

The power of smart technology in Africa

 By [Greg Morris](#)

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People across Africa face considerable challenges - many of them existential. But, without the right devices, connectivity, and skills, those who badly need their problems solved often can't access available solutions.



Greg Morris

It is clear, and African leaders agree, that ICT can have a mammoth impact on African citizens' quality of life, productivity, and global competitiveness. However, citizens need the tools to connect, innovate and transform, alongside governments that work closely with the private sector to this end.

Smart cities, fast forward

One sign of governments and the private sector in Africa having come together for this purpose is last year's Transform Africa Summit in Rwanda (May 2017). Themed 'Smart cities, fast forward', the summit was aimed at inciting African capital cities, including Johannesburg, to embrace technologies that effectively deliver services.



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Dr Deonie Botha, formerly of Sebata Municipal Solutions (a MICROmega Holdings company), identified the three critical components that will determine the success of smart cities in Africa; namely, access, availability, and affordability.

Dr Botha also highlighted small ICT-enabled initiatives with the potential to improve quality of life for those living in rural communities. One such example is the invention of a soccer ball kitted with a pendulum-like mechanism that allows the ball to capture and store kinetic energy for later use as an off-the-grid power source. This invention means that 30 minutes of play can power a simple LED lamp for three hours.

Where Africa needs help



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Smart cities help to create service delivery hubs that address citizens' actual and immediate needs. Dr Botha shared a sample of the effective solutions presented at the summit, like:

- **Healthcare:** There is a medical app that gives users access to prescription medication without moving from one pharmacy to another.
- **Education:** There is an online education and career planning system that helps high school students to undergo aptitude testing and career awareness-building - connecting them with tertiary education and potential employment opportunities.
- **Finance:** There is a digital payment solution that allows 10,000+ tea farmers in Rwanda to access their earnings within two to three days via mobile phone, as opposed to the two- to three-week wait they were accustomed to.
- **Transport:** There is a bus system simulator tool that shows how many vacant seats are available on a bus, and how long it will take to travel from one place to another.

These initiatives are mobile-phone-based, so they can be accessed affordably by diverse individuals from all socio-economic groups, genders, and locations.

Where the opportunities are

I believe that Africa offers incredible room for growth and development, and that many companies have the ICT solutions to meet the continent's needs. To make the most of these opportunities, there are several areas for the private sector to focus on:

- **Quality of life:** Start by improving food and water security, continent-wide.
- **Infrastructure:** Create shared, strong, and sustainable infrastructure to support service delivery and under-pin national ICT initiatives.
- **Skills development:** Expand ICT innovation capacity via skills development.
- **Industry development:** Promote trade by augmenting product/service value.
- **Employment:** Build meaningful work opportunities and maintainable livelihoods.
- **Education:** Greatly enhance skills development, teaching and learning.
- **Social empowerment:** Empower disenfranchised groups, women, and the youth.
- **Agriculture:** Enhance productivity, industrialisation, and commercialisation.
- **Medical:** Develop health services to enhance well-being and quality of life.
- **Finance:** Make financial services more accessible to those in rural areas.
- **Crime:** Build systems for tackling and eliminating crime and corruption.

Do the research first.

Regardless of your organisation's specific approach and focus area, it's wise that your strategy be based on in-depth market research, including things like:

- **Infrastructure:** What capacity is there for sustainable infrastructure creation?
- **Skills:** What is the potential for skills transfer and capacity creation?
- **The people:** What are the real expectations and needs of Africa's citizens?
- **National strategy:** What are the national governmental and ICT strategies?
- **Geographic limitations:** What is the ability, on the ground, to execute your strategy in a particular region, based on existing and potential ICT competency and skills levels?
- **Partnership:** What's the real potential for public-private ICT partnerships?

If these questions excite you, you may be well-placed to respond to Africa's call. The continent is certainly ready. Get your company ready, and go for it.

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ABOUT GREG MORRIS

Greg Morris is the chief executive officer of MCROmega Holdings Limited. Greg joined the group in 2000 and was appointed CEO in January 2011. Responsible for the day-to-day operations, management and corporate finance transactions of the Group, Greg holds a Bachelor of Accounting Honours Degree and is a qualified Chartered Accountant

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