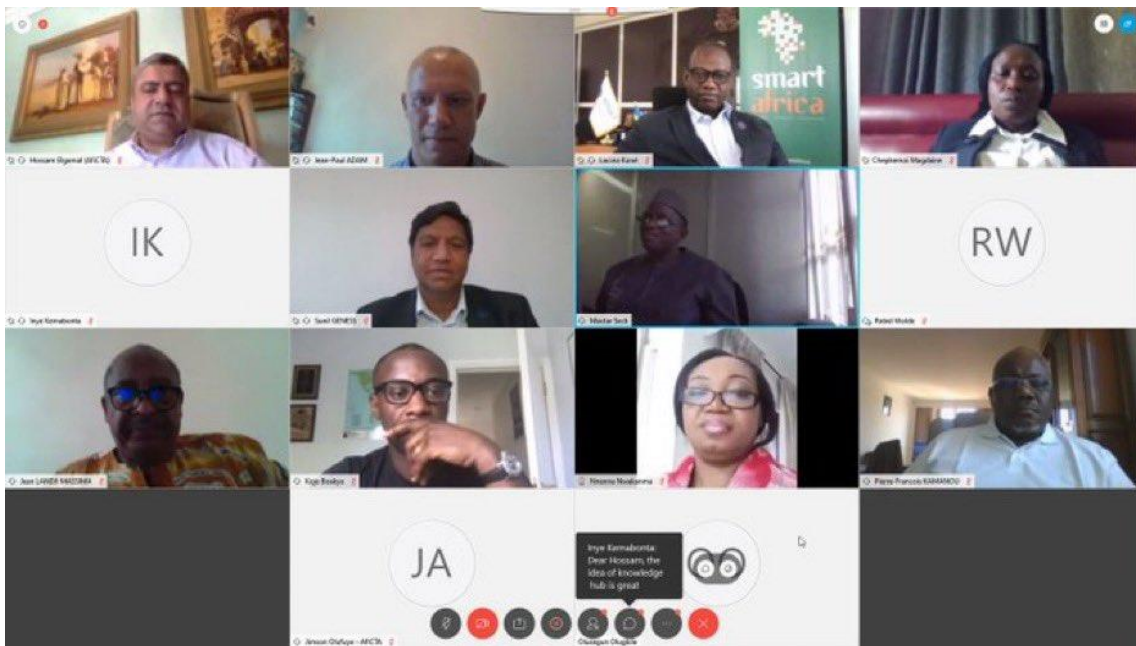# FINAL REPORT FROM THE AfICTA-UNECA LIVE WEBINAR ON "UNLOCKING AFRICA'S DIGITAL POTENTIAL AMID COVID-19"

