Enabling Affordable Connectivity & Entrepreneurship for Accelerated Digital Transformation in Africa

Abstract

Accelerating digital transformation in Africa requires bridging the digital connectivity divide and building a sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem to enable development of innovative digital services. The current broadband statistics leaves a large section of the population from taking part in the digital economy and hence experience severely curtailed societal services such as education, health and business opportunities, which is exasperated due to the COVID virus epidemic. Digital inclusion should be the goal as it brings together affordable high-speed internet access, information technology services, and digital literacy in ways that promote sustainable development for communities and individuals trying to navigate and participate in the digital world. A CSIR and UNDP collaborative project to support rural digital entrepreneurs (RDEs) to roll out affordable broadband networks in rural areas and development of sustainable business models recently started in South Africa with the aim to scale-up and spread the initiative to the whole of Africa, following the lessons from pilot phases in South Africa. The presentation aims to discuss the positive impact such a project in for sustainable digital connectivity, development of innovative digital societal services and sustainable business model involving rural digital entrepreneurs (RDEs). Engagement of RDEs with mobile communications companies is also promoted to ensuring infrastructure sharing, sustainable roaming and affordable data services at a national level. The RDEs have a potential for creating innovative digital services & industries, contributing to sustainable socio-economic development, improve agricultural systems, mining product innovation, development of value added ICT services and promoting effective utilization of natural and technological resources. The support to the RDEs with demand side uptake of broadband services, involvement and co-creation with the beneficiary communities to develop innovative digital services will lead to the creation of smart rural communities, benefitting from distance e-learning, smart agriculture with digital market access for agro-produce and e-health service industries.