Celebrating Africa's top 5 smart cities: Showcasing progress and prowess

By Marcel Bruyns   5 Jun 2023

Amid all the headlines about weakening currencies, rising inflation, and political instability, it's easy to get caught up in the negatives, but there's a lot to celebrate on our continent. As we approach the African Smart Cities Summit in June, it's a great time to recognise the remarkable advancements in Africa's top-performing smart cities.

Source: Gallo/Getty

Cairo, Algiers, Cape Town, Tunis and Rabat aren't just making waves, they're putting Africa on the global map of smart city innovation. These cities have been included in the 2023 edition of the IMD Smart City Index, which ranks 141 smart cities according to economic, technological, and humane dimensions (such as quality of life, the physical environment, and overall inclusiveness). It uses a combination of hard data and survey responses to gauge how people experience cities around the world.

Smart cities emphasise the importance of sustainability and inclusiveness and prioritise the integration of IoT in everyday life to transform people's day-to-day experiences. For this reason, it's worth considering how far the cities included in the Smart City Index have come and what exactly makes them 'smart'.

Smart cities: A potential solution to Africa's urban challenges

Factors such as technological infrastructure, connectivity, sustainable development, citizen engagement, and efficient governance play a vital role in shaping the path to smart city transformation. While certain hubs have made remarkable progress, others are still catching up.

Cairo

Cairo has emerged as a trailblazer in using technology to improve its urban landscape. With a smart city ranking of 108, the city's construction boom is transforming it into a network of interconnected, energy-efficient communities that offer

sustainable living environments and create quality job opportunities.

Notably, the new administration capital (NAC), located in the east of Cairo, embodies what's considered a new vision for 21st-century urban living. With a focus on strategic communications, modern transportation systems, and renewable energy supplies, the NAC exemplifies a progressive approach to urban development.

By implementing smart transportation systems and digitising public services, Cairo has embraced digital transformation. The city's commitment to innovation is evident in its integration of smart grids and revolutionary waste management solutions, which serve as a model for cities worldwide.

Algiers

Algiers is also striving to transform into a smart city through various initiatives. Its smart city ranking is 123, and infrastructure is its most significant hurdle to overcome. Despite its limitations, the city has embraced the 'clean slate' challenge of identifying opportunities to address the lack of legacy technologies within Algiers (and other cities in Algeria) to assist its successful transition into a smart one.

Cape Town

Cape Town, ranked 125th on the Smart City Index, offers free Wi-Fi on city buses, which helps make information more accessible to everyone. With its improved broadband infrastructure, access to the city's Open Data Portal is just one manifestation of Cape Town's smart city strategy. The Open Data Portal gives the city's citizens access to all city information, increasing local government transparency.

The city also uses real-time data to improve city-wide surveillance and emergency response, including fire and rescue, law enforcement, and disaster risk management. The Cape Town Emergency Dispatch Centre was created to provide a single, integrated public safety solution that facilitates operations and data sharing.

Tunis

To mitigate economic, social, and environmental challenges, Tunis has adopted the Digital Tunisia 2020 strategic development plan. It aims to transform Tunisia into an international economic hub. It is composed of strategic directions, namely infrastructure, e-Gov, e-business, and Smart Tunisia, where the focus is on describing the e-Gov strategic direction, especially the Smart Gov 2020 Project. Although Smart Tunisia is in its infancy, it has immense potential to improve its current ranking at number 137 on the Smart City Index.

Rabat

At 126 on the index, Rabat has also devoted much of its energy to startup and urban planning initiatives. If these efforts are maintained, the city is sure to become a key player in Africa's smart city development over time.

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African capitals are making their mark on the global stage, showcasing the continent's progress and prowess in building smart cities. Cairo, Algiers, Cape Town, Rabat and Tunis are leading the way with their innovative approaches to urban development and efficient use of technology. By leveraging the expertise of service providers and fostering collaboration, African cities can continue their transformative journeys and redefine what is possible in the realm of urban living.

This remarkable progress in smart city development highlights the immense potential for African cities to become global leaders in urban innovation. With the help of expert service providers, who knows where today's cities could be in the years to come? The future holds endless possibilities for African cities as they continue to embrace smart technologies and create sustainable, efficient, and inclusive urban environments.

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