

Smart Africa – Acceleration of the Digital Transformation in Africa

Contributing to a Single Digital Market in Africa

The challenge

Africa's digital economy grew from 1.1% to GDP in 2012 to 4.5% in 2020 and is expected to reach 5.2% by 2025 and 8.5% by 2050 (World Bank, 2024). This trend holds immense potential for socio-economic growth and technological innovation if leveraged sustainably across sectors. However, while Sub-Sahara Africa has the highest internet usage growth rate globally, from 1% in 2000 to 30% today, over 840 million people lack stable internet access (Internet Society, 2022). With only 25% of the African population being online, limited access is primarily due to insufficient connectivity infrastructure leading to high internet access costs (GSMA, 2024). Expanding broadband coverage by just 10% in African countries could boost GDP per capita by 2.5%, highlighting the transformative impact to reduce poverty, increase household consumption and achieve higher levels of socio-economic participation (GSMA, 2020). As a pan-African initiative with 40 African Member States, Smart Africa addresses these challenges with the vision to create a Single Digital Market by 2030.

Smart Africa, a political alliance of 40 African Heads of State and Government, is a driving force behind this transformation, aiming to build a **continental Digital Single Market by 2030** and ensure **affordable access to broadband and ICT-based economies**. Representing over **1.1 billion people**, Smart Africa is a highly influential political and technical partner for the **German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)** in shaping digitalization efforts across Africa.

Our approach

The GIZ Smart Africa Project is commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and collaborates with Smart Africa in the following three components:

- **Implementation of Cross-Border Services in Member States** – supporting the effective implementation of digital initiatives to provide impactful, scalable solutions across Member States
- **Supporting Organizational Development** – strengthening systems and structures to foster sustainable implementation capacities
- **Mobilisation of Partnerships and Resources** – facilitating public and private dialogues to advance effective implementation and support strategic development

Beyond these core areas of expertise, the project functions as GIZ's Key Account to Smart Africa to leverage GIZ's global expertise and continent-wide structures in the digital economy. This shall strengthen Smart Africa's initiatives even further and foster efficient and well aligned collaboration with a broad range of partners.

Project name	Smart Africa – Acceleration of the digital transformation in Africa
Commissioned by	Federal German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Africa wide with various Member States
Lead executing agency	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ)
Duration	01.06.2024 – 30.05.2027

The benefits

Smart Africa as Africa’s Agenda Setter: As the continent’s key organisation for digital transformation, Smart Africa shapes Africa’s digital future. The collaboration positions Germany as a strategic partner, directly contributing to digital policy frameworks with outreach to 40 Member States and over 1.1 billion people.

Leverage Across GIZ Programmes: Through Smart Africa, Germany anchors digital innovation across sectors such as health, trade, infrastructure, finance, climate, data governance and private sector cooperation. The project enhances coherence, impact, and scalability of German development cooperation – making digital a cross-cutting driver of transformation.

Strengthening African Ownership in Global Debates: By leveraging Smart Africa’s role as an honest broker between African states, international partners, and the private sector, Germany helps to shape global debates on key issues like AI and digital infrastructure – promoting values such as human rights, data protection, and digital sovereignty.

Agile Piloting & Regional Scale Up Implementation: Through Smart Africa’s project two-way implementation methodology, innovation can be market-sounded via Pilot Projects and Blueprints whereas feasible projects can be scaled up for cross-country implementation.

Success factors

The project builds on six years of trust and collaboration between GIZ and SAS, ensuring strong foundations for future activities. This joint cooperation enabled more than 20 products in the key sectors of health, trade, payment systems, data centers, data governance, Artificial Intelligence, cyber security and digital skills. The project’s success is rooted in three key factors.

First, the long-standing, trust-based collaboration between GIZ and Smart Africa provides a strong political foundation and privileged access to decision-makers, ensuring effective coordination and implementation. Second, the project’s flexible, demand-driven design allows it to adapt to evolving national and regional priorities, which enhances relevance and ownership among African partners. Third, the project leverages a well-established

network of European and African stakeholders, enabling efficient agenda setting, technical exchange, and the alignment of joint initiatives—thereby positioning Germany as a key enabler of digital transformation on the continent.

Examples from the field

Contribution to the National Data Strategy for Senegal

In close collaboration with Smart Africa and GIZ’s Data Economy program, the Government of Senegal, through the Ministry of Communication, Telecommunications and Digital Economy, successfully launched its National Data Strategy as part of the Senegal Digital Strategy 2025 (SN2025). Anchored in an inclusive, participatory process involving key national stakeholders, the strategy defines 59 concrete measures to harness data as a driver for sustainable development, innovation, value creation, and above all, digital sovereignty.

This strategic framework aligns with Senegal’s Adjusted and Accelerated Priority Action Plan (PAP2A) and positions the country to make evidence-based decisions and stimulate digital entrepreneurship. The joint effort showcases how Smart Africa’s continental mandate and convening power, combined with GIZ’s technical expertise and long-standing engagement, can deliver high-impact, country-owned results that strengthen data governance and foster a people-centered digital transformation.

Scaling the Smart Africa Digital Academy (SADA)

Germany has been instrumental in scaling the Smart Africa Digital Academy (SADA), which provides digital skills training to African citizens, especially in underserved areas. Through the collaboration, over 5,000 participants, including policymakers, regulators, and entrepreneurs, have been trained in key digital competencies, including AI, cybersecurity, and data governance. This initiative also focuses on improving digital policies across the continent, fostering collaboration between political leaders and regulatory bodies. Additionally, with the support of GIZ, SADA has mobilized a \$20 million grant from the World Bank to expand its reach, contributing to the growth of Africa’s digital economy.

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