



Towards ever-greater connectivity, services, and digital content

Angela Wamola

Welcome to “Listening to a World on the Move”, the Orange podcast where experts from our ecosystem discuss the major trends driving the telecoms sector. For this episode, we handed the microphone to **Angela Wamola**. Angela is head of Sub-Saharan Africa at GSMA, a global organization unifying the mobile ecosystem. In this interview, Angela looks at the growing demand for connectivity and digital services especially in sub-Saharan Africa and offers some insights on the digital transformation and socio-economic advancements for the sector.

My first question for her was how she has seen connectivity needs changing over the past few years in Africa and how she sees them evolving in the future.

Angela Wamola:

In recent years in sub-Saharan Africa, mobile collectivity has continued to drive digital transformation and socio-economic advancements. This underlines the need for continued efforts to address the persisting barriers that impact mobile internet adoption in the region, particularly those of affordability, accessibility of devices, online safety concerns and continuing to build capacity on digital skills.

And we see that authorities and enterprises are driving developments in this area. They see the opportunity to leverage the growing 4G and 5G networks alongside emerging technology such as AI, so that we can enhance productivity and efficiency in service delivery.

The adoption of 4G has accelerated in recent years and is partly driven by the growing demand for, not only just fastest speeds among consumers — and Africa being a very youthful continent, young consumers — but we also see that there is momentum being driven from enterprises and government services. And so, over the next five years, we expect the 4G adoption in the region will more than double to 45%.

At the same time, in terms of evolution of connectivity, we see 5G momentum growing, although the initial focus for the region is in urban and industrial locations where there is a greater need for the technology. And by 2030, we expect that 5G will benefit the sub-Saharan economy by 11 billion dollars, which will account for about 6% of the overall economic impact of mobile.

So, what impacts will new technologies have on connectivity needs in Africa?

So, in general, the wave of growing momentum behind AI, its capabilities, applications, the debates that we see around responsible use of the technology... All these developments just indicate that emerging technologies driven by the evolving connectivity needs in the continent will drive growth in the region and so help us to continue contributing also to the productivity of Africa.

How will these technologies be game changers for African networks?

So I believe that these will help change the game in Africa because it will no longer be a consumer play, which has been largely the situation in the continent for a long time — that a lot of the building blocks, the foundational building blocks of mobile connectivity on 2G, 3G and 4G, have been on consumer use cases. But now when you look at 5G ultra-high-speed broadband, then that begins to change.

For example, when you look at, just last year, up to 2023, we have seen a lot of 5G commercial launches in at least 15 countries where it's not just piloted commercially, and a growing number of spectrum allocations, as well as when you look at where the adoption is coming from. For example, in South Africa you see deployments by Telkom South Africa, as well as Orange Botswana, having launch commercial 5G fixed wireless services.

And so, this is just demonstrating the growing demand for newer technologies as well as newer infrastructure to be able to provide that primary sort of broadband connection and improve coverage in the region through fixed wireless access.

How can GSMA and private operators work together to meet the growing demand for connectivity and provide essential services?

So when we look at the role of the GSMA and private operators working together with governments and other stakeholders to provide and meet the growing demand for connectivity and essential services, it's predicated on the agenda for digitalization in the continent, unlocking the future potential and the potential that lies in the continent through enhanced activity, a better way of mobilizing resources and managing costs. In this day and age, it depends on us leveraging technology. The private sector plays a very important role in demonstrating how we drive efficiency and effectiveness and the impact of increasing productivity.

We find that these investments and infrastructure are key for us to be able to unlock and improve connectivity, particularly in underserved areas. And the GSMA continues to support all our efforts of private sectors, not only our members, but the ecosystem at large: providing industry insights, leveraging learnings and best practices from other regions and how they have adopted and adapted to technology.

And we continue to advocate for supportive regulatory policies and frameworks that can facilitate private sector investment in infrastructure and promote also that competition in the market that allows us to continue developing at a pace that will lend itself to the leapfrog ambition that Africa sees herself claiming.

Conclusion

Thanks for listening. Discover all the episodes of the podcast “Listening to a World on the Move” on the Orange 2023 integrated annual report website.