, she noted, that by establishing the alliance and leveraging the collective expertise and commitment of development partners, the meeting undoubtedly paved the way for a harmonized approach to adopting emerging technologies in the region in the world on work.

She also highlighted that Digital skills are critical and cut across all sectors, including among others health, services, and industries, to drive sustainable development in East Africa.

Prof. Gaspard Banyankimbona, Executive Secretary of IUCEA, stated, "Our region's educational institutions play a critical role in fostering innovation and driving socio-economic development. The establishment of this Alliance will demonstrate the commitment of our academic institutions, industry partners, and policymakers to work together to address the digital skills gap and ensure that our students are equipped for the challenges of the future."

Dr. Sylvance Okoth, Executive Secretary of the East African Science and Technology Commission (EASTECO), stated, "Our mandate is to promote and coordinate the development of science, technology, and innovation to support regional integration for socio-economic development. Establishing the alliance will provide a platform to consolidate the various science and technology policies from the Partner States and develop a comprehensive regional Artificial Intelligence framework that will drive the uptake of AI technology for socio-economic development in East Africa."

Mr. David Roos, Project Director at dSkills@EA, stated that the EAC Education Conference marked a significant step forward with a crucial partner meeting focused on implementing the East African Digital Skills, AI Research, and Innovation Alliance. This initiative was endorsed by the EAC Education Ministers

at the 19th Sectoral Council meeting. Under the leadership of the EAC Secretariat, IUCEA, EASTECO, and EABC, this partner-oriented initiative aims to unite member states, the private sector, and civil society in addressing the challenges at the intersection between higher education and economic integration.

The following recommendations during the meeting:

- A whitepaper of the recommendations of the meeting will be shared with all stakeholders and a validation session will be held to ensure comprehensive input and alignment.
- Develop and an implementation roadmap, constitute a founding board, and target a launch in the first quarter of 2025.
- Draft an inclusive Strategic plan for implementation to address key needs, including increasing awareness and political will, securing resources for indigenous AI solutions, and fostering regional ownership of AI skills and infrastructure.
- Advocate for the development of the EAC regional Artificial Intelligence Strategy to guide the implementation of **Digital Skills, AI Research, and Innovation Alliance in the region.**

The outcomes of the workshop were presented to a wider network at the Inaugural East African Community Regional Education Conference on 13th August 2024. The subsequent collaboration with all stakeholders will play a critical role in shaping the region's AI technological landscape. The workshop aligns with the African Union's focus on 2024 as the Year of Education, which aims to address the pressing educational challenges within Africa.

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