

AfricaConnect3: Connecting Africa to Unlimited Possibilities

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Since 2011, the European Union has been co-funding the development of pan-African Research and Education Network (REN) through the AfricaConnect project. The third phase of AfricaConnect (AC3) started in November 2019 with GÉANT, ASREN, UbuntuNet Alliance, and WACREN regional RENs 1 as the main coordinators. The main objective of AC3 is to contribute to the human capital development of Africa by increasing the use of digital technologies at the African research and education institutions. Without high-speed network infrastructures for research and education, however, access to digital technologies remains a challenge.

African researchers and students have not been active contributors and users of world research and innovation. This is due to the absence of affordable connectivity and lack of services. According to UNESCO's statistics, Africa contributes to less than 2% of the world's research output and has only 91 researchers per million people compared to 4272 for North America and Western Europe 2. In general, Internet penetration in Africa is very low due to lack of connectivity and highly priced Internet.

AC3 presents a great promise not only for establishing high-speed networks to interconnect universities, colleges and research centers across Africa, but also for deploying a wide range of services that allow instructors, scientists and students to seamlessly access a wealth of invaluable education and research resources. These include cloud technologies, high performance computing, digital repositories, online libraries, and ODeL (Open and Distance eLearning) as a means for disruptive access to higher education.

In this talk, AC3 will be presented as a new prospect for connecting Africa to unlimited possibilities in education, research, and innovation. The project is centered on 4 main actions. The first action focuses on establishing secure, adequate and affordable network infrastructures for the African NRENs interlinking them through their respective African RENs to GÉANT, Internet2, RedCLARA and other regional RENs. The second action supports the deployment of dedicated services and applications that provide seamless access to variety of computational resources and repositories in an effort to foster collaboration. Efforts will include setting up eduID.Africa, deploying eduroam and eduGAIN, and initiating the African open science cloud. The third action will implement a large-scale capacity building program through the Africa Training Initiative. Finally, the fourth action will be centered on advocacy and awareness in order to facilitate policy support and stakeholder engagement for the long-term development of sustainable and affordable high-speed network infrastructures.

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