

# The impact of Microsoft's 4Afrika Initiative

It has been seven years since Microsoft first launched its 4Afrika Initiative - a continent-wide, multi-million dollar investment to accelerate digital transformation in Africa.

South Africa was one of the first countries to benefit, with the opening of an AppFactory in 2013 and internship programme in 2014, which took on young students for three to six months to give them hands-on digital work experience.

Today, that AppFactory and internship programme are still running, with the AppFactory recently becoming part of Microsoft's evolved Equity Equivalent Investment Programme. Across the continent, 18 other AppFactories, now known as Skills Labs, have also since opened, securing employment for 85% of its graduates.



L to R Louise Allen, VP Client Success at Broadreach Consulting; Lillian Barnard, MD Microsoft SA; Priaash Ramadeen, co-founder of The Awareness Company and Anrothe Abdella - Microsoft 4Afrika's Regional Director

Interns4Afrika has placed over 780 interns with 176 partners, while a partnership with the YALI regional leadership centre has upskilled a further 4,049 youth in South Africa.

Most recently, an AI and IoT PopUp Lab in Johannesburg provided technical training and guidance to 110 business leaders and technical specialists, including Bidvest Group and Standard Microgrid, accelerating their solutions to

commercialisation. Collectively, these and other skills development initiatives have impacted some 1.6 million Africans.

Over the last seven years, Microsoft 4Afrika has worked alongside local governments, partners, startups, SMEs and youth, offering support to develop skills and innovation – and has prioritised industries including healthcare, agriculture, financial services, education and government services.

Two of these South African partners include BroadReach Consulting, a health solutions company, and The Awareness Company, a tech startup that drives data-driven storytelling in areas including agriculture and conservation. Both organisations are working with Microsoft 4Afrika to use data in smart ways to enhance operations and impact societies.

## Using data to impact societies

BroadReach is currently one of the fastest-growing companies using Microsoft cloud services in South Africa. Their digital HIV Portfolio on Management Solution has helped an estimated 340,000 people access HIV treatment in KwaZulu-Natal where the epidemic is high.

The tools have also enabled BroadReach to reduce the time taken to analyse data from 1,000 sites in South Africa, from eight months to less than one. Their solution, powered by Vantage, Azure and Power BI, gives individuals in the health system the right information at the right time, with the right recommendations and tools to take action, helping save more lives.

The Awareness Company is one of the 300+ startups Microsoft 4Afrika has supported in Africa. The company's HYDRA platform uses advanced data aggregation and fusion engines, alongside other technologies, to enhance operational efficiency and digital transformation of industries such as agriculture and conservation. Microsoft has provided them with business development support, including access to markets and potential customers.



“The potential of solving big problems on the continent becomes tangible when partnering with Microsoft and 4Afrika,” says Priaash Ramadeen, co-founder of The Awareness Company, addressing media at a recent Microsoft event in Johannesburg.

## Creating sustainable technology solutions

“Meeting the people involved reaffirms your vision and belief that it is possible. The Awareness Company and Microsoft share a common goal: to make an impact and create sustainable technology solutions.”

In addition to BroadReach and The Awareness Company, Microsoft 4Afrika has partnered with the Centre for Proteomic and Genomic Research in Cape Town, building a new cloud computing platform to enhance the study of African genomes. Through MySkills4Afrika, it has also helped the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation use Power BI to improve healthcare management in Lesotho, and supported Brightwave Technologies in developing school connectivity and connected solutions in the Eastern Cape.

Speaking on Microsoft 4Afrika's work, regional director Amrote Abdella says, "In Africa, we understand that for people to meaningfully use and benefit from technology, we have to have the foundations of affordable access, digital skills and enabling environments for innovation in place. This has been 4Afrika's mission since 2013 – supporting entrepreneurs, building digital talent pipelines and investing in technology-enabled solutions that grow economies and impact societies."

To grow this ecosystem further, Microsoft earlier this year opened two data centres in the country, and in the past year has invested over US\$ 2.8 million in local education and skills development.

"Microsoft is committed to accelerating the pace of digital transformation in South Africa, ensuring businesses, government and citizens benefit from the Fourth Industrial Revolution," says Lillian Barnard, Managing Director of Microsoft South Africa.

"The recently opened data centres in Johannesburg and Cape Town, and ongoing work through initiatives like 4Afrika, are all milestones in the company's mission to empower every person and every organisation to achieve more."

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