

villages

neighbours

rural

communities

businesses

people

families

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homes

## Africa.Connected

neighbours

rural

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people

# Leave no one behind: uniting to bridge the digital chasm in Africa

By Hisham Hendi – Managing Director, Vodacom Tanzania

**Life as we knew it is no more.** The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly changed our lives and the digital landscape globally, with an unparalleled acceleration in digital transformation. While the telecoms community in sub-Saharan Africa has responded to this crisis with great tenacity to keep citizens and businesses connected, north of a billion people on the continent are still not able to reap the benefits of being connected. Remedying this is the seminal challenge of our time.

Today, as part of our Africa.Connected campaign, Vodacom Tanzania PLC is proud to join our teams across Africa in the Vodacom Group to invite governments, industry and businesses to further accelerate our digitalisation efforts and ensure that everyone is connected. This campaign builds on our six-point plan commitment to future-proof our network and infrastructure, accelerate support to government (to support eHealth and eEducation), enhance digital accessibility and literacy for the most vulnerable, promote widespread digital adoption for business, and support our societies to overcome the COVID-19 crisis through targeted digital adoption and enabling financial inclusion.

The economic repercussions of the pandemic have been brutal, with sub-Saharan Africa facing a significant economic crisis. According to the World Bank in Africa, growth in Sub-Saharan Africa is predicted to fall to -3.3% in 2020, pushing the region into its first recession in 25 years.

To advance Africa's economic recovery post-pandemic, the continent must accelerate digitalisation and expand regional cooperation. We have the opportunity to transform the entire continent, improving living conditions and economic opportunities for more than 1 billion people. To support this, Vodacom Tanzania is launching the Africa.Connected campaign.

Vodacom Tanzania's vision is to take the country into the digital age and transform lives through technology. As such, we are ready to continue to support and work with government, industry and social sector institutions to expand and broaden digital offerings, foster an enabling environment for rapid digitalisation and speed up infrastructure investments.

In November of 2020, in his inaugural address to the 12th Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania, His Excellency President John Pombe Magufuli outlined several ambitious and commendable targets for his government over the next five years. Key targets are for:

- Broadband coverage to rise from 45% to 80%
- Increased handset usage to cover the whole country
- R&D in ICT to be made a priority
- Electrification to become a key component of the country's energy policy

All having the stated aim of growing the national economy to benefit all Tanzanians. Vodacom Tanzania fully supports these goals and is keen to work collaboratively with the government and its relevant stakeholders as well as non-governmental and private institutions to make this a reality.

Partnerships with governments, businesses, and organisations, both local and international, are an important cornerstone of continued success in digitalisation. We must maintain a collaborative approach to build a future that is fair, inclusive, and sustainable. Initiatives such as the African Union Commission Digital Transformation Strategy and the UN Digital Cooperation Roadmap provide sensible frameworks for how this could progress.

## Public-private partnerships are crucial to accelerating development

There is much at stake and ambitious targets to close the current digital divide that we simply can't achieve if we work in isolation. What we must put in place is a strategic and considered set of public-private partnerships to compete in the global digital economy.

The mobile industry worked hand-in-hand with governments and businesses to develop initiatives that helped alleviate the impact of the pandemic on citizens; such as mobile-money transaction fee waivers, discounts on data tariffs for health and educational sites, as well as cash and equipment donations. Mobile companies and other industry players have supported vulnerable communities during the pandemic, while also contributing to economic recovery efforts. Vodacom Tanzania extended direct support to the governments of The United Republic of Tanzania and Zanzibar through a donation of Tsh. 2.3 billion as well as providing free internet connectivity to the Dar es Salaam Ministry of Health offices.

Projects such as M-Pawa and M-Kulima on the M-Pesa platform helped small scale farmers access unsecured loans, connect to markets, improve their value chains and tap into much needed education and information on agriculture and farming. The M-Pesa platform itself performed a key role in reducing the cash-reliant nature of most commercial transactions thus helping increase efficiency and security for many small businesses, as well as helping to greatly increase financial inclusion. On education and learning, the instant school project worked to provide free educational content, not just academic content but also vocational and more practically oriented information for all learners, even those not in formal institutions.

## We must get more people online

Internet connectivity across Africa is still low, and there's a need to use innovative ways to connect the unconnected and the underserved. The GSMA found that the mobile market in sub-Saharan Africa will reach several important milestones over the next five years: half a billion mobile subscribers in 2021, 1 billion mobile connections in 2024, and 50% subscriber penetration by 2025. These achievements will be underpinned by operators' continued investment in network infrastructure.

To support broader digitalisation, major infrastructure expansions will be required, including those in backbone networks and last-mile connectivity. It is estimated that governments, development finance institutions, companies, and investors will need to spend \$100 billion on key ICT infrastructure by 2030 to achieve universal broadband access. And with 5G on the horizon, although not yet at the point of rollout in most African countries, there is no question that there is a significant task ahead.

There is no 'one size fits all' solution to connect everyone across all markets. Each country faces unique challenges and conditions. The government of the United Republic of Tanzania has already taken important steps and made great strides in the effort to get its citizens connected and has committed itself to continue to do so. However, there is a role for other stakeholders in the country to play. As such, Vodacom Tanzania and the Africa.Connected campaign will be at the forefront of driving the conversation in Tanzania about digitalisation and the strategies, commitments and resources that will be needed from all stakeholders in order to achieve our own goals as well as the government's stated targets.

The digitalisation of our continent will not happen overnight. This is a long-term commitment that is only possible through sustained, robust and authentic collaboration.