

Inaugural GITEX Africa shows global commitment to African digital economy

It's a polarising time for tech: Elizabeth Holmes just moved into her jail cell, and every day supposedly brings us one step closer to an AI extinction event. Meanwhile, David Johnson checks in from a purpose-built air conditioned tent in Marrakech, where he's bullishly being told that tech will be Africa's saviour.

This week Morocco has become the centre of the global tech community's effort to advance Africa's digital economy as the first edition of GITEX Africa takes place in Marrakech. Bringing together an impressive array of figures from governments, business, big tech, startups, and the investor community, the event aims to accelerate and catalyse the continent's ambitious digital transformation journey.

A feeling that GITEX Africa is helping to make up for lost time grips the event, with attendees from the continent seizing on the rare opportunity to lay out their ambitions to a global audience on home turf.

GITEX Africa's large scale reflects the ambitions of Africa's digital movement. Cross-continental initiatives are apparent everywhere; Smart Africa's vision to create a single digital market in Africa by 2030 is one of many.

Africa's vibrant startup ecosystem also continues to grab headlines with the

creation of seven unicorns over the last few years. According to analysts Briter Bridges, African startups raised a total of \$5.4B across 900-plus deals in 2022.

Moroccan digital development

Mr. Sidi Mohammed Drissi Melyani, the General Director of Morocco's Digital Development Agency, commented that "hosting GITEX Africa underlines Morocco's commitment to work alongside the private and public sector to accelerate Africa's digital infrastructure development, while promoting cross-continental e-governance policies that improve digital transparency, openness and process integration."

GITEX Africa 2023 will also accentuate the progress of Morocco's digital development strategy, strengthening its position among the top three African countries with the best ICT infrastructure, and underlining its status as having one of the continent's most advanced telecommunications markets.

Lagos and beyond: Africa's Silicon Valley

Babajide Sanwo-olu, Executive Governor of the Lagos State in Nigeria, was among the keynote speakers at the GITEX Africa Digital Summit. He suggested Africa is on a fast-track to becoming the next Silicon Valley, stressing the importance of investing in African youth – which makes up over 60% of the continent's population. He also noted encouragingly that around 30% of investment in Africa is already dedicated to the digital economy.

Mr. Sanwo-olu also said Lagos is already home to some of Africa's largest data centres, while the state's Start-Up Act 2022 and Knowledge, Innovation, Technology, and Entrepreneurship (KITE) Project in the Yaba suburb are propelling Lagos, and Nigeria into a hub of global innovation.

"The Yaba Start-Up policy will elevate Lagos as a city ready to become a global player," said Mr. Sanwo-olu. "In a few years, not only will Africa be supplying the bulk of professionals required (in the global IT industry) but it will also be creating a lot of jobs.

TalentQL is one of 60-plus Nigerian startups this week looking to scale-up its operations and collaborate with fellow innovators and investors. Founded in 2021, TalentQL helps companies build top-tier teams by hiring, developing and managing tech talent remotely.

"The focus for us is to bridge the divide between demand and supply for tech talent in Africa," said Godwin Nwalozie, Head of Operations at TalentQL, which

has operations in Nigeria, the UK, Rwanda, and the USA. Nwalozie said demand for African talent is now higher than ever.

Financial inclusion

The continent's robust fintech sector is estimated to reach revenues of \$65B by 2030, growing at the world's fastest rate at 13 times over the next seven years.

This presents a unique opportunity for the continent to leapfrog outdated stages of technological development and move straight to more advanced solutions that are evident at GITEX Africa's Fintech Summit, one of ten dedicated conference tracks at Africa's most comprehensive leadership conference programme.

Aalya Ghouli, CEO of DIGIFI and DIGISERV at BNP Paribas, a speaker at the Fintech Summit, said: "GITEX Africa is a unique opportunity to bring together the African ecosystem around a common goal: to accelerate digitalisation in Africa and position the continent as a key global player in the development of technological innovation."

Digital development backed by governments

In a testament to the importance of the role of governments in creating nurturing ecosystems the Togo Government announced that they have selected Atos and IDEMIA to build its National eID system. The solution will include a citizen portal, mobile app, cybersecurity, core biometric system, enrolment kits and personalisation system for the new eID cards.

Alpha Barry, CEO Atos Africa, commented: "The biometric eID solution will play a crucial role in Togo's digital transformation and national development. Atos is committed to delivering a reliable and secure solution that meets the needs of the government and citizens. We are proud to leverage our expertise in biometrics, cybersecurity and digital transformation to support Togo's ambitions and contribute to a more inclusive and connected world."

Challenges ahead

Lacina Koné, CEO of *Smart Africa* commented in his opening remarks that "the

road ahead may be challenging, but I have an unwavering faith in the collective genius and resilience of the African people. They have showed time and time again that they are a force to be reckoned with”.

He made clear that “our journey is far from over: we stand at a pivotal moment where decisions we make today will shape the trajectory of Africa’s digital future: a future defined by innovation, sustainability and inclusivity. A future where technology is not just a luxury but an enabler of progress for all.”

“At GITEX” he continued, “we can highlight collective solutions emerging from the continent – and have a chance to collaborate with like-minded visionaries. We should do this via our guiding principles of embracing collaboration, fostering inclusivity and embracing sustainability”.

These challenges raised by Lacina Koné are varied and significant. GITEX aims to tackle everything from: the need for greater internet coverage (including an overhaul of much outdated infrastructure), the creation of a more developed cyber security industry, the urgent need to stem migration in order to fill the talent shortage and, crucially, the provision and granting of access to much greater levels of funding.

GITEX Africa is a timely event for a hugely promising continent.