Transform Africa 2016 to focus on Smart Cities

Rwanda will in October 2016 host the third Transform Africa Summit that will focus on developing 'smart cities'. Under the Smart Africa Initiative, Rwanda is spearheading the smart cities agenda.

According to Dr Hamadoun Touré, the executive director of Smart Africa, the meeting will convene over 300 mayors of cities across Africa to showcase the components of a smart city.

The smart cities initiative, which aims at leveraging technology solutions to improve efficiency of cities, has seen Rwanda roll out a number of developments such as WiFi in public areas, including public transport vehicles, as well as cashless payment systems in public transport.

Currently, the initiative is backed by 11 African countries while more nations are expected to join.

Touré told The New Times that the initiative will go on with efforts to bring more countries on board.

The forthcoming Smart Africa summit will tackle the issue of developing smart cities on the continent. The initiative is on the verge of building partnerships with governments, academia, and private sector to increase its relevance in the ICT ecosystem.

During the just-concluded World Economic Forum (#WEFAfrica)on Africa in Kigali, the Smart Africa Alliance entered into a partnership with Ericsson to meet the goal of developing a more connected and fully functioning knowledge-based society in Africa.

As a result of the partnership, Ericsson will serve as a technical advisor and platinum private sector member collaborating

with the Alliance to design blueprints supporting the implementation of the Smart Africa vision and plan.

Touré said the agreement was a boost toward Smart Africa's aims as it would facilitate their work to create an enabling environment for the private sector as well as understand skills gap.

"Since the inception of the Smart Africa Alliance, one of our main principles has centred on the critical need to create an enabling environment for private sector involvement. We realise that economic transformation must be driven by private companies focused on the use of ICT to increase access to markets and information for business," Touré said.

Sharing skills

For Ericsson, the partnership will be an opportunity to share skills and contribute positively to ICT growth in cities and countries.

Fredrik Jejdling, the head of Ericsson in the sub-Saharan Africa region, said that they would be aiming at replicating the solutions pioneered in Rwanda, such as smart cities across the continent.

"Our experience working on Smart Rwanda has provided an excellent platform to replicate and tailor similar solutions for other member states and governments. ICT will change cities, countries and industries and ultimately lead to a truly Networked Society in Africa," Jejdling said.

The Smart Africa initiative last month set out to reduce call rates among member countries by implementing the One Africa Network

Participating countries to date are: Ivory Coast, Gabon, Kenya, Mali, Uganda, Senegal, South Sudan, Chad, Rwanda and Burkina Faso.