African Diaspora Investment Symposium 2021

Leapfrogging Africa: Healthcare, Education, Connectivity, and Finance

Online Forums July 2020 - January 2021

October 28 Session Summary- Highlights - Action Steps

Special Thank You to Our ADIS21 October Speakers!

C.D. Glin, President and CEO, U.S. African Development Foundation (USADF)

The Honorable, Paula Ingabire, Minister of ICT and Innovation, Government of Rwanda

Panel Session

Saida Benhayoune, Innovation Practice Advisor, MIT

Hiruy Amanuel, Co-founder and Managing Director, A.J. Ventures

Nekesa Were, Director of Strategy, AFRILABS

Timothy Nzioka, Director of Regional Program Operations, USADF

Fireside Chat
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 innovation and investment hubs in Africa. Across the continent, several countries have taken various approaches to building strongholds of investment and innovation. Rwanda is actively planning an innovation hub, Kigali Innovation City, to transform the country into a knowledge-based economy. In West Africa, Nigeria has partnered with U.S. officials to launch a West Africa Trade and Innovation Hub.

Key Questions:

- What are some unique approaches adopted by different countries in Africa to building innovation ecosystems?
- What role are public-private partnerships playing in amplifying Innovation hubs in Africa?
- What are the most pressing challenges Africa innovation hubs are facing today?
- What effects is Covid-19 having on innovation ecosystems?
- What are some unique ways in which the African diaspora can engage in amplifying African Innovation hubs?
We value your feedback.

Please take a few minutes to take the October 28 ADIS session survey here: https://forms.gle/uTXVNQycb5wLCXjX9.

Register for #ADIS21 November!

Investment in Education and Online Learning in Africa

Wednesday November 18~ 8:00 AM PST, 11:00 AM EST, 4:00 PM GMT

Registration Link here.
Summary

On October 28, 2020, African Diaspora Network hosted its fourth ADIS virtual forum: "Amplify Innovation and Investment Hubs in Africa." The session brought together Africans, Diasporans, and friends of Africa to discuss challenges and opportunities for innovation and investment in Africa. The link to the recording can be found here.

The session began with a rhythmic Bala performance by Mandjou Kone, a Griot from Mali and Burkina Faso. Mandjou is a singer, dancer, and storyteller. She was born into the renowned Kone family of West African griots (Djeli), the keepers of oral tradition. Her performance included traditional songs passed down for centuries, from the ancient Mali Empire through the generations. One of the songs she performed was a tribute to King Sundiata Keita, the Lion Prince of Mali.

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. One speaker that joined the October ADIS panel session was Hiruy Amanuel, Co-founder of Gebeya. Almaz pointed out that because of the first African Diaspora Investment Symposium, Hiruy and Amadou Daffe, went on to co-found Gebeya, a new-age EdTech company based in Ethiopia that trains, hires, and cultivates top talented African software engineers. ADN's programs such as ADIS matter because it creates a place where connections are made and new partnerships start. Almaz reminded us that you never know who you might meet so take every opportunity to connect with and support each other.

Fireside Chat: Building Innovative Ecosystems In Africa: Destination Rwanda

Fireside chat moderator, C.D. Glin, President and CEO of the U.S. African Development Foundation (USADF), opened with some context about innovation and investment hubs in
Africa. According to Venture Capital Firm Partech, Africa and African Tech Startups raised **1.1 Billion** in equity funding in 2018. In 2019, the Global System for Mobile Communication Association estimated that the number of active tech hubs providing support for tech and digital entrepreneurs had risen to nearly **620** throughout Africa.

USADF is committed to contributing to this exciting progress in innovation by integrating digitization into its grant activities. By doing this, USADF contributes to boosting grantee business growth, building resilience, and supercharging businesses for the 4th industrial revolution.

C.D. says, ‘On the continent, digital transformation is full speed and nowhere is that truer than in Rwanda where the government is an active sponsor for and supporter of information and communication technology (ICT) and has worked diligently to create an enabling environment for entrepreneurs and tech hubs to thrive.’

C.D. welcomed The Honorable, Paula Ingabire, Minister of ICT and Innovation, Government of Rwanda and thanked her for her commitment to digital transformation in Rwanda.

He asked Honorable Paula Ingabire, “**What has your journey been like over the past two years and what impact has this addition to the Minister of ICT of innovation had on your roles, responsibilities, and priorities?**”

Honorable Paula Ingabire replied, “**I think it was a natural combination to bring ICT and innovation together as we think about the solutions we create. What we have been trying to do is see, how do we think about innovation more broadly, whether it’s digitally enabled or not, for us to be able to tap into this creative talent that we have within the economy.**”
We want to be a testbed that is attracting talent from across Africa to come and work together here, provide the necessary conducive environment, and then the solutions they are building because you have a diverse team of innovators and entrepreneurs coming together will allow to build solutions that not only respond to Rwanda’s challenges, but solutions that can be exported outside of Rwanda.”

Next, C.D. asked, “Now that 98% of Rwanda has coverage what does that mean for the average Rwandan?”

Honorable Paula Ingabire responded, “What we are not seeing is a cumulative figure for usage and adoption. When you look at that gap of people who are still not able to take full advantage of the infrastructure investments that we have made, then we go back to the drawing board of understanding what do we need to do differently? It is not just a question of investing in infrastructure, it is now thinking, what do we need to do to make these people capable of using it? Is it just a question of willingness to use it? Is it a question of do we have the right skills to use it? It is a multi-faceted approach we are trying to test right now to make sure the gap of 20% that is not using the infrastructure we are putting in place is able to use it in a meaningful manner.”

