

Opinion: Tech-driven resilience in Ukraine can further drive innovations in Rwanda

In past decades, many countries have faced internal challenges, with citizens closely following national developments and demanding the appropriate recourse from their governments and communities. However, if in the past fragile contexts might have been barriers to innovations, nowadays they have become catalysts. Two countries in very different stages of development, Rwanda and Ukraine, perfectly exemplify what it means to be resilient and proactive in the face of adversity. Rwanda has been actively leveraging and scaling technological opportunities to solve public health challenges through innovations like Zipline's drone delivery service. Ukraine, concurrently, became the first country to set new global standards in digitizing public infrastructure through platforms like Diia, even amidst military attacks. The discussion between Kigali and Kyiv's offices in April 2024 only emphasizes that both countries aim to strengthen bilateral relations and, therefore, might benefit from synergy: Rwanda's enhanced delivery systems inspired by Ukraine's digital governance model could unlock a new frontier in Rwanda's healthcare access and innovations.

Ukraine as a unique example for other countries

While in recent years, Ukraine has become globally recognized for its defense against Russian aggression, its digital transformation efforts haven't gone unnoticed either. The government's all-in-one platform, Diia (Дія), allows Ukrainian citizens to access digital documents, register a business or marriage, and apply for benefits. Everything is accessible through the smartphone, and new features, like the ability to report enemy troop locations, have been developed especially rapidly in light of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Diia went far beyond traditional models of e-governance, which positioned Ukraine as a digital leader on TIME's list of best innovations of 2024.

What makes Diia especially interesting is how it blends centralized power and decentralized access. On the one hand, it simplifies government by reducing bureaucracy, as there is no need to access the services through different offices and people. On the other hand, it puts main social services into a single platform, giving the Ministry of Digital Transformation more centralized control over how services are delivered and how data moves. As Gulsanna Mamedieva, adjunct professor at Georgetown's McCourt School of Public Policy, explains in her article for Harvard Center for International Development, the Ministry of Digital Transformation didn't just move old processes online, it redesigned them entirely. In doing so, Ukraine is introducing a more customer-oriented technology that sets a new standard for digital sovereignty and is already being watched closely by other countries.

Why Rwanda should look to Ukraine to develop healthtech

Just like Ukraine, Rwanda has made extraordinary progress in using technology to address the most pressing challenges in the country, such as healthcare access. One of the most notable examples is Rwanda's successful partnership with an American company called Zipline. Through this collaboration, Rwanda uses drones to deliver blood, vaccines, and medical supplies to rural clinics. This initiative has not only improved Rwanda's healthcare system by reducing the urban-rural divide

under specific local conditions but has also gained global attention. Zipline's success in Rwanda demonstrates the powerful potential of public-private partnerships in delivering innovative health solutions.

However, when compared with the multifaceted approach taken by Ukraine, it becomes clear that Zipline represents just one layer, logistics, of what's possible in health innovation. To bring the technological impact even further, Rwanda could consider a more integrative approach that connects delivery, diagnosis, follow-up, and citizen engagement into a unified, centralized digital system. This is where Ukraine's experience becomes invaluable.

Rwanda's relatively centralized governance structure, combined with Zipline's tailored innovation, creates a strong foundation for the development of digital health infrastructure from the ground up. Rather than redesigning outdated systems, Rwanda has a unique opportunity to directly build an innovative solution that can efficiently tackle healthcare challenges in the country.

This approach is similar to Ukraine's wartime efforts to develop digital strategies that can benefit local communities during a crisis. In Rwanda, such a platform would not only enhance health access and outcomes but also lay the foundation for broader digital governance and innovation.

The opportunity for collaboration and skill transfer

The recent talks between the Rwandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ukraine's diplomatic delegation open the door for future collaboration. Ukraine's digital expertise, especially in developing innovative initiatives in extreme conditions, could complement Rwanda's on-the-ground healthcare logistics. Together, the two countries can exchange experiences and create scalable solutions for other nations. While Rwanda has already attracted companies like Zipline to deliver physical goods, there is now space to collaborate with the Ukrainian government to enhance the country's healthcare governance. The collaboration could include knowledge and policy exchange, capacity-building initiatives, or joint frameworks to develop sustainable technological ideas.

A central strength of Ukraine's technology, Diia, is its balance between centralized oversight and decentralized user access. If Rwanda manages to adopt a similar approach to its own healthcare sector, it would make a significant step forward in digital health system modernization.