

Africa is ripe for investment

By [Julien Fouriot](#)

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Even though economic growth is slowing globally, technology innovation is unlocking unparalleled opportunities for countries all over the world. Nowhere is this more evident than in Africa where developing economies are in a prime position to harness the potential of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and leapfrog other more advanced nations.



Image source: Gallo/Getty.

Thanks to the availability of sophisticated technology solutions at affordable rates, Africa can more effectively address some of the key challenges that have proven to be both its biggest bugbear and greatest opportunity. Things like infrastructure development, better education, improved healthcare, the list goes on. All of this is made possible thanks to enhanced bandwidth, the ubiquity of mobile devices, and the arrival of multinational data centres in South Africa that bring with them access to things such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and augmented reality.

Positioned for growth

According to the [African Development Bank](#), the continent's general economic performance continues to improve. Gross domestic product (GDP) reached an estimated 3.5% last year, up from the 2.1% of 2016. Furthermore, GDP growth is projected to accelerate to 4% this year and 4.1% in 2020. It goes on to state that regional integration has been one of the keys for this growth, not just on a trade and economic front, but also on the delivery of regional goods.

Following the inaugural Africa Investment Forum last year, it launched a [digital platform](#) to connect investors with investment opportunities across the continent. This also provides a live database of private and public private partnership projects, as well as being a repository of information on investors and technical assistance providers on the continent. As of earlier this month, it is currently hosting a community of more than 500 users, 110 companies, 30% of whom are outside Africa.

All this combines to give further impetus to how important mobile technology is to the success of all countries on the continent. South Africa led the charge with mobile in the early 90s, quickly followed by others. Today, Africa is a mobile-first (and in some parts mobile-only) continent where innovations such as mobile money, e-learning, and telemedicine are becoming commonplace.

Mobile land rush

With Africa's working-age population [projected](#) to increase from 705 million in 2018 to almost one billion by 2030, more needs to be done to capitalise on the potential that exists. Mobile devices that are physically better suited to the harsh environmental conditions of the continent need to take priority. These ruggedised handsets must be developed to still provide all the functionality of sophisticated smartphones while providing protection against the elements (dust, heat, water).

Handsets are in many respects the enablers to harness 4IR as it provides users with a gateway to not only access the internet, but also the likes of the cloud and mobile money. This has proved to be a boon for entrepreneurs who do not have access to laptops and desktop machines. Mobile empowers people from all walks of life and education levels to get information and equip themselves for a digitally-led future that is arriving faster than many anticipated.

And this is where the importance of foreign investment is coming to bear. Service providers and manufacturers can tailor their offerings and help Africans embrace a 4IR environment to not only have the skills required for a connected world, but also engage and transact with people from around the world. Inasmuch as the technology provides a platform for skills development, it also facilitates significant economic growth that will make the continent even more attractive to outside investors.

Africa is in a prime position to take charge in a 4IR environment, but it needs to be bold and quick to capitalise on the technologies that enable it to do so.

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