Panel Session: Amplify Innovation and Investment Hubs in Africa

The fireside chat was followed by a panel discussion moderated by Saida Benhayoune, Innovation Practice Advisor at MIT. The panel spoke about unique approaches African countries are using to build innovative ecosystems and both challenges and opportunities in amplifying innovation hubs.

Saida shared a framework for understanding and facilitating dialog around innovation ecosystems developed by MIT D-Lab. The center are the actors that are participating in the innovation ecosystem. They are represented both as the type of actors and the functions
that they play. The bottom component is the resources that innovative ecosystems need so they can produce both the innovation and also the support systems that allow innovation to flourish. The top portion, the enabling environment, is the elements of climate, the things to affect the ability of ecosystems to produce and diffuse innovation.

Image source:

Saida asked the panel, “From your own perspectives, what are some unique approaches you have seen adopted by different countries in Africa (other than Rwanda) to building innovation ecosystems?”

Nekesa Were, Director of Strategy at Afrilabs, said, “In Kenya we have Konza City. It's been five years in the making. It's been a labor of love for those involved in building it out. What I love about this project is that the government has invested a lot of time in building community. A lot of people believe in the vision of what it is.”

We now look forward to seeing how the government begins to complement what innovators have done within the Kenyan innovation ecosystem and hopefully soon the two parts align. Potentially then what Konza City
would do is enable the Kenyan innovative ecosystem to leapfrog.”

Hiruy Amanuel, Co-founder of A.J. Ventures and Gebeya said,

“There are a lot of hubs in Ethiopia. We work alongside a few of them to co-sponsor and put on events. They are a good resource for students that we’ve brought on through Gebeya in the past. A lot of times these hubs and ecosystems are good networking and good resources for them to find mentorship. They are a good space for them to work and have wifi. I am definitely in agreement to the value that they provide to the tech ecosystem. In Ethiopia it’s a little bit harder because the hubs don’t have as much resource and government/private-sector support as they do in Nigeria and Kenya. They still provide us a good resource, a good networking hub.”

Timothy Nzioka, Director of Regional Program Operations at USADF – NAIROBI, responded, “When we are looking to develop an ecosystem, we are looking beyond tech hubs. We are looking at human capital, we are looking at national policy.

For example in 2019, in Ghana, they set up a science, technology, and innovation policy. At the international level, having the right policy guideline is key. In Nigeria, they set up Start-Up Nigeria as a 3-month incubation program that was started last year and it is gaining a lot of traction.”
Suggested Action Steps:

- **Network**: Look for opportunities on ADN's online networking platform. To join, click [here](#).
- **Partner**: Are there individuals or organizations around you that share your passions? Are there ways that you can partner together to make a difference?
- **Invest**: Saida shared a framework developed by MIT D-Lab for understanding and facilitating dialog around innovation ecosystems. How might you contribute to this framework and dialog?

Highlights

- In 2019, the [Global System for Mobile Communication Association](#) estimated that the number of active tech hubs providing support for tech and digital entrepreneurs had risen to nearly 620 throughout Africa.
- 98% of Rwanda now has network coverage. The infrastructure is laid, but still there is 20% of the population not using the connectivity. The government is working to see why this is and what solutions can be put in place so that the infrastructure is used in a meaningful way.
- Other innovation hubs include: Konza City in Kenya and Start-Up Nigeria. Ethiopia has various hubs although they do not have as many resources and support as other countries’ hubs.
- For startups to succeed, foreign investors, private equity, mentors, and knowledge-sharing are needed. The public and private sectors need to work together.
- Innovation does not have to be something complicated. It can be simple, different takes on regular activities. Both complex and simple innovations are critical.
Currently a lot of collaboration is happening between different African hubs as they share best practices.

See the entire session recording here.

Poll Results
A live poll was conducted during October’s virtual forum (pictured below). The first question asked, ‘What sector do you believe would benefit Africa the most from emerging innovations?’ The participants responded as follows: Health 45%, Education 42%, Connectivity 30%, Finance 22%, and Agriculture 39%. The second question asked, ‘Based on your level of interest in new innovations and your current social or financial assets, how would you like to support innovative initiatives?’ The participants responded: I would like to invest financially in initiatives 25%, I have skills that could benefit a new initiative 53%, I have networks who could contribute to the innovative work happening in Africa 47%, and Other 12%. The last question asked was, ‘What do you see as the greatest challenge to new innovations in Africa?’ Respondents answered: Lack of Leadership 49%, Lack of Funding 51%, Lack of infrastructure 60%, Covid-19 4%, and Other 5%.
Based on your level of interest in new innovations and your current social or financial assets, how would you like to support innovative initiatives?

- I have networks who could contribute to the innovative work happening in Africa
- I have skills that could benefit a new initiative
- I would like to invest financially in initiatives
- Other

What do you see as the greatest challenge to new innovations in Africa?

- Other
- Covid-19
- Lack of Infrastructure
- Lack of Funding
- Lack of Leadership
Conclusion

Many African countries are making leaps and bounds in innovative progress. According to the Global System for Mobile Communication Association in 2019 there were nearly 620 active tech hubs providing support for tech and digital entrepreneurs throughout Africa. Countries are collaborating to support one another and further progress. Public and private sectors need to continue to work together if innovation is to continue to thrive. The Diaspora and friends of Africa can help by investing in startups, mentoring, sharing knowledge, and continuing conversations about better ways to do things, whether that be in the tech, education, finance, or other sectors.

We invite the participants of the October 2020 forum to share their feedback by filling out the following survey: https://forms.gle/uTXVNQycb5wLCjX9.

We look forward to having you at the upcoming ADIS21 November 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

- USADF
- Government of Rwanda
- MIT D-Lab
- A.J Ventures
- AfriLabs

- Session recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dxg5OwEEQxY&feature=youtu.be
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