



## **Symposium on Digital Transformation of SMEs Nouakchott, Mauritania 11<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

The Symposium on the Digital Transformation of SMEs was organized by the ICCIA Training Academy - Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Agriculture (ICCIA) in collaboration with the Perez Gurrero Trust Funds for South-South Cooperation (PGTF) and the Mauritania Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Agriculture (CCIAM). The event was held in Azalai Hotel, Nouakchott, Mauritania on the 11th and 12th of October 2023.

The Workshop was attended by more than 30 participants from 12 countries namely: Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Egypt, Guinea, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, Nigeria and Mauritania, representatives of SMEs, Chambers of Commerce and Public / Private Sector representatives. In addition, a representative from United Nation Development Programme UNDP Mauritania also participated the workshop.

The objective of the workshop was to discuss the principles of Digital Transformation and Digital Transformation implementation strategies for the SME Sector and to add value to SMEs through digital transformation, so as to facilitate data exchange and commercial match making as well as to improve effectiveness and efficiency of SMEs.

Following is a brief overview of the different sessions of the workshop and key takeaways for ICCIA's potential future collaborations:

### **Opening Ceremony**

The opening ceremony happened at 9:30 am on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2023, at Azalai Hotel Nouakchott Mauritania. Dignitaries, Excellencies, and other important personalities were invited to attend the opening ceremony of the Digital Transformation Workshop. During the opening ceremony, a welcome note was presented by the Secretary General of the Mauritania Chamber of Commerce "Mr. Wane Abdul Aziz".



A brief talk was presented by Mr. Talha Ahmed Shaikh (Lead Trainer of Workshop and Digital Specialist ICCIA). Mr. Shaikh spoke about the core objectives of the workshop and the significance of Digitalization in strengthening trade in African countries. The last address in the opening ceremony was from the Digitalization Minister of Mauritania in which he spoke about the efforts of the Mauritania Government in Digitalization Initiatives.

### **Session I: Introduction to Digital Transformation**

The session was conducted by Talha Ahmed Shaikh, Digital Specialist at ICCIA, during this session following major aspects were discussed:

1. Brief Introduction about ICCIA.
2. The Era of Technology – Disruptions and Fourth Industrial Revolution.
3. Impacts of Digital Transformation on SMEs.
4. The current state of SMEs in OIC especially in Africa.

This session was about 90 minutes long, and the basic objective was to build up a baseline understanding of all the participants for further sessions which are purely designed on the principles of digital transformation.

During this session, each participant was given the floor to briefly introduce themselves and discuss the dynamics of digitalization in their organizations/countries.

For the baseline concepts alignment examples from digitally mature organizations in different sectors were discussed such as Airbnb, Uber, Netflix, Salesforce, and Chat GPT.

The most motivating part was that there was very active participation from the audience in the form of questions and discussions. Participants from the Mauritania Chamber of Commerce acknowledged the significance of the digital transformation initiatives but also talked about the lack of resources and funds to activate all these initiatives.

### **Session II: The Digital Transformation Journey**

The session was also conducted by Talha Ahmed Shaikh, Digital Specialist at ICCIA, during this session following major aspects were discussed:

1. Understanding the digital transformation journey.
2. Key parameters to consider for Digital Transformation.
3. Understanding the Areas of Digital Transformation
  - a. Process Transformation
  - b. Business Model Transformation
  - c. Domain Transformation
  - d. Cultural / Organizational Transformation
4. Digital Transformation Implementation Strategies
5. Post-Transformation Impact Analysis
6. The current state of SMEs in OIC especially in Africa.

This session was about 120 minutes long and this session discussed one of the most critical concepts of Digital Transformation. The whole digital transformation journey was explained in depth during this session. To support and strengthen the concepts, some digital transformation failure case studies of FORD Motors, General Electric & Proctor and Gamble (P&G) were also discussed, so that mistakes which have happened in digitalization in the past must be avoided.

