

Google to invest \$1bn in digital transformation in Africa

Google has announced a plan to invest \$1bn over five years to support Africa's digital transformation. The investment focuses on enabling fast, affordable internet access for more Africans; building helpful products; supporting entrepreneurship and small business; and helping non-profits to improve lives across Africa. The announcement was made at Google's first-ever Google for Africa event, held virtually and livestreamed.



Google for Africa

Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google and Alphabet, shared the planned \$1bn investment and will include:

Enabling affordable internet access and building helpful products

- Google is building global infrastructure to help bring faster internet to more people and lower connectivity costs. The subsea cable Equiano will run through South Africa, Namibia, Nigeria and St Helena and connect the continent with Europe.

- Internet access is also hampered by the affordability of smartphones. Android has developed a device locking technology as part of the Android platform that will enable partners to offer financed devices.

Google has collaborated with Safaricom to support the launch of the first “Device Financing” plan in Kenya, and will

expand this initiative across Africa with partners like Airtel, MKOPA, MTN, Orange, Transsion Holdings and Vodacom, and more. These partnerships will help millions of first-time smartphone users gain access to quality, affordable Android smartphones.

- Plus Codes are a free and open-source addressing system to provide addresses for everyone. The government of The Gambia has adopted this in providing addresses for residents and businesses across the capital Banjul and are now scaling to the rest of the country. Plus codes will expand to South Africa, Kenya and other countries in partnership with governments and non-governmental organisations.

“ We plan to invest \$1 billion over 5 years on projects to improve connectivity, support startups and developer communities, support SMBs with low-interest loans, and fund non-profits working to improve lives throughout Africa. [#google4africa pic.twitter.com/4cRPje6rtF](#)— Google in Africa (@googleafrica) [October 6, 2021](#) ”

Investments in entrepreneurship and technology

Through a Black Founders Fund, Google will invest in Black-led startups in Africa by providing cash awards and hands-on support. This is in addition to Google's existing support through the Google for Startups Accelerator Africa, which has helped more than 80 African startups with equity-free finance, working space and access to expert advisors over the last three years.

“ Startup investment will power Africa's digital economy. Through our new Africa Investment Fund, we'll invest \$50 million in African startups, and help them create useful tools for their communities [#google4africa pic.twitter.com/48xiwuRil2](#)— Google in Africa (@googleafrica) [October 6, 2021](#) ”

Google also announced the launch of an Africa Investment Fund. Through this fund, the company will invest \$50m in startups and provide them with access to Google's employees, network, and technologies to help them build meaningful products for their communities.

Empowering businesses as they continue or embark on their digital transformation

In collaboration with the non-profit organisation Kiva, Google is providing \$10m in low-interest loans to help small businesses and entrepreneurs in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa get through the economic hardship created by Covid-19.

Renewed funding for nonprofits

Google.org is expanding its commitment to support non-profits working to improve lives across Africa, with \$40m to help more partners who are responding to challenges they see first hand in their communities - innovators like the Airqo team at Makerere University, who use AI and sensors to monitor poor air quality, a leading cause of premature death. Google is providing \$3m in new grant funding to expand this pioneering work from Kampala across 10 cities in five countries on the continent.

The announcement expands Google's ongoing support for Africa's digital transformation and entrepreneurship. In 2017, Google launched its Grow with Google initiative with a commitment to training 10 million young Africans and small businesses in digital skills. To date, Google has trained over 6 million people across 25 African countries, with over 60% of participants experiencing growth in their career and/or business as a result. Google has also supported more than 50 nonprofits across Africa with over \$16m of investment and enabled hundreds of millions of Africans to access internet services for the first time through Android.

CEO of Google and Alphabet, Sundar Pichai said: “We've made huge strides together over the past decade - but there's more work to do to make the internet accessible, affordable and useful for every African. Today I'm excited to reaffirm our commitment to the continent through an investment of \$1bn over five years to support Africa's digital transformation to cover a range of initiatives from improved connectivity to investment in startups.”

Nitin Gajria, managing director for Google in Africa added: “I am so inspired by the innovative African tech startup scene. In the last year we have seen more investment rounds into tech startups than ever before. I am of the firm belief that no one is better placed to solve Africa’s biggest problems than Africa’s young developers and startup founders. We look forward to deepening our partnership with, and support for, Africa's innovators and entrepreneurs.”

Minister Stella Tembisa Ndabeni-Abrahams, Minister of Small Business Development, South Africa said: “I am happy to note that Google has been active in supporting Small to Medium Enterprises, dedicating even more resources to this sector, since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the last 12 months, Google has helped close to 500,000 African businesses get online and reach new customers.”

Providing a platform for African cultural treasures and collections

Since 2012, the Google Arts & Culture team has partnered with institutions across the continent to preserve and promote their collections, providing a free online platform that anyone around the world can access. The result is hundreds of expertly curated stories about Africa by Africans.

This includes a new project called ‘Cradle of Creativity’ dedicated to the creative history and heritage of Africa. In collaboration with the Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art in Nigeria and the Origins Centre in South Africa, people across the globe can explore more than 500 high-resolution images, 60 expertly-curated stories with audio narrations, as well as Street View virtual tours, helping to showcase Africa’s creative talent and heritage.

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