

# Microsoft in Africa

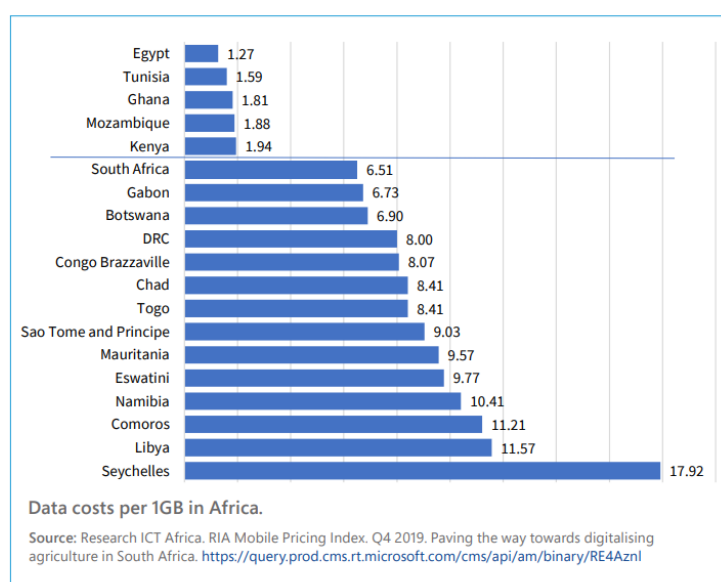


We believe there is a direct correlation between Africa's sustainable prosperity and its ongoing digital transformation. In the three decades since Microsoft entered the African continent, the company has invested in the technology ecosystem, including in cloud infrastructure, development centers, skilling, and capacity building. These factors, along with government policies to facilitate innovation, catalyze a thriving digital economy by leveraging trustworthy and inclusive technology.

Following a period of recession triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the continent is now on the path to recovery. Today, there is a unique opportunity to drive economic development and prosperity across the continent: Africa has the youngest population of any continent; mobile internet penetration is on the rise; and the pandemic has driven an acceleration in the adoption of technology by governments and firms seeking continuity.

## Broadband Infrastructure and Connectivity

Despite significant progress made over the last decade to develop information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure, internet accessibility and usability in Africa is lower relative to other parts of the world. Nearly 300 million Africans live more than 50 km away from fiber or cable broadband.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the Alliance for Affordable Internet reports that of the 48 African countries it tracks, only 14 meet its standard for “affordable internet” (designated as 1 GB of mobile prepaid broadband costing 2 percent or less than the average monthly income).<sup>2</sup> In 2019, the African Union mapped out a strategy to digitally connect every individual, business, and government in Africa by 2030.<sup>3</sup> The goal is to bring high-speed connectivity to everyone on the continent, including those who make up the last mile, and lay the foundations for a vibrant digital economy. Connecting the unconnected requires rolling out innovative and alternative solutions such as Wi-Fi, satellites, and hotspots to reach the nearly 100 million people that live in remote areas currently out of reach of traditional mobile networks.<sup>4</sup>



Continued investment in developing ICT infrastructure across the continent, including its reach to rural communities and those in lower income groups, will be an important pillar for establishing Africa’s growing data-driven economy. A crucial starting point is to take a technology-agnostic approach that would lower cost without sacrificing utility. The technology investments needed to achieve connectivity must incorporate the most cost-efficient technologies and consider alternative approaches when necessary.

<sup>1</sup> OECD/ACET. Quality Infrastructure in 21st Century Africa: Prioritising, Accelerating and Scaling up in the Context of PIDA (2021-30), 2020. <https://www.oecd.org/dev/Africa-Quality-infrastructure-21st-century.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Alliance for Affordable Internet. Africa Regional Snapshot: [Affordability Report 2020](#).

<sup>3</sup> Broadband Commission Working Group on Broadband for All (prepared by the African Union, World Bank Group, UNESCO, et al). Connecting Africa Through Broadband: A strategy for doubling connectivity by 2021 and reaching universal access by 2030, October 2019. [https://broadbandcommission.org/Documents/working-groups/DigitalMoonshotforAfrica\\_Report.pdf](https://broadbandcommission.org/Documents/working-groups/DigitalMoonshotforAfrica_Report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

## Microsoft's contributions

Microsoft is contributing to these efforts through its Airband Initiative which aligns with the company's mission to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more. The Airband Initiative adopts a human-centered and technology-agnostic approach to defining and advancing technology. It focuses on people's ability to afford, adopt, and use technology rather than on the deployment of technology irrespective of its equitable adoption and use.