Some focused discussion during this session was also done on the specific tools and processes that could be transformed through technology interventions. Specific low-cost and high-efficiency ERP solutions were highlighted and strategies to transform simple processes such as

Human Resource Management, Accounts and Finance, KPI Evaluation, Inter-Organizational Communication and many other processes which exist in every small to large organization were discussed.

Towards the end of this session, representatives from Burkina Faso, Mozambique, and Mali discussed the resistance and challenges they face in the form of non-cooperative bureaucracy and governments to adapt digital transformation initiatives.

The delegates also expected some involvement of all the OIC Institutions just like ICCIA to intervene at a governmental level to boost Digital Transformation Initiatives in the LDCs.



### **Session III: Technology Interventions in the Digital Era**

The session was conducted by Talha Ahmed Shaikh, Digital Specialist at ICCIA, during this session following major aspects were discussed:

1. Artificial Intelligence
2. Big Data Analytics
3. Blockchain and Distributed Ledgers
4. Internet of Things (IoTs)
5. Robotic Process Automation (RPA)
6. 3D Printing
7. Cyber Security
8. Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality

This session was about 120 minutes long and this session discussed the different technology interventions in the era of technology. The concepts of all the above-mentioned technologies were explained with relevant supporting examples that complement the trade trends in Africa. One of the major themes in the delivery of the content for this session was to consider the technology implementation as an investment rather than an expenditure, hence building a technology vision.

A focused 30-minute activity was conducted during this session in which each participant was asked to draft the technology vision for their respective organizations. Later follow-up

discussions were done on the technology visions by the participants, the trainer refined the visions of the participants to attain maximum results.

Towards the end of this session representatives from South Africa and Guinea talked about how the economy of their countries could be boosted with the effective implementation of all the technologies.

#### **Session IV: ICCIA Digital Transformation Journey**

The session was conducted by Talha Ahmed Shaikh, Digital Specialist at ICCIA, during this session following major aspects were discussed:

1. Step-by-step workflow demonstration of ICCIA Digital Transformation of Chambers Platform.

This session was about 90 minutes long and this session discussed the digital transformation journey of ICCIA. A complete step-by-step walkthrough of the ICCIA digital chamber of commerce platform was demonstrated and comprehensively discussed with the participants of the workshop. The whole digital transformation journey concepts were continuously connected while discussing the different features of the platform. Internal communication between all the stakeholders involved from ICCIA for the digital transformation initiative was also demonstrated with the participants.

Towards the end of this session representative from Senegal shared his insights of the platform that the Senegal Chamber of Commerce is developing to strengthen their private sector. The same representative also highlighted some additional features that the ICCIA platform already had compared to the local private sector project.

#### **Session V: Case Studies for Digital Transformation in Various SME Sector**

The session was conducted by Talha Ahmed Shaikh, Digital Specialist at ICCIA, during this session following major aspects were discussed:

1. Successful Digital Transformation Journey (Case Study # 01) – Electronics Company (Clipsal Pakistan).
  - a. Tracking of employee performance with a two-tiered management approach
  - b. Penetrating different market segments for lead generation
  - c. Availability of necessary documents on a single platform
  - d. Admin-level dashboards for data analysis with category-level drill-down data
  - e. User, Vendor, Category, Product, and Market Segment Reporting
2. Successful Digital Transformation Journey (Case Study # 02) – Textile Weaving Factory (AK Textile Pakistan).
3. Digital Transformation Opportunities in Livestock Development
4. Digital Transformation Opportunities in the Agriculture Sector
5. Digital Transformation Opportunities in the Handicrafts and Cottage Industry.

This session was about 120 minutes long and this session discussed the digital transformation solutions and journeys of different SME sectors in the developing countries. A complete step-by-step walkthrough of the software developed for electronic companies and textile companies in Pakistan was shared and comprehensively discussed with the participants.

There was a very interesting and long discussion towards the end of this session in which participants started to brainstorm the different software solutions that would have a drastically positive impact on the economies of their respective countries.