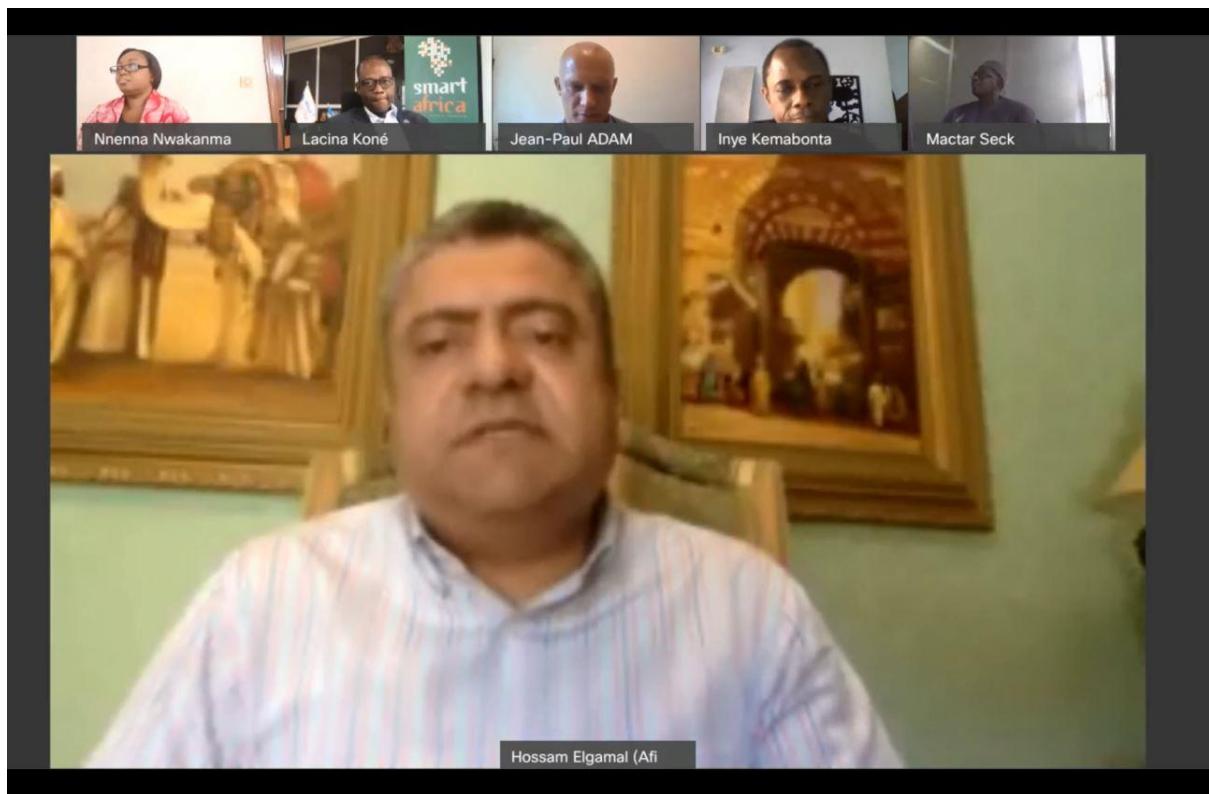**Commentary: Reflecting on AfICTA UNECA Live eConference**

Record participation, engaging discussion, and smooth organization: The Live Webinar on 26th May 2020 by AfICTA in collaboration with UNECA was a very successful one boasting of about 14 panellists and over 100 participants online who enriched the collective dialogue, appreciation to resilience internet infrastructure and conference platform provided by UNECA and the bilingual presentations breaking the barrier of language through interpretation in French and English.

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Synergy in the African ICT Ecosystem to deliver SDG 2030

At the AfICTA- UNECA Live webinar, **Engr Hossam Elgamal**, Chairman AfICTA, Opened by welcoming all the participants and expressed his joy in organizing the event together with UNECA and Smart Africa which adopts the multistakeholderism approach we intend to deploy in addressing issues Africa faces currently in its digital ecosystem. Gathering from experience both in the Public and Private sector he highlighted how the pandemics posed as an opportunity for both the private sector and the public sector to prioritize investments necessary in ICT infrastructure, policies and solutions although a very important discussion is the need to holistically synthesize the efforts of all stakeholders on all fronts in the African ICT ecosystem to enable growth and deliver on the SDG 2030. He also emphasized the need for more look into not just a telecommunications sector framework and Agenda but a "Digital Transformation" strategy which will be monitored and effectively coordinated by Digital transformation regulatory bodies to ensure the growth we desire in Africa.

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Successful Solutions Implemented in Africa During COVID-19 pandemic

