African Diaspora Investment Symposium 2021

Leapfrogging Africa: Healthcare, Education, Connectivity, and Finance

Online Forums July 2020 - January 2021

September 23 Session Summary- Highlights - Action Steps

Context:

African Diaspora Investment Symposium (ADIS21) is the sixth annual global convening that celebrates and champions the entrepreneurial and innovative spirit of Africans, Diasporans, and friends of Africa.

The ongoing pandemic has devastated the world and hit Africa hard. At the same time, it has forced a renewed focus on accelerating development across sectors. This focus presents an opportunity for African development to leap forward, bypassing physical infrastructure that the continent has lacked for the better part of a century. We foresee acceleration across four areas: **connectivity, education, healthcare, and finance**. ADN intends to be at the forefront of this momentum.

To prioritize community well-being in light of the current global health crisis, ADIS21 will take place as a monthly virtual series from **July 2020 to January 2021**.

This month's session focused on digital connectivity across Africa. Digital connectivity across the continent is amplifying industry at all levels as the countries work to address the internet access gap. How is broadband cable progressing, particularly regarding inland access and delivery? How are smartphones becoming an integral part of commerce and everyday life? How can we create a system that helps innovators and entrepreneurs to quickly locate supplies and services in their area? What kind of impact the rollout of 5G could have for Africa? Are there nascent e-commerce and e-learning solutions suited for the continent? Join this session to look at key examples of digital connectivity, including drone technology, mobile technologies, and the planning of Africa's roll-out plan of the SpaceX Starlink and the expansion of Google's Loon project.

Key Questions:

- How can technology transform the African continent?
- What are some barriers to digital connectivity?
- What challenges exist in creating equal access to technology?
- What role does governance play in digital connectivity and development?

ADIS21

AFRICAN DIASPORA INVESTMENT SYMPOSIUM

Leapfrogging Africa: Health Care, Education, Technology, and Finance

We value your feedback.

Please take a few minutes to take the September 23 ADIS session survey here: https://forms.gle/v3SGo6GzRKLHh3Pw8.

Register for #ADIS21 October!

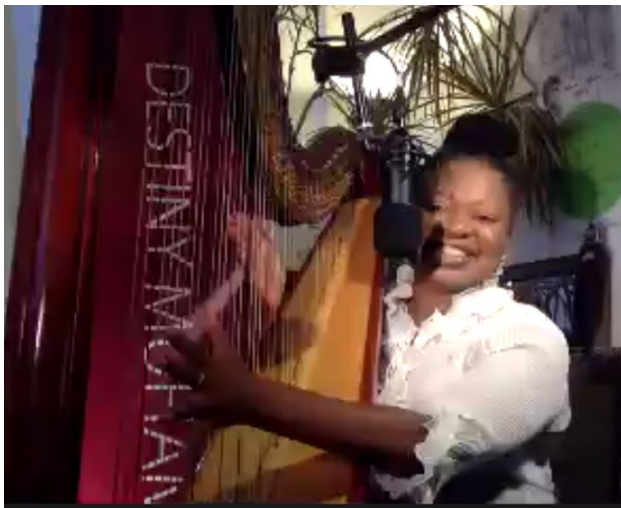Amplify Innovation and Investment Hubs in Africa

Wednesday October 28~ 8:00 AM PST, 11:00 AM EST, 3:00 PM GMT

Registration Link **here**.

Summary

On September 23, 2020, African Diaspora Network hosted its third ADIS virtual forum: **_"Digital Connectivity Across Africa."_** The session brought together Africans, Diasporans, and friends of Africa to discuss challenges and opportunities for digital connectivity in Africa. The link to the **recording** can be found **[here](#).**

The session began with a beautiful harp performance by Destiny Muhammad, a

recording/performing artist, composer, and producer. The music she shared had notes of Celtic and smooth jazz and told a story of the importance of 'being present'. She began with a medley of songs by Jon Coltrain followed by a song called 'Tomorrow' which emphasized taking action on what is most important today. You can find her website at destinymuhammadproject.com.

