Microsoft Imagine Cup: Makerere students win, making Africa proud

For the first time in the history of the Microsoft Imagine Cup, two teams from Africa won prizes at the worldwide finals.

Team Code8 from Makerere University that represented East Africa in the just concluded 11th annual Microsoft Imagine Cup competitions in Russia received the Women's Empowerment Award presented in partnership with UN Women. While Team Masked Ninjas from Egypt received an AFT Excellence Award.

The Code8 team consisting of Brian Gitta, Joshua Businge (both first year Computer Science students) Simon Lubambo, a fourth year Electrical Engineering student and their mentor Josiah Kavuma a third year Information Technology student, developed a Windows phone application named *Matibabu* that diagnoses for malaria without pricking the body to draw blood. Instead, a custom piece of hardware (matiscope) is connected to the windows phone, then a light sensor is passed over a finger to diagnose malaria in the shortest time possible.

After diagnosis, the results are displayed on the phone screen showing whether you have malaria or not. These results are then sent to the user's skydrive for medical record keeping and sharing with their personal doctors.

The UN Women Award that comes with a cash prize of $12,000 (sh30m) recognizes two student teams that created projects that best address issues impacting women globally.

According to an excited Josiah Kavuma, the funds will enable them do more research on the feasibility and scalability of their application. “We are extremely happy to be the first African team to secure a prize at the finals and we shall now focus towards competing for the Imagine Cup Grant,” he added.

“It feels good to see our dreams come true especially after the hard work, sleepless nights, the team spirit and motivation from our lecturers and staff of the MIC-Uganda,” Kavuma noted.

Team Code8 is one of the fruits of the Microsoft Innovation Center-Uganda, currently hosted at the College of Computing and Information Sciences. “At MIC-Uganda, we are proud of the progress the program has made on the ICT sector in Uganda in terms of supporting software developments and start-ups. This is the second win after the *winsenga* application that got $50,000 from Microsoft last year,” said Drake Patrick Mirembe, the MIC-Uganda manager.

According to Ms. Alethea Lodge-Clarke, the Microsoft Program Manager Public Private Partnerships, “the success of the teams from the African continent speaks for itself in showing that there is no shortage in innovation – all that is required is a platform to showcase that innovation and take it to the next level.”

Commenting on the partnerships between Microsoft and developing countries like Uganda, Ms, Alethea revealed that, " The Microsoft 4Afrika initiative, launched in February this year, shows our commitment to exploring new ways to link the growth of our business with initiatives that accelerate growth for the Continent. Africa is home to more than a billion people and houses 16 of the world's 30 fastest growing economies, with no shortage in innovation. At Microsoft, we view the African Continent as a game-changer in the global economy. We believe deeply in the potential of technology to change Africa, but we believe equally in the potential of Africa to change technology for the world."

Microsoft YouthSpark initiative is another way in which Microsoft is driving innovation on the African continent. Microsoft YouthSpark is a global initiative that aims to create opportunities for 300 million youth in more than 100 countries during the next three years. This companywide initiative includes Corporate Social Investment (CSI) and other company programs — both new and enhanced — empowering youth to imagine and realise their full potential by connecting them with greater opportunities for education, employment and entrepreneurship.

YouthSpark forms part of the overall Microsoft 4Afrika vision and through this initiative Microsoft is paying specific attention to the next generation of our ecosystem through working with schools, students, start-ups and the developer community to drive skills and ICT integration which will in turn trigger growth. Through Microsoft's partnerships with governments, non-profit organizations and businesses, Microsoft YouthSpark aims to empower youth to imagine and realize their full potential.