Jean-Paul Adam, Director for Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resources Management in the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa opened by appreciating the opportunity presented him by AfICTA and UNECA and also thanked his panellists and participants for attending before stating the vulnerabilities exposed by the COVID-19 in Africa which borderline hinges on the lack of connectivity among most Africans and how we can address it. In this light, he went further by mentioning a couple of initiatives in Africa that helped cushion the effect of the pandemic which include :
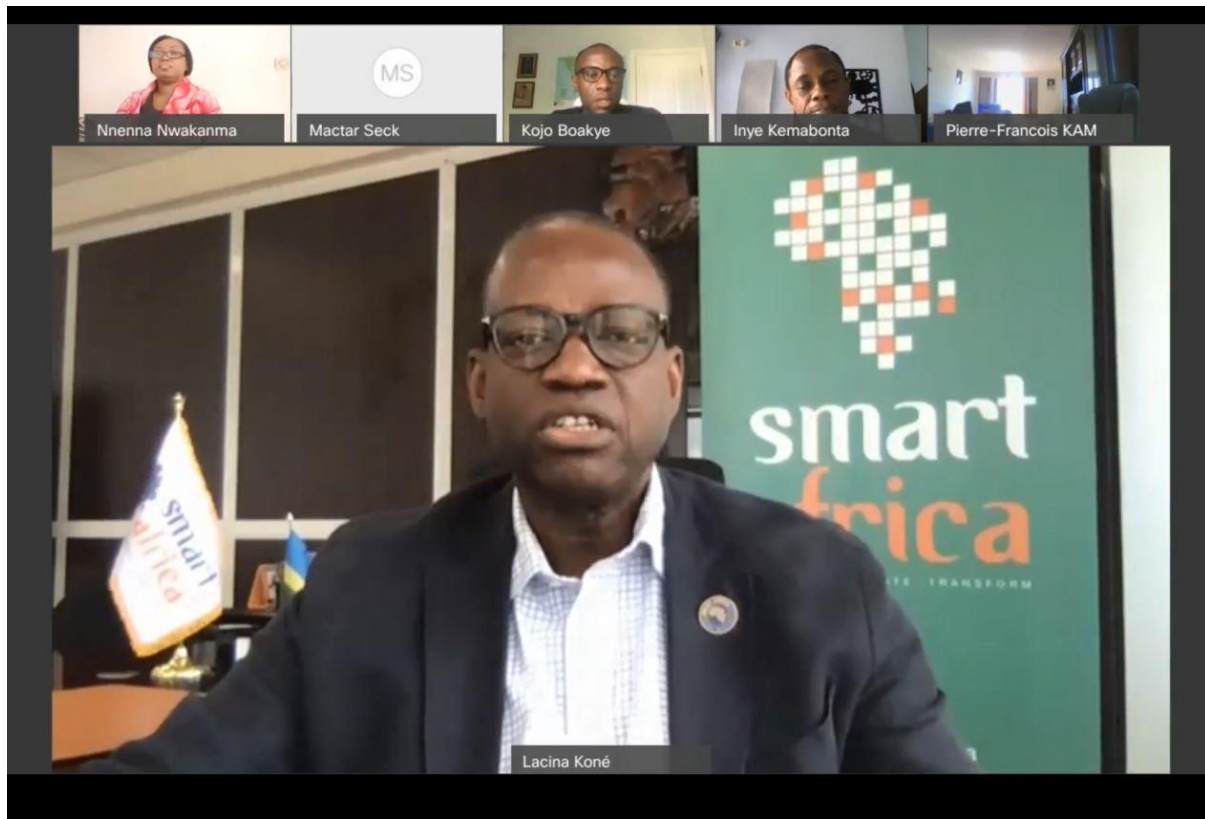
- Ghanaian COVID-19 tracker App.

- WhatsApp Chatbot tool for self-diagnosis in SA.

- COVID Triage by Wellvis - Nigerian ICT tool created for COVID-19 free online self-diagnosis.

- Google Loon 4G - an agreement between Kenya & Google to allow loons carrying 4g base stations to improve internet coverage fly over its airspace.

- Ugandan market app (AgroMarket Day) tat gives a platform for Farmers to sell products online.

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In conclusion, he stated that for Africa to address its digital gap vulnerabilities then we would have to invest in the digitalization process in Africa, putting money in the key areas that improve infrastructure and connectivity which would, in turn, create more wealth for the economies in Africa.

Institutionalizing the Coordination of Digital Transformation Strategies of Africa

Mr Lacina Kone, CEO Smart Africa spoke on some created some initiatives SMART AFRICA has created in combating the pandemic which includes:

* A call for the project targeted at African startup - a technology platform to support its 30 member states in which it notes how African startups have mobilized technologically in combating the pandemic outbreak.

