

A future of 'smart cities' in Africa

Due to increased access to connectivity and the associated predicted urbanisation, African cities wishing to uplift their populations into the 21st century are going to have to start focusing today on what the city of tomorrow will look like, according to professional services firm Deloitte.



© Feelart via FreeDigitalPhotos.net

In her paper, 'Africa is ready to leapfrog the competition through smart cities technology', associate director at Deloitte Africa, Denise Lee says that rapid urbanisation means it will only be a matter of time before such smart cities begin to appear in Africa.

"There has been a lot of attention on the concept of a 'smart city'. Broadly speaking, a city can be defined as smart when investments in human and social capital, traditional transport and modern ICT communication infrastructure fuel sustainable economic development and a high quality of life, with a wise management of natural resources."

Not a one-stop process

As to where a city starts, Lee says, "The establishment of a smart city is not a one-stop process, it is a journey. This journey is completely dependent on the maturity status of each individual city supported by the political and societal appetite for development."

The Deloitte report states that African cities have the opportunity to start with the latest technology available, thereby immediately thrusting them as competitors into the global market place.

Another driver is the rise of the African middle class. This, coupled with the fact that Africa has a disproportionately young population with 62% of the population under 25 years of age, makes for an interesting consideration as to the quantum of tomorrow's consumer market.

"It is hardly a surprise that mature businesses are casting more than an interested eye over the continent as a youthful

population provides a secured consumer base for many decades to come," says Lee.

A global super-urbanisation move

Predictions of a global super-urbanisation move with 70% of the world's population being urbanised by 2050, includes the perspective that in the next 30 years, roughly 50% of Africa's population will be living in cities. Each of these factors combine to produce a powerhouse of innovation.

Another advantage of African cities is the entrepreneurial culture of their people. Lee explains that anyone who has travelled to Africa will notice the can-do attitude.

"Africans operate within an environment where anything and everything is possible. This can do approach has resulted in African businesses being recognised globally for innovations made within industry," says Lee.

Technology based innovation

Proving the point, much of this innovation has been technology based. The advent of mobile telecommunications has seen Africa experience the fastest telecoms growth worldwide over the past five years. Its current 72% average mobile subscription penetration is expected to reach 97% by 2017.

The final advantage is that governmental leadership across the continent has strategically positioning ICT as an economic enabler. For example, a Deloitte study, 'Economic Impact of Mobile in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan, Serbia, Thailand & Ukraine', has found that a 10% increase in mobile phone penetration is linked to an increase in a middle/low income country GDP of 1.2%. This follows from the ensuing economic activity that people engage in as a result of being connected. ICT access is increasingly being seen as a very necessary tool for development."

Lee concludes, "African cities are well positioned to leapfrog into the mid-21st century. However, without the successful adoption and appropriate selection of technology, African cities will indeed be left behind as more and more Africans look for brighter futures on other continents."

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>