How GITEX Africa lived up to the hype

The unmistakable feeling in the air at this year's edition of GITEX Africa was "bigger, better and more meaningful". In a year when African startup events and conferences have become routine, the exhibition and conference managed to retain and grow a real sense of value.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Despite plunging startup financing across the continent, this still relatively new African edition of Dubai's biggest tech show drew thousands of guests and hundreds of companies as it put up a bigger show in Marrakech, Morocco, compared to the maiden edition.

Mature tech meets startup tech

Part of the attraction of <u>GITEX</u> stems from the fact that it has mastered the art of drawing the big global technology companies, as well as leading players from Europe and the MENA region, to its exhibition halls. The presence of these more mature companies, for example, was even more pronounced this year. The resulting experience, from an attendee perspective, feels like an intentional weaving of large enterprise technology solutions with younger technology upstarts.

For example, Visa, the global payment card services company, brought a coterie of startups from its Fintech Accelerator program. The program launched late in 2023 is part of Visa's pledge to invest up to $1B in African companies by 2027. So, not only was Visa represented as a global

financial services firm in its own right at GITEX Africa, but the startups that are part of Visa's accelerator program also illustrated the crossover from the global technology giant-dominated landscape to Africa's fledgling startup ecosystem.

The global heavyweights at GITEX Africa also utilised the media glare at the event to announce partnerships, memorandums and a slew of collaborations with local companies as well as African startups. Microsoft, which is promoting its cloud and AI software suite for governments, large companies and startups, signed at least three MOUs during GITEX. The MOUs range from an agreement on a collaborative framework for deploying AI solutions to address climate change in Morocco to an MOU to create a new AI Institute with Groupe Holmarcom, a large Moroccan conglomerate, and a partnership with Zindi, the African AI and data science talent provider, to train 10,000 young Africans.

For one, the robust feedback campaign that followed the maiden edition of the event helped conference producers curate a roster of meaningful content that helped keep crowds clustered around the more than half dozen stages at the event. Creating compelling content that can hold an audience's attention despite the sensory overload of GITEX Africa is a challenging feat, especially for an event that is the size and scale of GITEX. This year, GITEX organisers pulled it off, thanks to wide-ranging partnerships with dozens of tech communities on the ground, which organisers forged.

Digital Morocco

At this year's event, the presence of Moroccan startups was unmissable. From a prominent Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P) expo stand strategically placed as one walked towards the 10x, Elevate, and Future of Finance stages to dozens—maybe hundreds—of Moroccan tech startups at the startup exhibition areas, the handiwork of _Morocco's_

Agence de Développement du Digital (ADD) was visible.

Similarly, the trajectory and priority of technology businesses in Morocco were apparent. As Ory Okolloh, Partner at Verod-Kepple Africa Ventures, a $60M pan-African focused venture capital fund, put it, "Morocco's investment in education and research deep tech, supercomputing, and materials/industrialisation from a govt and corporate policy approach is impressive.."

But ADD and Kaoun International, the Dubai World Trade Center department that organises GITEX Africa, do not appear content with putting on a good show once every year in Marrakech. Two examples illustrate this point for both entities.

Reaching for new grounds

Throughout the 3 days of the conference, ADD signed partnership agreements with Sénégal Numérique SA, the Information Systems and

Digital Agency (ASIN) of Benin, the National Digital Development Agency (ANADEN) of the Comoros, the Digital Agency of the State of Mauritania (AN-ETAT), the Gambian Information and Communication Technologies Agency (GICTA), the National Agency for the Information Society (ANSI) of Niger.

The _statement_ announcing these partnerships on ADD's website described the initiative as something of "capital importance, symbolising a major step forward in technological cooperation on a continental scale."

For Kaoun International, organisers of GITEX Africa, the announcement of a new GITEX event that will debut in two Nigerian cities in September 2025 represents a significant continental leap for the Dubai World Trade Center division. A _press release_ announcing the expansion described the

new event as something that will "integrate the Nigerian tech ecosystem firmly into GITEX AFRICA Morocco and extend its reach into GITEX GLOBAL in Dubai…"

Though smaller in scale, under this new format, the event will focus on artificial intelligence, health, finance, and North Star Nigeria, the GITEX event brand focused on startups. It is fitting that in its second year, GITEX Africa, which made its African (and first international) debut in 2023 through Morocco, has become one of Morocco's important launchpads southwards. It's not a long shot to interpret this as an early sign of success as Morocco works to position itself as a launch platform for investments flowing into sub-Saharan Africa from the Gulf.

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