* It also developed a response pack to guide member states in their response to the COVID-19. The pack details best practise all over the continent on short and medium-term actions in terms of broadband connectivity advising govt, to release certain frequencies on a free basis to use and recommended Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) zero out the connectivity on educational platforms.

Although he highlighted that Africa lacks consolidated regulatory bodies that govern digital transformation because it still seems foreign to nations in Africa. He also promises that Smart Africa is poised to be a catalyst alongside UNECA, AfICTA etc. in institutionalising the coordinated and organised efforts that African countries need in its digital transformation strategies to ensure and secure social development for the future on Africa.
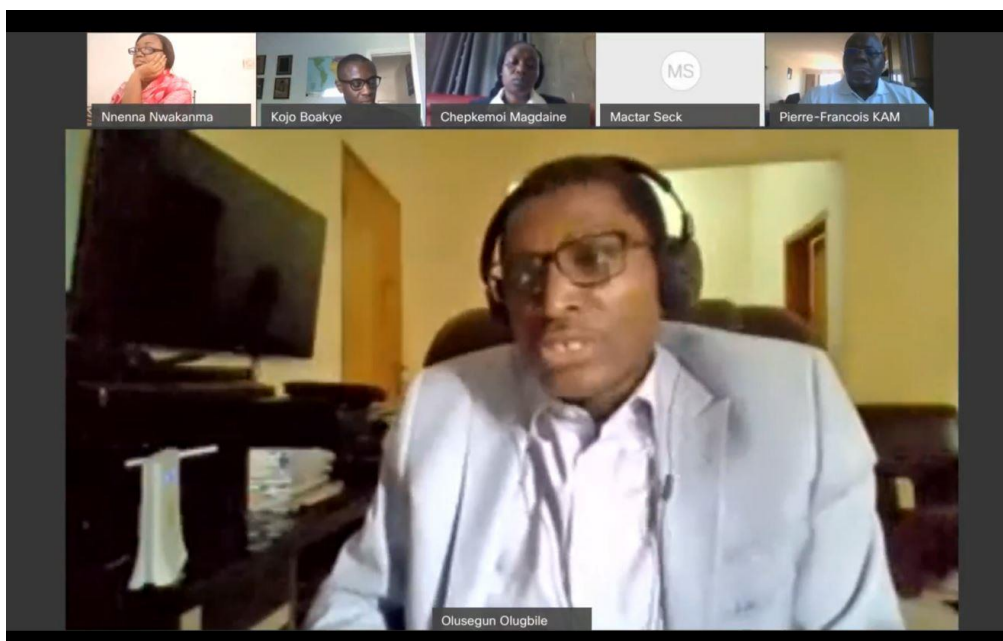
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Enhancing Access and Broadband deficit in Africa.