## **Session VI: Knowledge-Economy**

The session was conducted by Passent Waguih, Member Relation Management Officer at ICCIA, during this session the speaker highlighted the significance of the knowledge economy and informed business decision-making. The knowledge era, driven by rapid technological and information development, requires the ability to create, innovate, and transform information into knowledge. Knowledge is the currency of this era, surpassing other economies and growing rapidly. This workshop aims to define the knowledge economy theoretical framework, identify indicators, and present the successful experience of the Algerian company Sonatrach in transitioning to the knowledge economy. The session speaker prepared the contents of the presentation that intended to optimize knowledge economy benefits and promote long-term economic development in an interconnected society.

This session was about 60 minutes long.



## **Session VII: Technology Outlook in Mauritania**

The session was conducted by the Chief Executive Officer of a technology company based in Nouakchott Mauritania namely "Interlink". The core objective of this session was to give an outlook on different technological commercial activities happening in Mauritania. Mauritania's tech industry is still developing and growing, however, there are still several streams and business avenues which not yet been explored and capitalized.

This session was about 60 minutes long.

## **Session VI: Distribution of Certificates and Closing of Workshop**

After all the technical sessions, it was time to close the program. All the participants were given the feedback forms followed by brief closing remarks from Mr. Talha Ahmed Shaikh. Certificates were distributed among the participants and a group photo was taken to formally close the workshop.



### Important Sideline Meetings

Following important meetings were conducted in Nouakchott in line with ICCIA's vision and objectives.

1. Dr. Benjamin Olagboye (Technical Advisor UNDP Mauritania): Dr. Benjamin was very glad and impressed by the initiatives of ICCIA and shared details about different initiatives of UNDP Mauritania. Dr. Benjamin shared his idea of organizing a capacity-building program for the private sector of Mauritania. Further Dr. Benjamin also opened the room for ICCIA to collaborate in their private sector capacity building program.



2. Mr. Abdur Rehman Ould Hamza (Head of Technology, Mauritania Chamber of Commerce): Mr. Abdur Rehman was very thankful to ICCIA for conducting the Digital Transformation Workshop, furthermore, Mr. Abdur Rehman requested support from ICCIA in developing different technology initiatives at Mauritania Chamber of Commerce.

## Post Workshop Recommendations

Following important recommendations should be considered for further enhancement of tech infrastructure and organizational portfolio in the African Region.

1. **Active Relationship Development with Chambers of Commerce:** Representatives from the participating chamber of commerce highly appreciated this initiative by ICCIA and considered Mauritania to be very fortunate to get the opportunity to host this workshop. There is a big gap in adapting the technological mindset in African countries, hence there is a massive need to plan further initiatives of this kind or series of workshops to strengthen the private sector in the LDC's, Sahel and other African countries.
2. **Initiation of ICCIA Tech Consulting Services:** Delegates from different countries discussed the tech initiatives they are doing locally and the issues they are facing to successfully implement the tech solutions in their organizations/countries. Many delegates wanted the ICCIA expert to highlight the mistakes in their digital transformation journey that should be corrected and some alternative suggestions to attain maximum results from the digital transformation initiatives. This kind of interaction infers that there is a massive need to provide consultation to organizations from the OIC countries and this could be easily provided through the platform of ICCIA.
3. **Target Audience/Delegates of the workshop:** Since the core aspect of the workshop was the Digital Transformation of SMEs, it would have been ideal if most of the participation in the workshop had been from the SME sector, although there were some representatives from the different tech companies in Mauritania, but major local participation was from the people associated with the Mauritania Chamber of Commerce. A greater participation was expected from the people associated with the tech sector and the SME sector.
4. **More focused topics for the training:** Although it is essential to conduct workshops and training on the topic of Digital Transformation, however, it is a very broad spectrum of discussion, and the training covered different angles of digital transformation. In the future more focused training topics for example dedicated training on Cyber Security, Blockchain, Internet of Things, etc should be planned for a more focused impact.
5. **The participants extended their thanks and appreciation to the organizers namely, ICCIA Training Academy – Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Agriculture (ICCIA), the Perez Gurrero Trust Funds for South-South Cooperation (PGTF), United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Mauritania Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Agriculture (CCIAM), for their kind cooperation and support towards organizing such an informative and valuable session.**

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