

Kenya leads smart city charge in Africa

While many see Africa as lagging in harnessing the benefits of smart city development, Kenya is leading the charge to embrace this new technology-rich ecosystem, says Riaan Graham, sales director for Ruckus Wireless sub-Saharan Africa.



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“A smart city can be defined as a vision to integrate multiple ICT and internet of things (IoT) solutions to manage the asset of a city. Of course, this extends to beyond just dropping in technology and hoping for the best. A true smart city is one that is focused on better service delivery, improved municipal services, infrastructure enhancements, and utilising real-time monitoring systems for the betterment of all citizens, to name just a few things,” says Graham.

Konza Techno City

Last year, the Konza Technopolis Development Authority in Kenya (or Konza Techno City for short) entered an [agreement](#) with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme to standardise the development of what many consider would lead the creation of the first African smart city.

“With a focus on building a sustainable and fully functional city to contribute to the Kenyan economy and offer better living standards for everyone living and working in Konza, the government is showing its commitment to a more liberal and dynamic way of embracing technology,” he adds.

This builds on other innovations such as M-Pesa which launched in the country in 2007. By the end of [2015](#), there were already 33-million users of the mobile money system in Kenya alone, leaving many analysts of the opinion that the country could become the first in the world to go completely cashless.

“For smart cities to work, you need commitment from the public and private sector. Kenya is showing the rest of the continent that through pro-active legislation and support of technologies designed to enhance the lives of all people, incredible things can happen. Given how quickly IoT has grown over the past few years, more countries will follow suit and use this as a starting point for smart city initiatives,” says Graham.

Implementing IoT solutions

He believes that with IoT-led initiatives seeing more business units becoming involved where budgets are not limited to what IT can do and as a result not purely funded by IT. Instead, marketing, operations, financial, and others are seeing income

generating opportunities by implementing IoT solutions and as such, are spending budgets here.

“Part of this IoT drive is the connectivity that surrounds it. While mobile infrastructure in Africa is being continuously upgraded, Wi-Fi networks are being rolled out throughout the continent. For a smart city to truly work there will be an increased reliance on this kind of connectivity to provide an alternative to fixed-line and mobile communications.”

Wi-Fi, Graham believes, is no longer viewed as a backup to mobile. In some respects, it has become a primary connectiv mechanism for users. South Africa’s Tshwane municipality and others are following suit by introducing more Wi-Fi points across cities and communities as a means of getting citizens connected to smarter services.

“This connectivity is aiding in the evolution of a smart city with more services being offered digitally than before. And while Kenya is being regarded as one of the champions in this regard, other countries on the continent will follow its example ar find innovative ways of bridging the technology gap and building a better-connected future for all their citizens,” concludes Graham.

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