Tenth Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

Virtual side event preceding the forum

18 April 2024 (14:00-15:30 EAT)

[Registration link](#)

Side event title: Giga: Connecting schools, connecting communities

Detailed description of the event

Background

Africa's journey towards its ambitious development goals, as highlighted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, hinges on the adoption of inclusive and equitable policies that empower every citizen. This is a collaborative effort that requires stakeholders to work together towards achieving these goals. The African Union's designation of 2024 as the year of Education in Africa, alongside the UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (OSAA)'s focus this year on Digital Transformation, underscores the urgent need to overcome the digital divide that obstructs progress towards achieving SDG4 (Quality education) to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Beyond education, the potential benefits of a digitally connected Africa are significant; the International Finance Corporation (IFC) reports that a 10% increase in mobile internet penetration could boost GDP per capita by 2.5%, potentially adding USD 180 billion to Africa's economy by 2025[1].

Despite these prospects, internet usage in Africa remains low, with only 40% of the population online as of 2022[2]. This limited usage could be largely attributed to the high cost of broadband, which is unaffordable for many. On average, Africans spend 5% of their monthly income on mobile internet—over three times the global average of 1.5%. The disparity is even starker for fixed broadband, with expenditures reaching up to 15.6% of monthly income, nearly five times the global average of 3.2%[3]. According to ITU, for broadband to be considered affordable, it should cost less than 2% of an individual's monthly income.

However, connecting people to the internet is merely the initial step. The challenge extends to internet usage, where the average bandwidth consumption by an African user is three times less than the global average (85 kbit/s vs 233 kbit/s). This underscores the need for comprehensive strategies to not only enhance connectivity but also to encourage development of content and meaningful internet use.

In this context, Giga, a global initiative by ITU and UNICEF, provides a useful model for expanding broadband internet access to schools and beyond schools to include health clinics, public offices, and other unconnected communities across the continent. Giga's approach begins with assisting governments in mapping the location and connectivity status of their schools, and the enabling digital infrastructure around schools. Having mapped over 2.2 million schools, approximately 36% of the global total, these maps serve as a foundational tool for governments. They enable the modeling of connectivity scenarios, the negotiation of favorable contracts with service providers, and the identification of financial solutions to

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[1] https://pressroom.ifc.org/all/pages/PressDetail.aspx?ID=26066
[2] https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2022/11/24/ff22-internet-use/
[3] https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/prices2022/ITU_Price_Brief_2022.pdf

bridge the connectivity gap in schools. This comprehensive support framework lays the groundwork for a more connected, inclusive, and equitable Africa.

Event description

The event will explore strategies for closing the digital connectivity gap, how to go about connecting all schools to the internet and implementing innovative and sustainable solutions, while leveraging the 3 As (Affordability, Accessibility, Applicability) to ensure inclusive and equitable access to information, opportunity, and choice.

Fostering collaboration between stakeholders, it will provide concrete recommendations for scaling up school connectivity efforts in African countries, empowering learners and educators through digital learning and providing a framework that can be used to expand internet connectivity beyond schools.

Details on the side event

Giga supports African countries to advance on school connectivity and through this empower teachers, students, and communities to thrive in the digital age. This initiative aligns with the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) and the Agenda 2063: the Africa We Want.

1. <u>Addressing the Digital Divide</u>: The digital divide remains a significant challenge in Africa, with millions of students and teachers lacking access to the internet. This lack of connectivity hinders educational opportunities, limits access to valuable resources and learning platforms. In 2024, Giga will continue to provide tailored support to African countries in improving their access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality school connectivity solutions.
2. <u>Promoting Sustainable Connectivity – Sustainable Development Goal 9c:</u> To ensure long-term impact and align with the UN's call to make education financing a national investment priority, stakeholders must prioritize the development of strategies to help finance sustainable connectivity solutions that are affordable, scalable, and aligned with the needs of each country. This includes developing partnerships with governments, telecom companies, philanthropy, and other stakeholders to invest in building robust and resilient internet infrastructure to schools and communities.
3. <u>Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4</u>: By enabling school connectivity, significant contribution can be made to achieving SDG4 and SDG9c. As such, country efforts aim to ensure that every African child can access learning opportunities, regardless of their location or socioeconomic background. This includes supporting schools welcoming refugees and their host communities.

The side event brings together policy makers, regulators, investors, the private sector, and decision-makers from African countries. It offers a platform to:

- Share experiences and solutions.
- Exchange ideas for affordable and high-quality internet access.
- Showcase how partnerships can address connectivity challenges and improve access for people and schools, and their communities.

<u>Agenda</u>

Moderators:

Christine Sund, Senior Advisor, Regional Office for Africa, ITU

Jaime Archundia, Giga Contact Lead

Agenda – 90 minutes		
Time	**Session**	**Speakers**
5 mins	*Opening remarks - TBD*	H.E. Salima Bah, Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation, Sierra Leone - TBC
5 mins	*A call to action: Empowering learners in Africa through meaningful school connectivity*	Ibrahima Guimba-Saïdou, Former Director General of ANSI, Director General, National Agency of Information Society
7 mins	*Africa's priorities in the African Union's Year of Education*	Dobrina Poirier, Economic Affairs Officer, Innovation and Technology, UNECA
7 mins	*Giga's approach to scaling connectivity of schools in Africa*	Marija Novkovic, Giga Country Engagement Lead
60 mins	*Panel discussion - Closing the gaps: Unlocking connectivity for all* [2 rounds of questions and final thoughts]	– Giga Countries Governments TBD – Frank Van Cappelle, Global Lead for Digital Education, UNICEF – Shaharyar Jawaid, Senior ICT Specialist, Economic Infrastructure, Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) – TBC – Ben Roberts, Chief Technology and Innovation Officer, Liquid Intelligent Technologies – Abiyot Bayou Tehone, Senior Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of Innovation and Tehcnology, Ethiopia – TBC – Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, Namibia - SpeakerTBC
5 mins	*Closing remarks: From ambition to action: Investing in a people-centered approach to education in Africa*	Emmanuel Manasseh, a.i. Regional Director for Africa, ITU