

Partnerships in times of crisis

By [Amrote Abdella](#)

27 May 2020

The current global crisis has highlighted a number of areas, from the need for efficient information management to the need for accurate data gathering for faster medical response.



Amrote Abdella, regional director of Microsoft 4Afrika Initiative

In looking at the role of technology during this period, one area that has stood apart in driving meaningful change is the role of partnerships. Today, more than before, Microsoft 4Afrika is steadfast in supporting healthcare partners across the continent as they adapt their platforms and services to meet current needs.

Microsoft, through its 4Afrika initiative, has formed strategic partnerships with healthcare providers throughout Africa and beyond, providing them with technical support and business consultancy to help them achieve their goals.

Each of these healthcare providers has had a significant impact in their sphere of influence, but with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, we've seen how our partners have used their existing platforms and programmes to pivot and adapt existing technologies to rapidly provide the much-needed response to address the challenges of the pandemic.

Healthcare powered by big data

Artificial Intelligence and machine learning are already used in healthcare, but in a rapidly evolving situation, these tools can significantly help boost response times and preparedness.

When Microsoft 4Afrika first partnered with BroadReach, they were striving to create and implement data-driven solutions to improve the management and delivery of health programmes in underserved regions around the world. Vantage, an integrated cloud platform powered by Microsoft solutions, delivers powerful analytics that helps development, health and human services organisations quickly identify risks and opportunities.

Using machine learning, AI, big data and cloud computing, the company has enabled significant health outcomes in supported districts, integrating data immediately from a wide range of sources, and delivering real-time data, actionable insights and step-by-step implementation guidelines to boost effectiveness.

Their digital HIV Portfolio on Management Solution has helped an estimated 340,000 people access HIV treatment in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, while their proactive predictive tool helps keep patients on treatment by predicting which patients are at risk of stopping medicines and empowering healthcare teams to reach out to them before they stop. Other types of predictive analysis help develop an understanding of how particular clinics and staff members are performing, medical stock levels and predicting what may happen and intervening before that happens.

During the Covid-19 crisis, BroadReach has moved quickly to repurpose its existing platforms. The company has used its cloud services, built on Azure, to rapidly gather data from thousands of health workers in the field and instantly upload it into Vantage, where advanced analytics are giving leaders key guidance to manage and prepare for the impact of the pandemic.

In healthcare, quick response times save lives. BroadReach has produced a facility readiness survey that allows government to redirect resources to prioritised hospitals and facilities, so that they have the right equipment and medical supplies on hand. Predictive analysis can be used to help forecast and track outbreak hotspots.

Partnerships like the one with BroadReach demonstrate the significant value that technology can deliver in situations that are rapidly changing and require high volumes of data from disparate sources to be quickly analysed for use in prediction and preventative measures.

Keeping healthcare facilities safe

Our partner Raphta has worked with Microsoft to develop software and hardware solutions that allow contactless biometrics which can be used for access control to facilities, among other things. Of course, during a pandemic where the virus can be transmitted on surfaces, contactless access assumes a far greater importance.

Raphta is now offering its Shuri Face Contactless Biometrics solution to hospitals, clinics and buildings for thermal screening and containment, limiting contact and virus spread. Using current AI facial recognition software and hardware technology developed by Raphta and having quickly added the necessary thermal imaging technology, the company is now running pilot projects at the Netcare Gardens Hospital in Johannesburg, South Africa and at Kenyatta Hospital in Nairobi, Kenya.

Using technology to reach out

Telemedicine is another area where technology is enabling safer diagnosis and limiting unnecessary contact between patients and healthcare providers. Globally, the use of telemedicine has been surging during the current pandemic.

In Pakistan, we've seen first-hand the benefits of telemedicine in reaching patients who have limited access to healthcare and healthcare workers. Sehat Kahani, an e-health start-up supported by 4Afrika uses Microsoft platforms to provide patients who are far from healthcare centres with access to qualified doctors via a telemedicine platform, while cloud computing services mean that their patient records are immediately available anywhere using a mobile device.

Telemedicine can perform a vital role in enabling people to access healthcare services, remote diagnoses, and treatment plans. During the Covid-19 crisis, Sehat Kahani is using its smartphone app to provide virtual consultations to patients across Pakistan, delivering educational content about the pandemic, and helping to direct them to the correct healthcare facilities if necessary. Using its telemedicine platform, it has educated more than a million users about the virus, and provided more than 6,000 online consultations with patients. The company currently has more than 160 female doctors working non-stop to support citizens through this health crisis.

Bringing positive change in difficult circumstances

It's encouraging to see how technology can support the humanitarian healthcare goals of countries across the globe, and how leading technology companies can support and enable healthcare partners to provide better, faster and more accurate treatment. Seeing how technologies can be adapted to work best in an emerging crisis shows the value of investing in these partnerships to help develop these platforms and services.

The clear challenge in Africa is bridging the gap in healthcare and providing equal access for all. By working with our partners across the African continent and beyond, we can see how technology is having a powerful impact on providing healthcare to the communities and countries who need it the most. Partners working together always provides more muscle through collaboration and we've seen technology allow our partners to scale, broadening their reach and subsequently have greater positive impact even in the current challenging, uncharted times.

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