

AFRICA POSTAL LEADERS FORUM 2023

“The African Posts journey to digital transformation and Innovation”

3 – 5 July 2023, Tiama Hotel, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

CONCEPT NOTE

Introduction

The Universal Postal Union (UPU) is holding the first edition of the Africa Postal Leaders Forum in July 2023, with the theme of **“The African Posts journey to digital transformation and Innovation”**. The forum will bring together postal executives, regulators, policymakers and technology industry experts from around Africa to discuss the most pressing challenges and opportunities for the postal industry. The forum will also provide a platform for participants to exchange experiences and share their insights and success stories. This interactive three-day event will take place from 3 to 5 July 2023 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

Background

Estimates indicate that, in 2021, Africa accounted for 70% of the world's mobile money market (valued at 1 trillion USD), with the African digital economy thought to have the potential to reach 5.2% of the continent's gross domestic product (GDP) by 2025. Between 2010 and 2019, Africa's GDP showed annual growth of 4%, which was more than twice that of the European Union or Latin America over the same period. With a dynamic economy combined with the youngest and fastest growing population in the world, as well as rapid urbanization, Africa is expected to see an increase in its consumption of online services. Digital transformation in Africa is, therefore, a key priority for the continent – as it is for the entire world.

The postal network is part of the national critical infrastructure in all countries in Africa. It plays a pivotal role in socio-economic development and in widening access for citizens and businesses to e-commerce, financial and governmental services, and more. Despite this crucial role, one of the greatest challenges facing the postal industry today is its relevance amid changing market needs in a rapidly expanding digital economy.

At the same time, the increasingly digital and data-driven information society offers Posts the opportunity to offset the long-term decline in revenues from letter post. Through adaptation of technology and innovation, Posts have been able to create new products and services. This diversification has seen Posts fully engage in e-commerce and offer a variety of services, including logistics and last-mile delivery for partners. Posts have also been instrumental in providing innovative digital services (in some cases, on behalf of governments) that have bridged connectivity gaps – notably urban–rural disparities – and thus contributed to social, digital and financial inclusion.

Africa and, by extension, the African postal industry as a major economic player have incorporated digitalization into their strategic development plans. The African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020–2030 is a clear example of the prioritization of digitalization in Africa, as evidenced by the vision statement:

“An integrated and inclusive digital society and economy in Africa that improves the quality of life of Africa's citizens, strengthens the existing economic sector, enables its diversification and development, and ensures continental ownership with Africa as a producer and not only a consumer in the global economy.”

Furthermore, the overall objective is:

“To harness digital technologies and innovation to transform African societies and economies to promote Africa's integration, generate inclusive economic growth, stimulate job creation, break the digital divide, and eradicate poverty for the continent's socio-economic development and ensure Africa's ownership of modern tools of digital management.”

It is against this background that the Africa Postal Leaders Forum has been envisaged as an exclusive event to bring together policymakers, decision makers, regulators, postal operators and partners to address current and emerging issues and accelerate the modernization of Posts in Africa.

Objectives and expected results

The main objectives of the forum are to:

- Provide top management and senior officials from postal operators, regulators and policymakers in Africa with relevant and insightful information on the digital transformation of Posts and the role of the postal network in advancing national and regional digitalization strategies;
- Share best practices and concrete examples regarding the digital transformation of Posts in Africa, in collaboration with other players for the provision of new digital services;
- Bring together postal industry stakeholders – such as e-commerce marketplace platforms and e-retailers – and to explore possible collaboration with postal operators;
- Share information on suitable digital infrastructure requirements from experts and technology providers;
- Showcase success stories about digital solutions that are relevant for Posts, from startups and other providers;
- Promote discussion regarding regulatory challenges, such as the harmonization of regulations in different regions and fields (e.g. trade, finance, communications) and how the postal sector can contribute to overcoming these challenges;
- Promote and showcase UPU projects, programmes and services.

This event is expected to achieve the following:

- Top management and senior staff from postal operators will obtain relevant and insightful information to help and support decisions concerning the digital transformation of their institutions;
- Regulators and policymakers will gain a deeper understanding of the role of the postal network in advancing national and regional digital and e-commerce strategies;
- A network will be established of postal decision makers that can support and accelerate Africa's digital transformation;
- Use of UPU solutions and services will be increased, in order to strengthen service provision by postal operators.

Activities

The event will be held over three days and will comprise panel discussion sessions, presentations, business round tables and side events.

Expected participants

- Government officials and other political representatives
- Senior executives from postal operators
- Industry experts, technology, infrastructure and solution providers
- E-commerce platforms and e-retailers
- Regulators from different fields (e.g. postal sector, communications, finance, trade)
- UPU experts
- Development partners