Microsoft launched the Airband Initiative<sup>5</sup> in 2017 to eliminate the broadband gap in rural areas. Through the Airband Initiative, we partner with internet and energy access providers, telecom equipment makers, nonprofits, and local entrepreneurs to advance digital equity—access to affordable internet, affordable devices, and digital skills—as a platform for empowerment and digital transformation across the world. By July 2022, Microsoft Airband partners are projected to extend internet connectivity to at least 40 million unserved people.<sup>6</sup>

Microsoft's strategy in Africa typically involves partnerships with local internet providers to catalyze the creation of a "digital equity platform". This includes access to broadband, skilling and in some cases, the provision of devices. Once this platform is in place, Microsoft convenes additional public-private partnerships to deliver digitally transformative solutions in various sectors, such as education, agriculture, rural enterprise, and health. These platforms focus on improving the productivity and the livelihood of local community members, building more sustainable and resilient communities, and fostering inclusive development. Microsoft currently has 16 active projects in Africa covering 4 million people. The company expects to reach 6.5 million Africans by July 2022. Key partnerships include:

- In August 2020, Microsoft Airband launched a public-private partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to bring internet access to more women around the world, expanding women's economic opportunities and enabling digital development services. Projects are being deployed with six participating Airband partners across the globe, including Mawingu and M-KOPA in Kenya.<sup>7</sup>
- In Ghana, as part of the Airband Initiative, Microsoft partnered with government officials to ensure strong regulations were in place so that TV white spaces and other technologies could be used to extend networks quickly in unserved, predominantly rural areas. Regulations in Ghana now permit affordable broadband access to over 800,000 previously underserved people living in the rural eastern part of the country.<sup>8</sup>
- In Kenya, Microsoft Airband leveraged TV white spaces to bring internet access to the city of Nanyuki, a market town nearly 200 km from Nairobi. The technology reduced average household spend on internet access by nearly 15 percent. Access to the internet has also enabled students at local schools to improve their scores on the Kenya National Exam.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Microsoft Airband. <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/corporate-responsibility/airband>

<sup>6</sup> Microsoft On the Issues. "The path to prosperity through access to high-speed internet," October 7, 2019.

<https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2019/10/07/the-path-to-prosperity-through-access-to-high-speed-internet/>

<sup>7</sup> United States Agency for International Development. USAID/Microsoft Airband Initiative Factsheet, June 3, 2021.

<https://www.usaid.gov/digital-development/usaids-microsoft-airband-initiative>

<sup>8</sup> Microsoft On the Issues. "The path to prosperity through access to high-speed internet," October 7, 2019.

<https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2019/10/07/the-path-to-prosperity-through-access-to-high-speed-internet>

<sup>9</sup> Microsoft 4Afrika. "Mawingu: Connecting the Unconnected." <https://www.microsoft.com/africa/4afrika/mawingu.aspx>

- [Microsoft 4Afrika ran TV white spaces pilots in other countries across Africa](#), including Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Tanzania. Namibia is home to the largest TV white spaces pilot, connecting 28 schools and 24,000 students. In Botswana, three hospitals and five clinics are bringing specialized telemedicine services to more than 3,000 patients. Many of these patients are women receiving access to maternal care for the first time.

## Our Aim

Today, we continue to invest in Africa, working alongside start-ups, partners, small-to-medium enterprises, governments and youth, with a focus on delivering affordable access to the internet, developing skilled workforces and investing in local technology solutions.

Closing the digital divide once and for all requires the engagement of companies like Microsoft, but importantly, the financial support of international financing organizations around the world. Internet connectivity and technology infrastructure has made up a very small percentage of development bank funding historically, and that will need to change to bring connectivity to the more than three billion people around the globe who lack access to some form of internet connection.

Through Microsoft's work and engagement, the goal is not just to connect people, but provide a blueprint for other public and private sector entities to think about connectivity as a core part of their investments in health, gender equity, water, energy or any other core area of sustainable development.

In addition to connectivity Microsoft is engaged in areas across the technology ecosystem, including in cloud infrastructure, research and development centers, skilling, and capacity building, and we welcome the opportunity to provide you with additional details in the coming period.