Inye Kemabonta, CEO, Tech Law Development Services proposes that instead of trying to subsidise the cost for better broadband connectivity (where demand is lacking), it would prove more efficient for digital transformation agencies and governing entities in Africa to creatively ensure demand through "**Developmental Regulations**" that softly necessitates the need for more users to use the available broadband supply. Once demand goes up, then cost is bound to go down through competition for market share.
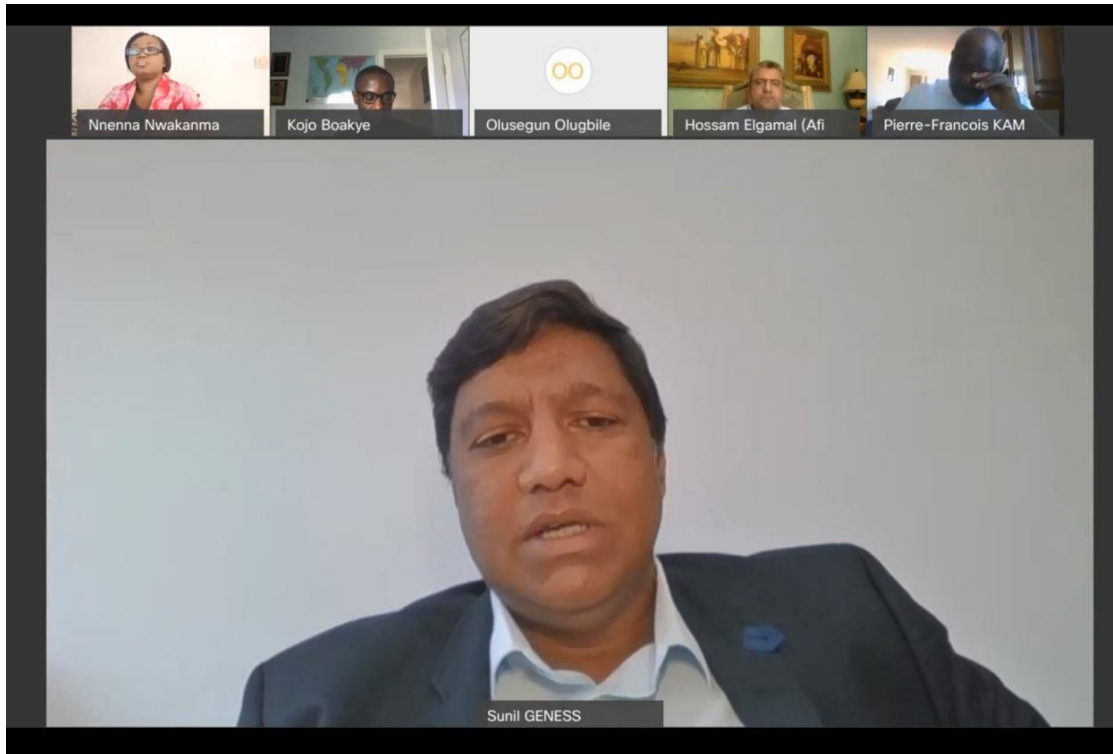
CyberSecurity: Data Security and Integrity

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Mr Segun Olugbile reiterated that in addressing the social developmental crisis in this age through technology, then the focal point of the discourse becomes DATA and it would be very detrimental if Africa doesn't begin to ensure that its date is safeguarded properly as this put us at risks of the 2nd wave of colonialism (A Digital One).

Mr Sunil Geness, Former President Information Technology Association SA highlighted that Technological Response to COVID-19 is in 3 phases

1. Containment: using apps and data gathered to help in tracing, tracking and fighting the

2. Rebuild: has to be a collaborative effort b/e govt and private sector ensuring that the competent individuals are providing value in the ICT sector.

3. Sustainability: and that involving the digital Agenda in the African Continent and it's the onus of multilateral organisations such as UNECA, AfICTA etc to ensure we give proper directions to government agencies in sustaining the digital transformation which would require the involvement of the Private at all levels or policy-making nationally & regionally.

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Kojo Boakye from Facebook highlighted some of the chains both in supply and demand in Africa where Facebook has proved to be very instrumental partnering with several organisations in the continent to ensure that connectivity problems in rural areas are mitigated. Emphasizing that although regulation is very key in digital transformation for Africa, we need to ensure that we are enacting the appropriate regulations that don't stiffen the interventions by the private sector in Africa during this recovery period.

Summary:

Africa is faced with problems in digital connectivity and digital divide which has hampered mobilization for digital transformation in the continent. To address the issue of digital connectivity then there is a need for meticulous approach individually in investments in creative solutions as Nations and regionally through consolidated and precise digital cooperation amongst ourselves. Secondly, there is an issue of independence "data independence" that we must address to ensure we are not subject to other continents and to do this we need commonwealth regulations that seek to protect our digital independence. AfICTA as a multilateral organization has some important developments in providing the data and information platform required for digital cooperation in Africa through its Africa Digital Information Hub: https://aficta.africa/info-hub/ where information on digital transformation strategies employed in countries across the continent are being provided.

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About

This report is a summary of events at the AfICTA-UNECA Live webinar.

You can explore more on aficta.africa as well as www.uneca.org

The digital recording of this event can be accessed here.

Rapporteurs

Dr. Mactar Seck, UNECA

Mr. Dada Samuel, AfICTA

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