Almaz Negash, founder and executive director of African Diaspora Network, welcomed attendees, thanked funders, board members, executive leadership council, champions. and team members for making the symposium possible. Negash welcomed the session speakers and gave a special thank you to the U.S. State Department for funding support and for helping to curate this month's panel of speakers. She also reminded the audience that the African Diaspora Investment Symposium started with seed funding from the U.S. State Department in 2016. Almaz said, "'Organizing this is like having a wedding every month. The planning is time-consuming, but also joyful when you have supporters!"

Fireside Chat: The Africa Tech Infrastructure: How Can Technology Transform the African Economy?

Fireside chat moderator Éliane Ubalijoro, PhD, Deputy Executive Director for Programs at Global Open Data in Agriculture and Nutrition, began a conversation with Mr. Philip Thigo, Senior Director for Africa Thunderbird School of Global Management.

"How can the African economy transform technology?," Éliane asked Philip.

According to **Mr. Philip Thigo**, *"Connectivity is a revolution for us! Africans have to be deliberate about it. Africa is young–median 19.7 age, basically a digital revolution. Simple technology that has meaning and changes peoples lives."*

Knowing that Philip is not particularly fond of the term 'leapfrogging', Éliane asked, 'Going back to the issue of mindset. **Why does the concept of 'leapfrogging' bother you? What mindset should we have?'**

Mr. Philip Thigo replied, "Because it predicts a future. I think of 'disruption'. It means to aspire to an end future, always looking at what is possible. We must be open and listening. We must be willing to grow. We don't know everything. That's why the diaspora network needs to move together to what we aspire. Technology will change, but we must invest in people. How do we invest in the next generation?

Panel Session: Digital Connectivity Across Africa

The fireside chat was followed by a panel discussion moderated by Thomas Debass, Managing Director of the Office of Global Partnerships at the U.S. Department of State. The panel spoke about the challenges and opportunities of technological connectivity in Africa.

Thomas began by giving an overview of the state of African connectivity. He said, "Despite lots of progress, Africa is still largely disconnected. Digital connection investments have been lagging. The U.S. government has been a huge support of Africa's connectivity efforts.

My agency, DFC, is investing more than a billion dollars in economic growth and connectivity in a flagship 'Connect Africa Initiative.'"

Next, he asked the panel session, "Where is Africa emerging in the connectivity landscape? How is COVID impacting this?"

The panelists drew upon their unique expertise to share insights on digital connectivity in Africa.

Nivi Sharma, COO of BRCK, spoke about the three main barriers she sees to digital connectivity progress in Africa. She said, *"As an education content provider, we kept running into this barrier of connectivity and infrastructure. We identified 3 main barriers to digital access. One is actual access-do people have a signal around them, do people have a smartphone? We know that only 10% of households in Africa have a computer. The second barrier to digital connectivity is affordability. It is perpetual and ubiquitous and we take it for granted. One of the first steps we*

need to take when thinking about connectivity is really empathizing with what the reality on the ground is. We need a new business model. People don't have the money, but can they pay for connectivity with time and attention?" The third barrier is digital literacy. This is the largest, greatest network of knowledge and information in the world, and there are people only using it for Facebook and WhatsApp. People don't understand that there is more out there-better ways to leverage all the knowledge out there.

Amrote Abdella, Regional Director of Microsoft's 4Afrika Initiative highlighted the importance of governance. She said, *"Do we have an understanding of what governance needs to look like? Where can we leverage our dollars and cents to use cloud computing for instance to allow us to redirect some of our investment. I think there we have the opportunity to fast-track our own adoption and our own transformation. I think governance is an area we need to be mindful and intentional about because the relevance and utilization around technology is really dependent upon decisions we make today. It will affect the next generation to come."*

Joseph Nsengimana, Director of the Mastercard Foundation Centre for Innovative Teaching and Learning in ICT, emphasized the importance of a needs-first approach to developing technology. He explained, *"One of the challenges we have seen on the continent is we had a technology-first approach. People were developing technology on the continent but they weren't actually connecting that technology to the needs of people. We need to adopt this demand-driven approach when introducing technology. It is the only way we are going to increase adoption. How do we talk about technology and in what context? It is the way we have this discussion that is going to drive investment. This is a huge investment!*

Suggested Action Steps:

- **Think Outside the Box**: How can technology be used as a tool to solve current problems and meet needs?

- **Empathize with people where they are:** Not everyone can afford tech. Can we get people to pay for technology with time and attention instead of money?

