



CONNECT AFRICA SUMMIT

COMBINING C2C & F-SAT

HILTON DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA. 11TH-12TH SEPTEMBER 2018

ATTENDANCE STATISTICS



257 Attendees



29 Solution Providers



26 Countries



47 Speakers

PRESENTATIONS

View presentations from the conference programme on our website:

<http://extensia-ltd.com/blog/>

REPORT FROM THE CONFERENCE CHAIR

Data, platforms, and communities: how industry and government can promote a Connected Digital Africa

Extensia's fifth annual Connect-to-Connect (C2C) Africa summit, repositioned as the Connect Africa Summit (CAS) 2018, wrapped up in Durban, South Africa this month with a two-day lineup of 12 keynotes, 7 panels and 2 workshops.

The participants represented 102 organisations from across 26 countries. They had a wide range of discussions at CAS 2018 on how to accelerate the vision of an inter-connected digital Africa, with inputs from government agencies, industry leaders, technology experts, service operators, solutions providers, technology experts, academia and civil society.



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Inter-Connectivity

Inter-connectivity developments span inter-continental, pan-African, regional and national initiatives. Mauritius and South Africa are countries which lead in ITU assessment of information societies in Africa, based on a combination of parameters such as broadband and mobile infrastructure and user adoption.

Ben Roberts, Group CTO, Liquid Telecom, charted the rise of broadband data networks in Africa and the need for better intra-regional connectivity. Trade agreements can also boost regional economies. Digital infrastructure can transform sectors in Africa ranging from agriculture and health to transportation and environment.

Fixed-line fibre networks criss-crossing the continent, coupled with innovation in emerging technologies like IoT and cloud, can transform Africa's business and public sectors. Digital will underlie the rollout and management of mega-infrastructure projects in Africa as well.

Kevin Viret, Business Development Director at Yahsat, explained how satellite broadband can power government solutions, corporate networking, broadcast media, and operator backhaul. Increase in broadband connectivity has a notable correlation with increase in GDP for emerging economies.

YahClick is Yahsat's high-performance satellite broadband service for home and business users in the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Asia. "Yahsat, with its latest satellite Al Yah 3, will provide 28 African markets with Ka-band coverage, reaching over 60% of the population," said Viret.

Case studies include access to pension funds by retired government employees in remote regions of South Africa, and educational content for children in rural Kenya via a partnership with the Maasai Wildlife Conservation Trust.

In addition to the above initiatives, solution providers from NuRAN Wireless, World Telecom Labs, and Tejas Networks shared insights on how they are able to improve digital access and service quality in a broad-based manner.

Digital platforms

Inter-connectivity across Africa has helped the rise of digital platforms integrating e-commerce, content and mobile payment, explained Herman Singh, Group Executive, Innovation Strategy, MTN Group. Africa's key megatrends bode well for the development of e-commerce, such as 400 million internet users, rapidly emerging middle class, world's youngest population, underdeveloped brick-and-mortar retail, and decreasing data costs.



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MTN Mobile Money is live in 15 countries, and expanding the footprint of financial inclusion. Jumia is capturing a huge part of the opportunity for e-commerce, logistics, and marketplaces. Digital economy models from India and China can be tweaked in unique ways for African markets.

Singh advised governments to pass regulations that make it easier to start businesses, promote investment in power and transportation, drive up-skilling, and incentivise local content generation. Businesses should refine their models of partnerships, and drive access to e-services.

Regulation

Carlos Rey-Moreno, Project Coordinator, Association for Progressive Communications, showed how innovations and progressive regulation in spectrum management could benefit small operators and community networks, an approach backed by the ITU.

This includes freeing up unlicensed spectrum for WiFi as well as television whitespace, with emerging cases in Zenzeleni Networks (South Africa), UHF spectrum allocation in Mozambique, and community licenses in Rhizomatic (Mexico). Other options include low-cost GSM.

Panellists from CRASA and INCM (Mozambique National Institute of Communications) shared regulator perspectives on improving connectivity in Africa. Network and data monetisation techniques were presented by Detecon, Global IP, and Global Good Networks.

Reaching the unreached

One challenge in the digital economy is overcoming the disparity between well-connected urban clusters and remote rural areas. Affordable Internet, regulatory incentives, and community engagement have been measures used to address this gap.

“Achieving the SDGs requires affordable internet access for all,” urged Mortimer Hope, Managing Director, GH Communications. Although the average price of mobile data was decreasing in Africa, in 2015 it was still very high at 17.5% of monthly income; the UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development has set this target at 5% of monthly income.

“Closing the connectivity gap will take innovation in policy, technology and business models,” said Hope. Spectrum policies should balance licensed and licence-exempt approaches to maximise innovation and investment; facilitate the sharing of under-utilised spectrum; and encourage the provisioning of more unlicensed spectrum.

A mix of technologies will be needed to provide affordable connectivity everywhere, eg. fibre, mobile, FWA, satellite, HAPS. Combinations of these technologies in inter-connectivity initiatives were presented by FoberCo, ABS, NewTech and Ceragon.



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Panellists from Project Isizwe, World Wide Web Foundation, and Genesis Community IT Initiative showcased the power of engagement at grassroots levels to bring the benefits of ICTs to local communities.

