

Innovation is the key to keep Africa moving forward

By [Sthembile Shabangu](#)

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NAIROBI, Kenya - In the wake of Africa month it's easy to be proud of all that we are achieving as a continent. According to the African Development Bank, Africa is the continent with the world's second fastest growing economy.



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There's little doubt that our vibrant continent is making great strides towards a bright future, with our economy expected to grow by 3.4% in 2017 and 4.3% in 2018, according to research in the African Outlook Report.

Children are being left behind

But the 110 million children in Africa who, according to the Internet for Education in Africa report, have never seen the inside of a classroom would likely tell us that it's not enough - and they would be right.

Children across Africa's rural communities are being left behind - and with more than 70% of the continent's population living in rural areas, this is a major problem. The same report shows that at least half the population resides more than 25km from the nearest fibre connection. It's clear that while we may be celebrating the growth of connectivity in cities, last-mile connectivity is still a major stumbling block.

Many diseases - few doctors

Education is not the only challenge that requires our urgent attention. Equally troubling and of no less importance is the healthcare sector. With serious diseases like Ebola, malaria, cholera, meningitis and HIV/AIDS still threatening a great number of African lives, we have our work cut out for us. In fact, Brand South Africa reports that while Africa shoulders one quarter of the global disease burden, it is home to just 2% of the world's doctors.

Despite the serious situation, Africa's health care systems still lack the capacity to research, produce and deploy the health care solutions we so desperately need.

This issue was highlighted at the recent World Economic Forum Africa Summit, where it became evident that the private sector will play a vital role in improving healthcare on the continent. It is in the private sector that the resources to invest in people and product development exist.

Changing lives one digital village at a time

As Samsung has discovered first hand, each investment, whether in education or health care or perhaps even both, has the potential to transform hundreds of lives at a time. Just last year we partnered with UNESCO in Tanzania to provide innovative education and healthcare solutions to the Maasai community in Ololosokwan, Ngorongoro.

Together, we established a multi-donor programme comprised of a Samsung Solar-Powered Internet School, a Samsung Solar-Powered Health Centre, a Solar-Powered Tele-Medicine Centre and a Solar-Powered generator.

While the Internet School contains an interactive whiteboard, Samsung Galaxy Note PCs and a printer, the Health Centre provides a variety of eye, ear, blood, dental and pre- and post-natal screening and treatments. The Tele-Medicine Centre, on the other hand, provides prescription and expert healthcare assistance through the use of tele-conferencing made possible by the internet and Samsung Tablets, ultimately enabling greater access to qualified medical assistance where before there was none.

Samsung also launched West Africa's first digital village in Volo in the Volta region of Ghana, where it is partnering with government, local health services and international stakeholders including UNESCO.

Similar to the initiative in Tanzania, the Village is comprised of a Solar-Powered Internet School, Solar-Powered Tele-Medical Centre, Solar-Powered Health Centre and Solar-Powered Generator.

Not only is the Village instrumental to the improvement of healthcare and education in the region but it also helps local traders to develop their businesses through the aid of an alternative, low-cost energy source.

Through innovations like these, we believe it's possible to start changing the status quo. We established a similar digital village in the community of Matshiding in Mpumlanga with the goal of making healthcare accessible to more people.

Because the digital village drastically reduces the distance that patients have to travel to access medical care, almost 700 patients visit the Village each month to access basic healthcare services.

It's true that we still have a great deal of work to do if we want to see our incredible continent continue on its path of transformation, but I firmly believe that the key to our success lies in the power of innovation.

The drive to serve as a catalyst for transformation across the continent is in our DNA. And just as it's been our mandate to inspire innovation in Africa, so Africa has inspired us. When it comes to innovation, the limits to what we as a dynamic and developing continent can achieve are few. We have only to look to ourselves.

Source: *African Media Agency (AMA)*.

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