Smart Africa Digital Academy (SADA)

Expanding knowledge to support Africa's digital transformation

Background

Access to broadband and internet services continues to be a major hurdle in the development of many African countries. Although sub-Saharan Africa has the world's highest growth rate for internet usage, only just over a third (34%) of the roughly 1.3 billion people in Africa regularly use the internet. In addition to insufficient infrastructure, a main reason for this lies in the comparatively high costs for internet services, which are not affordable for large parts of the population with low incomes. By contrast, high internet usage rates have great potential to boost the economic development of a country. Expanding broadband coverage in African countries by 10% would increase the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita by 2.5% (ITU, 2019).

Policies and regulations can promote the digital transformation. For this reason, the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) has concluded that improved regulation, for example, will lead to lower prices and therefore facilitate public participation in the digital transformation. The Smart Africa Digital Academy (SADA) seeks to address this by delivering the knowledge required for relevant actors to advance the digital transformation in Africa.

OBJECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTATION

The partner of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development in implementing SADA is the Smart Africa Alliance, a digitalisation initiative with 32 African member countries. SADA reaches its target groups with learning programmes developed with stakeholder groups and international organisations such as the World Bank.

SADA deploys a twin-track methodological approach:

(1) Targeted training and exchange formats to develop the skills of policy-makers in regulatory authorities and to support frameworks for more inclusive, more affordable internet access; and

(2) Broader, low-threshold training offerings for a wider audience to additionally reach the policy-makers of tomorrow and mainstream the goal of digital transformation.

The SADA learning resources are to reach 70,000 African addressees in public administration, the private sector and civil society by the end of 2023 with a strategic mix of digital self-learning and in-person training.

The SADA training sessions aim to improve participants' skills for shaping digital transformation and for formulating better ICT regulations that are inclusive, gender-sensitive and climate-friendly. Parallel to these training and professional development offerings, the dialogue and networking among participants from different African states help to develop better ICT regulations that harness the potential of the digital transformation while minimising the risks.

CURRENT STATUS

The project was officially launched in December 2020 at the Smart Africa Board Meeting and has since held numerous workshops with participants from over 20 member countries. In addition, the SADA digital learning platform went online in late September. The platform currently offers a comprehensive range of courses on topics including 'digital divide' and 'ICT infrastructure'. The offering is being continuously expanded in cooperation with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), UNESCO and other partner organisations.

SADA provides direct support to partner countries – for example, digital skills for cybersecurity, for new business models and for e-governance are developed and scaled locally. There are already official partnership agreements with 12 countries, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Tunisia and Rwanda; further negotiations are under way to achieve a wide-reaching network of partners from across Africa. SADA can serve as a model for other regions while also presenting opportunities for cooperation with global initiatives.