“Over half the world’s population is still offline,” said Onica Makwakwa, A4AI Africa Regional Coordinator, World Wide Web Foundation. A4AI is the world’s broadest technology sector alliance working to drive down the price of broadband by transforming policy and regulatory frameworks.

Its best practices are grounded on the principles of Internet freedom and the fundamental rights of expression, assembly, and association online. In Africa, it is working in Ghana, Nigeria, Mozambique, and Liberia.

“Our Affordability Report research shows that unless we take urgent action now to improve affordability and close the gender and poverty gaps in access, we will miss the UN target by over 20 years,” cautioned Makwakwa.

She called for more public access solutions, competitive markets, innovative uses of spectrum, effective use of universal service and access funds, time-bound broadband rollout, and more commitment to SDG targets.

Customer-centricity: The data advantage

In addition to supply-side dynamics, a range of experts also addressed demand-side economics in the connectivity and services domain. For example, James Williams, Founder/CEO, MrConnectivity, showed how mobile engagement levels are increasing globally.

Few operators, however, are tapping the full power of Application to Person (A2P) SMS and the benefits of mobile engagement. “Spam needs to be eliminated and delivery channels cleaned for the benefit of all,” he urged. Use cases for A2P SMS are limitless, ranging from balance inquiries and booking confirmation to service alerts and team communication.

SMS continues to deliver when it comes to open rates and URL CTRs. Benefits of effective mobile customer engagement include monetisation, stickiness, and social mobility. “The key to effective customer engagement is customisation and real-time interactions. Making each person feel special drives conversion,” Williams summed up.

Customer experience drives hyper-relevance, explained De Wet Bisschoff, MD Communications Media, Technology for Africa, Accenture. He defined the ‘love index’ for experience in five parameters: fun, relevance, engagement, social connects, and helpfulness. The combination of design and intelligence leads to better business performance and profit.



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Having a data-centric foundation builds the capability for analytics, according to Steven Sutherland, Divisional Executive, Adapt IT. The power of analytics ranges from descriptive and diagnostic to predictive and prescriptive actions. “Analytics informs the ICT service provider or operator, enables the regulatory authorities, and supports government in its quest to connect the unconnected,” explained Sutherland.

5G networks and smart city initiatives unlock new potential for data, which can lead to new business models, greater value, and better customer experience. Integrated and scaleable approaches are need for data gathering, monitoring, reporting and decision-making. Device management, KYC, regulations and general oversight all need to adapt quickly to the challenges of maintaining accuracy, privacy and auditability, according to Sutherland.

“Data is the medium of commerce around the globe. The most valuable source data comes from telecommunications,” said Nicole Nixon, CEO, Listing Central. Businesses should take care to ensure protection of systems, businesses and personal data, she cautioned.

With appropriate frameworks based on trust and monetisation, customer data can be effectively leveraged for marketing and forecasting, with notable business impact in sectors ranging from education to healthcare.

Partnerships

The theme of partnerships cut across throughout the conference, as a key platform for co-creation and collaboration for the digital future. For example, infrastructure sharing requires cooperation between service providers and operators, in a favourable regulatory climate. Benefits include lower costs, higher quality, increased flexibility, and better risk management, as discussed in panels featuring Helios Towers, Camusat, Eneza Technologies, SEACOM Angola Telecom, BofiNet, and BCN.

Infrastructure sharing can involve competitors as well as third-party providers. It calls for trust and maturity of the players in deciding to pool together physical assets and financial resources, along with regulator support. Emerging trends include sharing of infrastructure across sectors like energy, water, railways and telecoms.

Open innovation models have been leveraged to bring together government, universities, industry and community organisations for tech-based economic development in Africa, according to Ansu Sooful, CEO, Aizatron.

Leadership in the digital age will actually need to thrive on uncertainty, and be able to find out digitally-powered solutions for everyday problems. Digital artisans will leverage and create more opportunity via engaged communities and smart cities.



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Effective collaboration platforms will be needed to build out appropriate projects and create IP for commercialisation and community benefit. Digital literacy will need to be increased across the board. A number of projects were highlighted by Sooful, including the community network of Elsie's River. Partners in such initiatives include the City of Cape Town, MobileLearn Africa, African Ideas, SAP, Dimension Data, Britehouse, and Microsoft.

The road ahead

The concluding panel comprising of Liquid Telecom, Expresso Senegal, MrConnectivity and Hughes Network Systems shared visions, targets and roadmaps for a connected digital Africa. They called for more collaboration between the various technical and industry groups, better content in local languages, and cooperation between ministries.

Other recommendations were for progressive taxation policies to boost ICT adoption and manufacture, and a stronger data culture across the board. More trust and momentum are needed to boost collective progress on the digital front.

In sum, a palette of inter-connectivity options has emerged for African countries to share infrastructure and data platforms. With innovative business models and forward-looking regulations, it will be possible to reach the unreached and empower customers, citizens and communities. Partnerships hold the key to building these successful digital bridges on a Pan-African level.

With kind thanks to Sponsors, Partners, Speakers and Attendees who ensured the success of the inaugural Connect Africa Summit and its intended purpose of driving the connectivity agenda for Africa, we look forward to staying in touch and meeting again next year.

Dr. Madanmohan Rao
Conference Chair
Extensia Events