

Digital transformation in East Africa

Digital Transformation is both the challenge and opportunity of our generation. The rise of computers is creating the most seismic shift in society since the Industrial Revolution over a century ago. Data is increasingly the currency by which future success - and the decisions to reach that success - is funded.



Ashley Boag, Acting Managing Director
of SAP East Africa

No part of the world is exempt from this. Rather, any region that ignores the eventuality of digital transformation is fated to a disappointing future, left dependent on others for its wellbeing. This is the time for rising economies to shine. Whereas many developed nations have invested heavily on preceding technologies, countries in regions such as Africa, South America and Southeast Asia are able to leapfrog ahead and take advantage of this new era.

East Africa is often named as a region that appreciates the situation at hand. According to Ashley Boag, acting managing director of SAP East Africa, countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania have a solid grasp on the principles of digital transformation.

"There is definite recognition that technology and African innovation need to be a big factor and focus. Governments and companies know they have to invest in innovation if they want to continue their growth paths and even leapfrog others. More and more companies around East Africa are asking what we see as the key threads in technologies such as big data and the Internet of Things. They are already wrapping their heads around it and they understand that to stay competitive, they have to make significant investments in the future."

Boag cites a few examples, such as Kenya's innovation hubs - including iHub and Rwanda's aggressive broadband expansion. Regional ambitions stretch as far as potential drone airports, though more immediate challenges are not being ignored. There has been growing momentum across the spectrum of sectors: utilities, healthcare, financial services and

agriculture are all experiencing technology investment led by leaders who understand they are aiming for more than just efficiency and savings. They are building the region's future.

"There is a renewed sense of cooperation and positivity in East Africa - quite a positive view and outlook going forward. It's moderated, but it is a general positive sentiment. When I was at the World Economic Forum on Africa, held in Rwanda recently, that sentiment came through multilaterally."

There is a lot of agreement that East Africa is in a relatively good space now, bolstered by more cooperation between the various countries, he says.

"We are seeing the companies are asking the right questions. Many have skipped the efficiency, cost-saving level of thinking. Instead they wonder about what the relevant large trends coming to their industry and how they can engage with these to be relevant in the long term. It's a complex conversation, but there is a willingness to listen and a realisation that they have to come up with their own innovations. SAP may provide the platforms, but it is the ideas of governments, private companies and individuals being put to the test."

Digital transformation poses a challenge across the globe. No region, country or company will be left unshaken by its impact. Those who see its potential and grab it by the horns are destined to come out on top.

If East Africa continues on this course it has laid out, one day everyone else will look to its example on how to win in the 21st century, concludes Boag.

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