



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# AI FOR AFRICA INITIATIVE

## UNLOCKING AI POTENTIAL FOR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT AND PROSPERITY

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Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC), Western Cape Province

# INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence emerged as a transformative force capable of reshaping economies and societies, driving innovation, redefining the balance of power and advancing development goals.

Similar to other regions, AI developments are occurring in Africa at unprecedented speed as people, institutions and industries are gradually embracing AI for transforming essential sectors such as education, agriculture, finance and healthcare, where the continent is facing major challenges. An increasing number of locally developed and innovative AI-based businesses and startups such as Deep Learning Indaba, Data Science Africa, and Masakhane Research Foundation are flourishing across the continent, shaping AI landscape in Africa and helping communities and individuals access to essential services by providing new technological means and offering new opportunities.

To prepare Africa to the AI era, The African Union endorsed in July 2024 the Continental Strategy on Artificial Intelligence that reflects the common vision for AI in Africa and defines common priorities of the region for the five upcoming years including integrating AI in national and regional development plans; reviewing and re-orienting policies to align to AI changes, accelerating AI integration in critical sectors and promoting the use of AI for climate adaptation and energy efficiency as well as developing domestic AI expertise and capabilities ; addressing the AI funding gaps by increasing public and private investments and engaging in innovative and win-win partnerships.

AI developments in Africa will be guided by principles of ethics, transparency and non-discrimination; human rights and human dignity; peace and prosperity; inclusion and diversity as well as cooperation and integration while prioritizing and Africa -centric and development focused approach to make AI available for socio-economic development and foster innovation in strategic areas.

In 2025, African countries declared AI as a strategic priority for the continent and committed to unleash AI's vast potential to accelerate the implementation of the AU Agenda 2063 and ensure that AI development and governance are effectively incorporated into Africa's long-term strategic vision for inclusive economic growth, social progress and sustainable development.

While there is optimism about AI potential to transform economies and improve lives of people, the African continent is faced with challenges ranging from infrastructure deficit namely compute facilities and data centers, to a significant gap in AI skills along with inadequate capacity to develop high quality datasets that can be used to develop AI solutions that can respond to Africa context and needs of its populations.

## SCOPE AND AIMS OF AI FOR AFRICA INITIATIVE

South Africa, through its G20 Presidency for 2025, and under the theme “Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability” is seizing the opportunity to prioritize technological advancements and development of Just, equitable and inclusive AI as a catalyst for Africa’s economic growth, industrialisation and social progress.

To develop the necessary AI capabilities and bridge the digital and AI gaps Affecting Africa, there is a need for collaborative efforts as well as inclusive engagements and solidarity across various domains, actors and borders.

The “AI for Africa Initiative” introduced as a key G20 Initiative by South Africa and coordinate by the African Union has for main objective laying the foundations for an inclusive, vibrant and sustainable AI ecosystem in Africa. It aims to serve as a platform for inclusive cooperation between the African Union and G20 members at all levels of AI developments from the deployment of AI infrastructure including compute facilities and data centers to implementation of joint initiatives in research & innovation and capacity building, to exchanges of best practices on AI policies with a view to fostering interoperable AI governance approaches at international level to effectively harness AI potential for equitable and fair socio-economic development.

The initiative aligns with the AU Strategy on Artificial Intelligence that reflects the common vision for AI in Africa and defines common priorities of the region for the five upcoming years including integrating AI in national and regional development plans; reviewing and re-orienting policies to align to AI changes, accelerating AI adoption in critical sectors and promoting the use of AI for climate adaptation, energy efficiency and resilience building as well as developing domestic AI expertise and promoting AI literacy ; addressing the AI funding gaps by increasing public and private investments and engaging in innovative and win-win partnerships.

The AI for Africa Initiative is a framework for well-structured, coordinated commitments for both technical and financial support to advance AI in Africa, the initiative is open to all G20

members and the private sector, alongside backing from international organisations such as UNESCO, the ITU, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the UN SG Tech Envoy's Office, and the World Bank and regional organisations such as, the African Development Bank.

## PRIORITY AREAS AND STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS

The key areas of intervention and specific objectives that African Countries aim to achieve through the “G20 AI for Africa Initiative” are:

- 1. AI for Inclusive and Sustainable Development:** To leverage AI potential to advance sustainable and inclusive development in Africa, it is essential to promote AI adoption across both public and private sectors. The AI for Africa initiative has for objectives to boost AI adoption in the public sector to enhance the delivery of essential services to citizens and businesses, improve efficiency, accessibility, and responsiveness ; create enabling conditions for mainstreaming AI technologies in key sectors such as agriculture, education, and health ; encourage private sector engagement and investment in AI development, deployment and use, particularly in supporting startups, small and medium enterprises to foster economic growth and competitiveness.
- 2. AI Workforce, Education and Capacity Building:** Building a robust AI workforce in Africa requires a comprehensive approach to education and capacity development. This involves promoting AI skills and talent cultivation across all educational levels—from primary schools to higher education institutions—as well as in workplaces and lifelong learning settings. Establishing specialized AI education and training centers will ensure the safe and responsible use of AI technologies. To keep pace with AI advancements, continuous learning, reskilling and upskilling will be prioritized. Additionally, empowering communities including women through basic digital literacy and foundational AI skills will help bridge the digital divide and ensure that all citizens, regardless of background, can participate in and benefit from the AI-driven economy.
- 3. Developing Sustainable and Resilient AI- Related Infrastructure:** To support the growth of AI across the continent, African countries are prioritizing the development of sustainable and resilient AI-related infrastructure. This includes building a robust network of national and regional computing facilities and data centers to provide the foundational resources needed for AI research, development, and deployment.

