

Africa is fertile ground for innovative tech, here are some great examples

By [Paula Nagy](#)

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Everyone is on the lookout for the next big innovator and the latest technological breakthroughs that are set to revolutionise and redefine industries, organisations, and the way we live or do business.



Paula Nagy, programme manager at Founders Factory Africa | image supplied

However, in the search for the next blossoming Microsoft or the next Apple (while still in Steve Jobs' garage), Africa is very often overlooked - not only with regards to the continent's potential to innovate but also the innovations that are already being realised by young startups across the continent, with an estimated 7,500 counted across 12 African countries in 2022.

The continent is increasingly a breeding ground for some of the most unique and groundbreaking technologies. In fact, Africa is well positioned to become a leading technological hub and is already home to many emerging technology hubs, particularly South Africa, Kenya and Egypt. This is despite the fact that Africa only raised between \$4.8 and \$ 5.4bn in venture capital, compared to the US's approximately \$226bn, according to *TechCrunch*.

One of the biggest reasons for Africa's rising tide of innovation is, unexpectedly, what is often seen as its biggest weakness - the many challenges the continent faces. Nothing can push new ideas and technological development forward more than the need to overcome obstacles as challenges push us to find out-of-the-box solutions, thereby driving innovation forward and enabling us to create opportunity from difficulty.

From inequality and food security to healthcare and financial inclusion, Africa has long dealt with a plethora of pressing and complex issues requiring unique solutions.

And while this has long been the reason that the continent is perceived relatively negatively, African entrepreneurs have seized the potential of the digital revolution sweeping across the continent as an opportunity to address and solve some of Africa's most difficult challenges, ensuring we tackle local problems with local solutions.

Leveraging the power of technology

For example, more than half (around 600 million) of people in Africa do not have access to healthcare services when they need them. Still, startup Tibu Health in Nairobi is already leveraging the power of technology to innovate and solve challenges such as accessibility to primary outpatient healthcare by connecting patients to providers and services more efficiently, enabling better care at lower costs, and consequently revolutionising the healthcare journey.

One of the biggest challenges faced on the continent, however, is food security. But Africa also holds the potential to solve not only its own food security needs but also the world's if harnessed correctly. This is because the continent holds more than 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land.



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However, food producers on the continent currently do not have fair access to markets, do not often receive adequate value for goods cultivated, and lack access to financial services.

Startups like Nigerian agritech supply chain startup Winich Farms are working to change this by directly connecting food producers with informal processors and retail groups without the activities of middlemen via a democratised approach. This could significantly contribute to food security by increasing local food producers' access and connecting farmers in remote areas to new markets.

Meanwhile, digital transport startups like BuuPass are enabling long-distance transport operators to digitise their operations by building the digital infrastructure for the long-distance transport market in Kenya and Uganda. This is helping to increase their access to a greater customer base by enabling travellers to book their tickets with operators online.

Enabling innovation is vital

It's clear to see that digital innovation has a significant role to play in helping to solve Africa's most complex challenges, thereby driving prosperity and growth on the continent. As a key driver of growth and change, innovation has fast become the cornerstone of any economy's social and economic development by facilitating economic growth, increasing

competitiveness, and creating new employment opportunities.

As such, enabling innovation has become vital in today's volatile global economic climate, particularly as low- and middle-income countries are uniquely positioned to benefit from innovation.

While we're currently seeing the start of a new generation of innovators emerge across Africa, it remains true that the continent is lagging behind in some measures of innovation capacity as a result of challenges such as access to capital, the cost of technology, digital skills, and connectivity issues.

That's why we need to stoke the fires of innovation by empowering the continent's entrepreneurial ecosystem to scale up with hands-on support for startup growth through training, partnerships, and, most importantly, investment. It is by investing in the potential of young and emerging innovators that we will be able to highlight Africa as a beacon of transformation and technology across the globe.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paula Nagy, programme manager at Founders Factory Africa

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