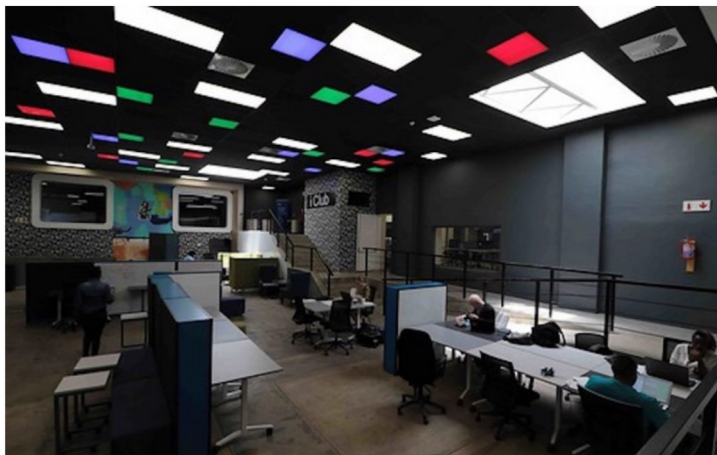


Africa Poised to be next Global Tech Hub

Africa has been at the forefront of world-class innovation for a long time, especially when it comes to home-grown technology solutions that speak to and solve socio-economic problems in communities across the continent. Technology professionals believe while countries such as Kenya and Nigeria have been at the forefront, the likes of Tanzania, Uganda and Ghana are establishing intentional tech ecosystems that foster entrepreneurship and skills development, which will open up endless possibilities, particularly for Fintech, an industry that is rapidly growing, evolving and one that has often relied on foreign investment. Matthew Cruise, Head of Business Intelligence at Hohm Energy, says, "When we talk about Africa's quest to be a global tech hub, we need to ensure that we are also considering the tech needed to power the foundational infrastructure that supports this ambition." According to the United Nations, some 570 million people in Africa have no access to electricity, which drastically hampers socio-economic development or poverty alleviation. Tech business leaders say renewable energy in the form of solar energy is the most viable option for addressing this challenge, as the continent holds some of the highest solar radiation numbers in the world. Tony Mallam, Managing Director of bitcoin micro-saving and investing Fintech platform, pinup advises that "entrepreneurs wanting to leverage the potential opportunities of a global Africa tech hub wave should think about building solutions that are unique to Africa, such as the huge unbanked and the 'Know Your Customer' KYC'ed population, estimated to be at least 57% of the continent's population.



"The opportunity provided by Africa's high mobile internet penetration will allow investors to leapfrog last generation infrastructure into cutting-edge solutions. Governments would need to support this opportunity by providing the right infrastructure, a safe regulatory environment, minimal red tape and tax incentives," explains Mallam. Building the continent's tech and digital capability needs to run parallel with skill development. The World Bank estimates that by 2050, half of Africa's population of 1 billion people will be under the age of 25, suggesting that the workforce of the future is based here. Zuko Mdwaba, Country Leader and Area Vice President, Salesforce South Africa, adds, "Indeed, if Africa is to realise its ambitions of being a global tech hub, it is imperative that all the various stakeholders – government, business, civic organisations and educational institutions – work collaboratively." It is imperative that any reference to tech on the continent makes special mention of health tech, where the room for growth is exponential. In fact, the African healthcare market is expected to be worth US\$259-billion by 2030. Bongani Sithole, CEO of Founders Factory Africa, says, "Three thoughts come to mind of how healthtech can significantly impact the continent's different markets for the better: It can provide access to cheaper

healthcare, provide access to healthcare in your pocket (such as telehealth), and technology can play a role in bridging the skills gap and helping medical practitioners do more with less resources."

Africa's internet penetration is currently half the global average of 62.5%. This affects not only consumers but also small businesses across the continent. This, along with

findings that revealed that South Africa saw a 66% growth in e-commerce in 2020 indicates that in order to compete and even scale, SMEs need affordable access to the internet.

Currently, SMEs that have limited or no access to the internet are stunted in their ability to increase market share and reach new audiences. Head of Marketing and Communication at online booking platform Jurni, Tshepo Matlou says, "With more tech hubs in Africa, will automatically come increased connectivity. This will in turn lead to more SMEs being able to embrace and leverage online opportunities ultimately allowing them to hold their own in a competitive market."

Cynthia Ponera, Regional Sales Director for East Africa at digital payments hub MFS Africa, says, "At MFS Africa, we have always believed that the only currency is access, and while we continue to, through our own efforts, create, advocate for, and partner to enable borderless transactions across the continent, the growing 'tech hub' culture in Africa will in the long run allow us to identify talent and collaborate with and partner with more start-ups." It also has the potential to increase dialogue with governments in regions like Tanzania, where we have partners, as we continue to transform the lives and realities of Africa and the diaspora."