

Summer 2025 Newsletter

A note from the CEO



As we celebrate one year of the Partnership for Digital Access in Africa, I am energized by the remarkable progress we've made in our mission to connect 1 billion people in Africa to affordable, reliable internet by 2030. Now in our second year, PDAA is transitioning from planning to execution, and we're already seeing tangible results from our collaborative approach.

The Bulk Purchase Marketplace (BPMP) initiative, developed with our partners at Smart Africa, demonstrates how multinational collaboration can reduce infrastructure and device costs through large-scale procurement. With fifteen countries already expressing interest and support from partners like Giga – a joint initiative of UNICEF and ITU – we plan to connect hundreds of thousands of schools and health centers while reducing internet costs by up to 60%.

The months ahead will be defined by continued execution, learning, and strengthening our partnerships. Thank you for your continued support and dedication to this mission. Together, we are accelerating digital connection and prosperity in Africa.

Sincerely,
Ibrahima Guimba-Saidou
CEO, Partnership for Digital Access in Africa



PDAA Updates

In PDAA's first year of operation, we've launched a number of exciting projects with promising early results that demonstrate how coordinated public-private partnerships can accelerate digital inclusion across Africa. In our second year, we look forward to scaling existing initiatives and embarking on new partnerships aimed at broadening and deepening digital access on the continent across our three strategic pillars.

These pillars – expanding access and reducing internet costs, making devices more affordable, and enhancing digital skills – are each crucial to our mission. Meaningful connection requires all three.



PDAA CEO Ibrahima Guimba-Saidou at the ABC Health Summit in Lagos, Nigeria.



Pillar 1: Expanding Connectivity

The Starlink Community Wi-Fi Pilot Project in Rwanda has provided valuable learnings about how to connect youth centers, bus stations, schools, and commercial centers to the internet using community Wi-Fi stations. PDAA, Smart Africa, and America's Frontier Fund are also advancing the African Broadband Bulk Purchase Marketplace (BPMP), which promises significant cost savings through large-scale, collaborative procurement. This program will increase competition among countries and enhance the resilience and reliability of digital infrastructure.



Pillar 2: Device Affordability

In partnership with the [International Finance Corporation \(IFC\)](#), PDAA is making significant strides in reducing the cost of internet-enabled devices. IFC is exploring a range of interventions, including soft capital, trade and supply chain solutions, handset receivable financing, and risk-sharing mechanisms to make entry-level 4G smartphones more affordable and accessible to first-time users. Additionally, engagement with KaiOS is enabling informal sector merchants and MSMEs with payment-acceptance phones featuring 3G/4G connectivity, with pilots underway in Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, and interest expressed by Equatorial Guinea and Zimbabwe.



Pillar 3: Digital Skills Development

The PDAA digital skills initiative is on track to train 5 million people by December 2026, with specialized programs for women, youth, and rural communities. In partnership with the [Mastercard Foundation](#), [ALX](#) is set to upskill 400,000 youth in in-demand digital competencies across the continent in 2025-2026. [Arizona State University](#) is strengthening e-learning capabilities at 10 African universities, while SmartAfrica and the [World Bank](#) are preparing to train 4,000 policy decision-makers in 2025. [Nokia](#) is designing a digital skills program for Ethiopian youth, and the Mastercard Foundation is supporting multiple initiatives, including training 20,000 young people for the global business sector, incubating 200 edtech ventures, designing a mass digital upskilling initiative targeting 4 million young women over five years, and implementing gig work upskilling programs in Ethiopia, Senegal, and Nigeria.



PDAA CEO Ibrahima Guimba-Saidou at a meeting with Intelsat CEO David Wajsgras and Academy Award-winning actor and humanitarian Forest Whitaker. Intelsat and Whitaker's nonprofit, the Whitaker Peace & Development Initiative, recently announced a partnership to bring high-speed satellite internet to community learning centers in South Sudan and Uganda.

Board and Governance

PDAA has been fortunate to welcome new board members since the beginning of the year:

- H.E. Paula Ingabire, Minister of ICT and Innovation in Rwanda
- Charles Murito, Regional Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy for Google in Sub-Saharan Africa
- Sally Wentworth, President and CEO of the Internet Society and the Internet Society Foundation
- Kelly Ommundsen, Head of Digital Inclusion and a Member of the Executive Committee for the World Economic Forum
- Dr. DeForest B. Soaries, Jr., President and CEO of Corporate Community Connections, Inc.

Our leadership structure continues to strengthen, with Executive Committee meetings held in October and December 2024, laying the groundwork for accelerated implementation in 2025.

The PDAA Board of Directors is chaired by:



**The Honorable Ellen
Johnson Sirleaf**
PDAA Co-Chair



Fatima Aliko-Dangote
PDAA Co-Chair



Gilman Louie
PDAA Co-Chair



Ray Chambers
PDAA Vice-Chair



Fred Swaniker
PDAA Vice-Chair

[Learn more about our board](#)



Upcoming Events

PDAA will be represented at the following upcoming events:

- Sept. 17th-24th: United Nations General Assembly (New York, NY)
- Sept. 22nd: AI Summit (Kigali, Rwanda)
- Nov. 11th-13th: AfricaCom (Cape Town, South Africa)

PDAA Partners: A Note from Giga and UNICEF



Giga, the joint initiative of UNICEF and ITU, helps governments identify, finance, and scale school connectivity as a driver of digital inclusion. Working across more than 40+ countries globally, Giga brings together data, infrastructure intelligence and financing strategies to strengthen national systems and reach the most underserved communities.

As digital public infrastructure becomes a priority across Africa, our collaboration with PDAA reflects a shared vision: affordable, inclusive access that is backed by evidence and enabled by local capacity. PDAA's ecosystem leadership is a powerful complement to Giga's country-level delivery and policy support.

Through our partnership with Smart Africa, Giga is also helping aggregate demand for school connectivity across member states, enabling bulk procurement, shaping markets, and accelerating implementation at scale.

Here's how that translates into impact in Africa:

- [Rwanda](#) – Giga supported the government in deploying real-time monitoring in connected schools and developing the country's first comprehensive school connectivity plan. The model is now guiding infrastructure investment and has informed regional policy dialogues.
- [Kenya](#) – Through Giga's mapping of more than 34,000 schools, the government has gained a detailed national infrastructure intelligence layer. This data is informing ICT and education budget planning and supports the integration of digital learning in public schools.
- [Sierra Leone](#) – Giga partnered with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education to map over 11,000 schools and assess existing infrastructure. This data has been used to develop national connectivity plans and inform financing strategies for future investment.
- [São Tomé and Príncipe](#) – Giga helped the government conduct cost modeling, procurement planning, and readiness assessments, unlocking co-financing to scale national connectivity efforts.

As countries shift from pilot projects to national delivery, Giga continues to evolve, supporting smarter policy, strengthening local capacity, and mobilizing financing for inclusive digital infrastructure, working with countries in Africa and beyond. Together with PDAA and its partners, Giga is enabling African governments to translate strategy into action. We are focused on what works—accelerating inclusive digital infrastructure where it is needed most.
