

AFRICA CODE WEEK

## READY, SET... CODE

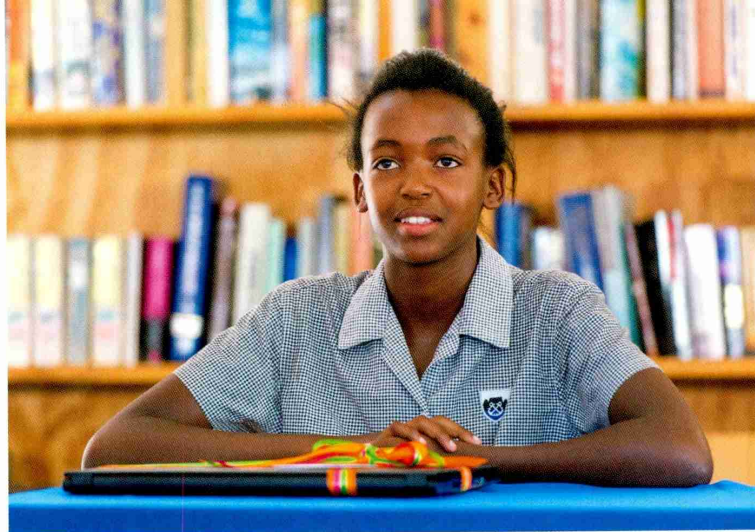
**FACT:** 80 per cent of all jobs will be related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) by 2020. The bad news: according to the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report, South Africa ranks last out of 144 countries for quality of science and mathematics education.

**AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF SOUTH AFRICA'S** dire shortage – current and potential – of scientists and engineers, the Cape Town Science Centre and software giants SAP came together in creating a foundation team that gave birth to last year's Africa Code Week.

Officially ranked as the largest literacy initiative ever organised on the African continent, Africa Code Week sparked the interest of more than 89 000 children across 17 countries to write their first lines of code. According to Julie Cleverdon, director at the Cape Town Science Centre, there's clearly a huge demand for this skill set: "An example would be the attendance figures, which aimed to reach 20 000 children, but managed to surpass this figure by 444 per cent."

Each of the countries involved battled it out in a friendly – but by no means non-competitive – rivalry. Morocco scooped the highest ratio of 33 589 youth introduced to coding, resulting in a grant from SAP to roll out digital education kits in participating schools. Second was the Ivory Coast, which received a grant to support the creation of a web programming school for underserved young Ivorians, and third was Tunisia. Of the 89 000 involved, South Africa successfully secured more than 17 000 at the event. "The viral impact in Morocco was a perfect example of how governments can leverage continent-wide initiatives to encourage ICT teaching in schools while driving engagement among students and teachers alike," says Cleverdon.

The skills development initiative is the story of hundreds of schools, teachers, ministers, community centres, businesses and non-profits getting together to combat the continent's unemployment rate and digital divide. With more than 150 000 youth and 1 500 instructors trained by SAP-skilled volunteers across Africa, the ambitious long-



term goal is to empower 200 000 teachers and impact on the lives of 5 million children within the next 10 years.

Over the next quarter of a century Africa's working-age population will double to one billion, exceeding that of China and India. Yet the digital skills gap continues to escalate. Cleverdon believes programmes like Africa Code Week provides a solution: "Coding has the power to put millions of young Africans on the path to successful careers and empower them to build sustainable growth. Companies in Africa are currently struggling to hire enough qualified IT talent. So the question is not whether a full lifecycle of skills support for young people in Africa needs to be created, but rather – when?"

Still, there's a positive spin to be found in the realisation that Africa has the distinction of being the fastest-growing digital consumer market on the planet, supported by the youngest and largest population – with 122 million people to be added to the workforce by 2020. Says Sunil Geness, director of government affairs and CSR lead for SAP Africa: "There is no doubt that the digital economy is here."

Geness says that digitisation is fostering huge economic growth worldwide, creating six million jobs in 2011 alone. "As a result, computer literacy has become a significant driver in establishing future generations in the workplace. As we all know, digital skills are critical for Africa's economy and that is why we need to call upon government, corporates and the public to help Africa's youth become tech-savvy."

It's not just the growing skills divide that needs some urgent attention. The lack of women in the technology industry has become a global issue that, fortunately, is being addressed. Over and above high attendance figures for Africa Code Week, the female participation ratio was an impressive 60 per cent in Tunisia, 56 per cent in South Africa and 50 per cent in Togo.

Building on the success of this first edition, SAP and partners are now preparing for Africa Code Week 2016, with plans to expand into 30 countries. Feeling inspired and ready to code? Be a part of the Africa Code Week mission and get involved by visiting [africacodeweek.org](http://africacodeweek.org) to register. – Adam Hunter, [marcusbrewster.com](http://marcusbrewster.com)

### 5 FACTS ABOUT AFRICA'S POPULATION

- Africa is the fastest-growing market, with more than 103 billion people, and is the youngest population in the world
- By 2100, two out of every five humans will be African
- 40 million young African people are estimated to be out of work and many more are under-employed
- 16 out of 26 fastest-growing economies are in Africa
- 60 per cent of Africa's population is aged under 35