

DRC to host inaugural Smart City Conference, Open Innovation Challenge

Spearheaded by Congo Bulaya, a subsidiary initiative of the Centre d'Innovation de Lubumbashi (CINOLU), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) will host its virtual Smart City Conference from 16 to 18 April this year.



Image source: Gello/Getty

Themes to be explored include the role of public policies, youth and civic participation in sustainable and inclusive human settlements; industrialisation for the city of the future; governance and education for all; urban resilience; the role of research in the development of resilient cities; and gender issues, balance and inclusiveness under SDG 11. These will be unpacked during roundtable discussions, workshops and focus groups with representatives from the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and New Information and Communication Technologies, the United Nations Development Programme, the Ministry of Education and the World Food Programme, among others.



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'Time to work together on solutions'

"The rationale behind Congo Bulaya is to contextualise, localise and focus innovation and entrepreneurship energy within the city space as this is the ecosystem in which problems need to be solved from a holistic perspective. Isolated innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives have proven ineffective on the ground because of structural and functional differences between cities in the DRC. It is now time to work together on solutions," says Berry Numbi, CINOLU managing director.

Grace Oluchi, hub manager at CINOLU, explains that a crucial outcome of the event will be establishing a

space for permanent dialogue between municipal decision-makers, governments, entrepreneurs and key actors from civil society on the issues of intelligent development of cities in the DRC. “We would also like foster partnerships between national and international business, cultural and technological ecosystems, municipalities, development support institutions, universities, professional bodies, startups, SMEs and civil society to create a regional integration cluster. Additionally, we would like to identify pilot cities to be supported in the development of smart solutions to the challenges they face.”



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Open Innovation Challenge

With Africa’s population growing exponentially and putting pressure on cities that are already struggling to cope, Congo Bulaya has created an Open Innovation Challenge to identify, stimulate the development of, and promote intelligent solutions to challenges faced by cities in the DRC. This is in alignment with Goal 11 of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals: making cities and human settlements inclusive, resilient, and sustainable.

Working in consultation with provincial leadership, municipalities, and development agencies, Congo Bulaya has identified six focus areas:

- Urban safety and security to make cities safer;
- Agritech to develop sustainable food security solutions for urban areas;
- Fintech for building cashless cities;
- City planning for improved architecture, mobility and accessibility;
- Energy and cleantech to reduce negative environmental impacts.

To bring solutions in these spheres to life, Congo Bulaya has set itself the goal of enabling the creation of at least 10 startups by 2024. It will also support and promote solutions with the potential to create at least 10 green jobs by 2023.

The organisation will soon be launching a call for projects addressing the six focus areas. The best solution will be selected for mentor matching and will also have the opportunity to participate in a four-month incubation/acceleration programme which will culminate in a demo day.

“Given the plethora of challenges experienced in metropolitan areas of the DRC, we will be on the lookout for solutions that can be adopted by each city,” says Oluchi.

She concludes by saying: “With the Smart City Conference and the Open Innovation Challenge, we hope to pave the way for achieving the objectives of SDG 11 in the DRC.”

Click [here](#) for more information on the Centre d’Innovation de Lubumbashi (CINOLU).