- **Be intentional about governance:** The relevance and utilization around technology is really dependent upon decisions we make today.

- **Invest:** The diaspora has an opportunity to invest in the development of digital connectivity with Africa.
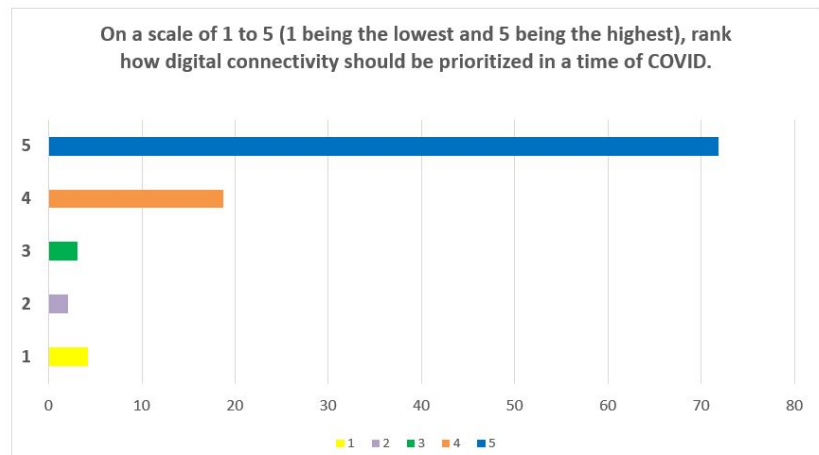
Highlights

- In the past, Africa's development has been shaped by outside funding sources. Now, with the dedication of the diaspora, we have a chance to invest back in the continent of Africa.

- Technology has made us think outside of the box to solve problems such as gaps in infrastructure. Using technology we can come up with innovative ways to address issues.

- Connectivity is a foundational building block that not everyone can afford. We need to empathize with what is really happening on the ground in Africa.

- Barriers to digital connectivity include: access to technology, affordability, and digital literacy.

- We have the opportunity to fast-track our own transformation by being mindful and intentional about governance. The relevance and utilization around technology is really dependent upon decisions we make today.

- We need to move from a technology-first approach of developing tech to a people-focused and needs-first approach to development. How can technology be used to improve lives?

See the entire session recording [here](#).

Poll Results

A live poll was conducted during September's virtual forum (pictured below). The statement was, 'on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest), rank how digital connectivity should be prioritized in a time of COVID.' The results of the poll show that of the poll participants, 71.88% of participants ranked digital connectivity as (5) being the highest, 18.75% ranked digital connectivity as (4), 3.12% marked it as (3), 2.08% marked it as (2), and 4.17% marked it as (1).

Conclusion

Technology is an essential tool in both professional and everyday life. Unfortunately, the development of technology has not always been people-focused. Technology has often been developed for technology's sake and not to meet a need. Developers must ask, 'How is what I am creating addressing a need?' There are many barriers to digital connectivity in Africa including access, affordability, and digital literacy. What are some ways we can get past these barriers? For example, how can families and individuals afford data? They may not have the money to purchase data, but is there a way they can exchange their time and resources for digital access? Thanks to the speakers in this session, we now have a lot of ideas we can consider in how we might expand digital connectivity in Africa. The diaspora plays an important role in this expansion by continuing conversations on connectivity, as well as health care, education, finance, and other sectors.

We invite the participants of the September 2020 forum to share their feedback by filling out the following survey: https://forms.gle/v3SGo6GzRKLHh3Pw8.

We look forward to having you at the upcoming ADIS21 October 2020 event!

Thank you,

The African Diaspora Network Team

Resources:

Visit ADIS21 Website for Resources on Education - Healthcare - Connectivity - Finance

Get to know the speakers better. Visit their organization websites
- ○ Thunderbird School of Global Management
- ○ Office of Global Partnerships at the U.S. Department of State
- ○ Microsoft's 4Afrika Initiative
- ○ Mastercard Foundation Centre for Innovative Teaching and Learning in ICT
- ○ BRCK (brck.com)
- ○ Programs at Global Open Data in Agriculture and Nutrition (GODAN)
- ○ McGill University
- Session recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdEkfVRamGo&t=3501s

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