

The digital life expectancy of Africa's youth

There is no doubt that Africa's digital-born, digital-first Generation Z - emerging as the largest youth population concentrated in Africa - will play a definitive role in not only creating a digital economy for Africa, but also have a significant impact on how the Afro-optimistic 'Africa Rising' narrative is played out on the global stage. These are the skills they will need met.

 By Louise Marsland 8 May 2018



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In a report on Africa's Generation Z, Liquid Telecom, researched the digital economy in Africa and the impact Generation Z will have on growing digital societies in Africa. By 2020, the digital economy is estimated to account for over 26% of global GDP, presenting Africa with a "huge opportunity to be part of the new digital world order".

According to the report, digitalisation is expected to bring an additional \$300 billion to Africa by 2026, expanding the digital sector and fundamentally changing how people live and work.



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Liquid Telecom's *African Gen Z Report 2018*, also approached entrepreneurs, academics and business professionals to find out what new skills Africa youth will need to be part of Africa's economic growth.

These are some of the key findings:

- There's a lack of data science skills across Africa.
- Practical training is essential to add to academic degrees in new fields like data science.
- There is a desperate need for work experience programmes, especially for computer science graduates and anyone going into a digital field with maths, science, engineering, software development or coding skills.
- Business and financial skills are also needed for disciplines where ICT/IT is an essential skill, so further post-graduate training programmes are needed.
- Demand is increasing for software development skills in Africa, as it no longer makes sense for multinationals to export talent into Africa. Demand will increase for local, multi-lingual talent and partners to implement solutions on a cost-effective basis.

- It is essential that data science becomes a core competency across all tertiary curriculums, according to Dr George Njenga, Dean of Strathmore Business School in Nairobi, Kenya: “It is more important than ever before that the next-generation adopts a multifaceted approach to data science. Learning how to analyse data and extract information from data is important, but at the same time they must learn how to work alongside different types of people and organisations.”
- Africa still has enormous literacy problems and game-based programmes on tablets and computers are being created and tested.

Here are some of the challenges that are being addressed:

- One challenge isn't around the lack of coding skills, but of business solving skills. “There is a huge gap between hardcore coders and those who can develop a solution that truly works for a business,” said Megan Yates, chief scientist at Ixio Analytics. The African Leadership University in Mauritius and Rwanda, for example, is aiming to train three million African leaders by the year 2066 – with computer science and data science playing a key role, Yates recounted.
- Coding skills are essential and Governments must play a role in encouraging this, such as in Rwanda and Kenya, which are seeing the benefits emerging. Nkosi Ncube, head of Application Lab at Insight2Impact (i2i), explains: “I have a lot of confidence in this generation, which are addressing two weaknesses of the previous generation. Firstly, they are good at thinking across borders. The entrepreneurs before used to think within their own borders, but this generation thinks big – they're trying to solve problems for everybody. At the same time, they embrace the reality that there is no ‘one size- fits-all’ solution, and different regions and cultural norms necessitate innovative, tailored solutions. Secondly, this generation is attracted to teamwork, and finds it easy to form teams and share information.”
- Demand is going to increase further with the introduction of emerging technologies such as AI, blockchain and Internet of Things (IoT), reiterates Amadou Daffe, CEO and co-founder of Gebeya. “We are trying to shape our business towards the fourth industrial revolution, and have, for example, begun machine learning and data science academies aimed at teaching graduates how to become AI engineers.”
- Africa Data Centres, part of the Liquid Telecom Group, has established state-of-the-art data centres in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Harare and Nairobi, with a combined 6,800 square metres of rack space. Liquid Telecom is helping to drive the adoption and uptake of Big Data Analytics as the next ‘must have’ strategy for any business to run smoothly and smartly, enabling users to increase sales and beat the competition in a new era of multiple tools and methods for the extraction, analysis and presentation of data.

Amadou Daffe concludes: “Africa has been playing catch-up with the world when it comes to traditional industries. But software development and technology offers the lowest barrier of entry for Africa to compete - all you need is a laptop, a brain and Wi-Fi.”

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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