

Why Demo Africa is taking place in Morocco this year

 By Tom Jackson

26 Jun 2018

Demo Africa will take place in Morocco for the first time after previous editions in Nairobi, Lagos and Johannesburg, with the organisers already touring the continent picking contestants. Lions@frica explains why it is taking the event to North Africa for the first time.



The time has come for the regional ecosystem in North Africa to attain global relevance, and we are glad that the Kingdom of Morocco is hosting our pan-African technology showcase over the next two years.

Why Morocco, why now?

After a six-year run that saw us begin in Nairobi in 2012 and 2013, and travel across to Lagos for the next two years, with our most recent events in Johannesburg over the last couple of years, the North African region was our planned destination for the 2018 and 2019 editions of Demo Africa.



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Our executive team considered a number of variables in selecting our host country including, but not limited to, ecosystem partnerships, public sectors support, regional growth potential and a dynamic Local Organising Committee. The country is certainly on an interesting trajectory towards becoming an innovation hub in the region, and all of our targeted stakeholders are showing remarkable ambition towards globalising the Moroccan ecosystem.

Ecosystem development

Funding for Moroccan startups is on the rise, while a [GSMA report](#) on tech hubs across Asia Pacific and Africa show that Morocco is home to 25 accelerators, incubators, co-working spaces or other types of tech hubs. with over 50 per cent located in Casablanca alone.

With huge support from our founding partners at [Microsoft 4 Afrika](#), our ecosystem engagement led us to the fantastic work being done by organisations like [Technopark](#), [LaFactory](#), [Outlierz Ventures](#), Creativity at Work, VBS and the [Maroc Numeric Fund](#).

We were also quite thrilled to see the forward-thinking actions of firms like [H7](#) that have focused squarely on scaling startups across the African ecosystem to become global players. With the [OCP Foundation](#), we are excited to have a pan-African ecosystem leader with roots in Morocco, and a strategic roadmap that fits perfectly with ours.

Public sector support

In October 2017, the [Moroccan Ministry of Finance and Economy](#) launched the Innov Invest Fund. This fund offers real opportunities in terms of support and financing dedicated to startups and innovative project developers. Its implementation reflects a strong commitment by the government to this category of entrepreneurs who constitute the nucleus of the economy of the future.



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With this new instrument, the Central Guarantee Fund (CGC) is expanding its offer and thus filling a gap in the funding chain for early stage startups. According to the ministry, the CGC has signed four agreements with the management companies of the four seed funds selected – Azur Innovation, the Seaf Morocco Growth Fund, Morocco Numeric Fund II and Green Innov Invest. These activities and relationships are particularly instrumental as the [African Business Angels Network \(ABAN\)](#) expands its North African footprint through Demo Africa.

Francophone inclusion

The African technology ecosystem is comprised of multilingual and multicultural innovation hubs across countries, states and cities. Over the last six years, Demo Africa has delivered content in English and participating startups have been trained to present their ventures in the same language. In advancing our vision towards broader participation across our francophone networks and hubs, the 2018 and 2019 editions of Demo Africa will allow startups to pitch in both English and French, and support content delivery in both languages.

Data available from [OIF Researchers](#) estimate that there are 200 million French-speakers in the world and that nearly half on them live in Africa. With 96.2 million Africans speaking French at the moment, the report estimates that rising rates of literacy and birth rates mean there could be 700 million French-speakers in the world by 2050. With this in mind, the next two editions of Demo Africa will pay particular attention to the recruitment and assessment of viable ventures from francophone regions of the continent.

Corporate innovation

While in Casablanca, we also had the opportunity to meet with mobile operators [Orange](#) and [Inwi](#), which are playing a remarkable role in the growing ecosystem in Morocco. Data available from the GSMA suggests that the increase in partnerships between mobile operators and startups is due to an increasing acknowledgement of the mutual perks the parties can benefit from.

Currently, mobile operators support or run over 14 per cent of the active tech hubs identified across Africa. With over a billion mobile subscribers across the continent, corporate innovation programs with telcos represent an interesting go-to-market approach for many ventures.

Within the Moroccan ecosystem, Inwi runs an annual [Impact Camp](#) programme. The week-long bootcamp is geared towards coaching a number of local startups around a specific theme or industry vertical. Comparatively, in their continued support of the ecosystem, Orange recently launched a new co-working space, [StartOn](#), with a focus on supporting startups across a myriad of target industries.

The fourth industrial revolution

The next two editions of Demo Africa will welcome the introduction of new startup verticals including [artificial intelligence](#), data analytics, blockchain and robotic technologies. As we continue on this journey of globalising African technologies, while promoting frugal, local solutions, we are also advocating that the fourth industrial revolution could completely transform Africa.

From big data to machine learning, the fusion of technological breakthroughs in the physical and digital spheres is changing the most fundamental tools and techniques of human interaction, and the net effects on the African continent will be no different from any other developing markets.

Demo Africa will offer the next generation of African innovators an opportunity to showcase their solutions, and we are glad to be calling Morocco our home over the next two years.

ABOUT TOM JACKSON

Co-founder @DisruptAfrica. Tech and business journalist in Africa. Passionate about the vibrant tech startups scene in Africa, Tom can usually be found sniffing out the continent's most exciting new companies and entrepreneurs, funding rounds and any other developments within the growing ecosystem.

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