The African Startups ecosystem, article by AWS

AWS South Africa recently embarked on a journey to bring AWS Startup Days to Johannesburg, Lagos, Accra and Nairobi. AWS Startup Days are free events for early-stage founders, developers, and investors that aim to help early-stage founders build quickly with AWS services. They do this by providing networking opportunities and hosting business advice events, with tips on how to get funding, how to market your products efficiently, and how to leverage the breadth of startup programs that AWS provides.

So, what did we learn about startups, founders, and investors as we engaged with some of the hottest startup ecosystems in Africa?

Lagos, Nigeria

In Lagos, logistics are critical. Unlike Nairobi's and Accra's populations, which both roughly have the population density of Silicon Valley, Lagos' population is a vast 21 million. The sheer size of the city presents overwhelming challenges and hampers founder access to tech hubs, including difficulties with simply getting around. There is so much entrepreneurial talent – payment tech startups like Paystack and Flutterwave have had some amazing achievements, for example – but just getting to them all in a day was challenging. However, this, coupled with the fact that the Lagosian startup ecosystem is rich in accelerators, incubators, and early stage funding, means that the city is still filled with untapped potential. Because Lagosian startups are still primarily concerned with how to get started with funding, marketing, and hiring, opportunities abound.

Accra, Ghana

Accra made everyone on our team smile. Its superb infrastructure, great venues, and numerous social development initiatives all lend themselves to the making of a startup nation. However, there is a clear lack of early stage funding and programs in this space, which explains why all our AWS Startup Day business sessions in Accra were oversubscribed.

Nairobi, Kenya

Walking around Nairobi is like walking into a spaza shop full of tech-savvy founders, developers and business leaders. If you're not familiar with "spazas," think of the biggest informal shopping district you can—except instead of clothes, food, and wares, you get every flavor of startup, from mobile first, commerce, fintech, energy, and agrotech to early stage and seed funding.

Johannesburg, South Africa

Johannesburg's startup ecosystem has a strong corporate venture firm culture, including many funding opportunities with corporate VCs, so the city generates many B2B and SaaS founders and impactful consumer ventures. We learned that these founders generally want to leverage the latest technologies, as such, expect and need minimal additional experience in gaining markets.

Technology wise, all these cities are home to some incredible initiatives like agrotech startup Cowtribe building out vaccination solutions to save farming or church tech startup Asoriba using serverless to scale. Not to be ignored are payment and financial service startups like Cellulant, Paystack, Aela Credit, and

Flutterwave. Cellulant in particular has been making strides in moving as many workloads to AWS as possible. Our favorite part of the African tour was hearing from the founders of these companies through AWS' Startups on Air program. Do take some time and listen via Periscope! https://aws.amazon.com/startups/startups-on-air/.

Overall, these startup ecosystems are moving much faster than the programs currently designed to support them. Each ecosystem would benefit from city-wide digital initiatives, as population density and logistics getting to incubators and accelerators or just heading to find funding and meet mentors, is a major challenge for founders.

This is why AWS Startup Team collaborated with SW7.co to launch an accessible Virtual Business Accelerator initially in South Africa