A key focus is also on promoting a distributed African AI cloud infrastructure that ensures accessibility, scalability, and efficiency. Additionally, expanding high-speed connectivity networks will enable seamless access to AI services and foster greater collaboration across the continent and between Africa and other regions and countries. The deployment of domestic AI infrastructure and models is essential to developing and sustaining an African AI ecosystem that can empower African people and preserve Africa identity in the AI environment.

4. **Data Governance and Capabilities:** A key objective of the AI for Africa Initiative is to accelerate the implementation of the African Union (AU) Data Policy Framework, which includes developing data capabilities of African countries, prioritizing robust data governance and the development of harmonized national data governance structures along with the operationalization of mechanisms for cross-border data flows. There is a strong emphasis on enhancing data access and interoperability across sectors and national borders as well as ensuring the availability of high-quality, diverse datasets that are representative of Africa's rich cultures, communities, and demographics as an imperative for the development of inclusive AI ecosystems in Africa.
5. **Research and Innovation:** Africa's commitment to advancing research and innovation is central to its vision on harnessing AI for Africa's development and prosperity. By supporting research in vital sectors such as health, agriculture, education, energy, and logistics, countries African countries can drive practical solutions that meet local needs. The acceleration of the implementation of the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa, with a focus on integrating AI into scientific research, is a key step toward this goal. Creating favorable conditions for innovation—through infrastructure, funding, and policy—will empower African researchers and entrepreneurs. Strengthening collaboration between academia, industry, and government will further enhance the impact of research. Additionally, fostering international cooperation will position Africa as both a contributor to and a beneficiary of global technological progress.
6. **Leveraging AI to Enhance Energy Efficiency and Sustainability:** Artificial intelligence presents a powerful opportunity for African countries to enhance energy efficiency and promote environmental sustainability. By integrating AI into the energy sector, nations can move beyond traditional systems and develop innovative, locally adapted solutions to address the continent's energy access challenges. Technologies such as machine learning, data analytics, and the Internet of Things (IoT) can significantly improve the performance of smart grids, enabling more flexible and diversified energy generation and distribution. AI also plays a crucial role in optimizing the use of renewable energy

sources—such as wind, solar, geothermal, biomass, and hydropower—by improving forecasting and resource management. The AI for Africa Initiative aims to support Africa countries in aligning AI development with clean energy investments to ensure that technological progress supports environmental preservation and long-term sustainability goals.

7. **Developing Robust AI Governance:** To ensure safety, security, and interoperability across the continent and ensure that AI serves the interests of societies, economies across the continent without harming people, African countries are prioritizing the development of robust and inclusive AI governance frameworks and adoption of common technical standards. This can be achieved by establishing multi-stakeholder and multi-level governance systems—engaging governments, local authorities, the private sector, academia, and civil society—will ensure that AI policies are inclusive and contextually relevant; strengthening national capacities to develop, adopt, and regulate AI in alignment with local priorities to enable responsible innovation ; creating enabling policy and regulatory environments and adopting ethical principles that uphold human rights, cultural and linguistic diversity, gender equality, and African values is critical to building trust in AI systems and promote safe and widespread AI adoption.
8. **Address AI Funding Gap and Attract Investments:** Closing the AI funding gap is essential for accelerating Africa’s AI driven transformation and ensuring equal opportunities to all Africans. To achieve this, African countries need to rely on both public and private investment in AI, creating opportunities for innovation and scalable solutions tailored to local needs. Strengthening international partnerships with other regions and countries is also key to mobilizing financial and technical resources for AI development, deployment, and use. In addition, developing innovative financing mechanisms—such as blended finance, venture capital, and public-private partnerships—will support large-scale AI adoption across sectors. By aligning investment strategies with national priorities, Africa can build a resilient AI ecosystem that drives sustainable development and technological autonomy.



# LAUNCH OF THE AI FOR AFRICA INITIATIVE

The G20 AI for Africa Initiative is aligned with the African Union's development and regional integration aspirations and has for objective accelerating the implementation of the AU Continental AI Strategy and AU Data Policy Framework while taking into account the sovereignty as well as the different levels of development and AI readiness of African countries.

The Initiative identifies key areas of intervention as well as specific objectives and strategic actions that are needed to pave the way for AI development in Africa including the creation of spaces for joint programs and establishment of networks of researchers in the AI field .It is based on open-ended, voluntary and collaborative actions for financial and technical support to advance responsible, ethical and secure AI development, adoption and use in Africa.

The initiative provides space for bilateral discussions between G20 members and South Africa Presidency to explore areas and means of contribution and offers powerful opportunities for long term AU / G20 collaboration, exchanges of best practices and establishment of AI-based partnerships.

The AI for Africa Initiative will be officially launched at the AI for Africa Conference, to be co-organized by the South African G20 Presidency, the African Union and UNESCO, on 30 September – 1 St October 2025 back to back to the DEWG and AI Taskforce Ministerial Meetings where G20 member, invited countries and private sector will be given space to publicly announce their pledges for financial and technical commitments to support shaping Africa AI future.