

The recently released GSMA Digital Economy Report is very instructive on Uganda's digital journey over the years. Uganda has made remarkable progress in expanding digital infrastructure. Today, our nation stands at 96 percent 4G population coverage, a milestone reflecting years of sustained investment, collaboration, and commitment.

The report also shows that Uganda's mobile broadband coverage now outperforms both the East African at 78 percent and Africa at 81 percent of populations being covered by broadband.

This is proof that strategic investment over time truly pays off. Yet, the report also reminds us that coverage alone does not equal connection.

This report presents a new challenge to tackle. The Usage Gap. Uganda's usage gap is 75 percent, East Africa at 79 percent and Africa at 72 percent.

Even with near-universal 4G availability, three out of four Ugandans living within mobile broadband coverage are still not using it. This "usage gap" stems from challenges that go beyond network infrastructure.

Bridging the usage gap matters because the benefits extend far beyond the telecom industry.

The GSMA modelling shows that the right digital reforms could unlock Shs14.6 trillion in additional economic value by 2030, delivering an estimated 1.79 million new jobs.

Digital access opens doors to education, healthcare, financial services, markets, and government services as creators and con-

Utilise Uganda's impressive Internet broadband coverage

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internet



tributors to the economy.

It is these and more services that Uganda needs to digitise, create value and accelerate usage.

Terminal devices like Smartphones, laptops, and consoles remain expensive for many households and businesses. This is because of various reasons, including effects from the disrupted global supply chains. The industry is collectively engaging with various stakeholders to take affirmative action on taxes on entry level devices.

GSMA analysis finds that entry-level smartphones are priced at \$38.91 (about

Shs137,000) in Uganda. This price equates to 39 percent of monthly GDP per capita, and 96 percent of monthly GDP per capita for the poorest 40 percent of the population.

Taxation contributes to 35 percent of smartphone cost.

The GSMA Report recommends adding four million unique mobile Internet (broadband) subscribers by 2030.

This would reduce the mobile Internet usage gap by seven percent and contribute to the NDPV 2030 objective of 45 percent population using the Internet.

As more people enter the digital economy, we must take care of each other's digital safety by addressing the digital skills gaps, building trust in digital services and tools.

It is important to integrate digital skills literacy in our daily lives as families, teams and organisations.

Uganda's digital journey has reached a critical inflection point. Yes, we have built an exceptional physical foundation.

But without meaningful usage and robust protection against digital threats, much potential remains untapped. This is the true promise of a connected Uganda.

Soumendra Sahu is the CEO and managing director of Airtel Uganda.