

Africa's Dilemma: Bridging Digital Divides and Governance **የአፍሪካ አጣብቂኝ፡ ዲጂታል ክፍፍሎችን እና አስተዳደርን ማስፈን**

The majority of African nations have already begun the process of digitising their public services in an effort to bring the government closer to the people and to boost the effectiveness of public administration. Digital transformation, the widespread adoption of digital technologies to improve business processes, government operations, and consumer experiences, is happening all over the world, and Africa is no exception.

The continent of Africa has a comparatively low rate of digital penetration and digital readiness. Despite the difficulty being the same as in other sectors, certain African governments have yet to have a digital policy or plan. While the gap between developed and developing countries keeps growing. This is mainly because the African continent hasn't invested enough in its ICT infrastructure, which includes their internet service providers.

Africa is currently positioned at the very bottom of the ladder regarding ICT, which has significant repercussions for the continent and the rest of the world. That this phenomenon is taking place is attributable primarily to the fact that countries with more advanced ICT infrastructures have more robust economies than those with less developed infrastructures. As a result, the development gap between Africa and the industrialised world is becoming even more expansive.

The digital goals of many countries are outlined in their national development plans; in contrast, some have more in-depth documentation outlining their digital strategies. Others continue to have policies and strategic procedures covering very particular topics, such as e-commerce, cybersecurity, digital privacy, and e-government, amongst others.

On a positive note, digital platforms and e-commerce are already taking over the African continent, even though they are spreading there at a slower rate than in the rest of the world. The increasing use of technology and the associated digitisation of processes is a potential driver of economic growth, particularly with the creation of digital jobs for Africa's large youth population. Some nations have already begun to take advantage of these chances by passing laws and implementing national digital policies designed to speed up digital transformation across various industries.

African political and business leaders could help their communities transition to digital by actively participating in activities like capacity building and awareness raising. As some data indicates that Africa has the most significant increase in mobile subscriptions and is the global leader in the use of mobile phones for money transfers and other essential services, this should continue and need to be recognised as a positive trend.

In order to realise the full benefits of the digital economy, Africa needs to transform from basic connectivity to interconnectivity digitally. These motivating forces enable the growth of continental-scale applications and services. The digital transformation of the ICT industry in Africa

will provide significant insights into the requisite competencies and the barriers to be overcome in digital transformation. Nevertheless, the question of who owns the technology and who is responsible for its development is the most important factor in Africa regarding digital transformation.

Instead of imitating digitalisation in other parts of the world, African nations must take into account their specific reality and create a localised form of digitalisation. This strategy includes addressing the problems of small farmers and pastoralist communities.

Among many issues that African countries should address as part of a concerted effort is ensuring that their citizens have affordable access to the internet and improved digital literacy. In order to boost the economy and maintain a competitive edge in both the domestic and international markets, it is imperative that citizens have access to digital services.

Approaches to the digitalization of public services that are fragmented and lack an overall strategy at the highest level of government are a recipe for decreased efficiency. Investing in interoperability, regulatory frameworks for data protection, and putting users' demands at the centre of service design are crucial for enabling a human-centric and adequate digital service supply.

The availability of electricity, broadband internet, hardware, and software, as well as technologically knowledgeable inhabitants, are all essential to the spread and success of digitalization. In areas where the government cannot address the digitalization strategy, institutions responsible for carrying out may form partnerships with the private sector and citizens willing to provide services on behalf of the government. That is what we call it public-private-partnership (PPP).

Examining how digitally prepared Africa is in this regard on a periodic basis and identifying the impediments to advancement is helpful in making improvements. Is the full potential of 4IR technology still a bit of a stretch at this point, and how long until widespread digitalization gets off the ground? Instead, the effectiveness of e-government and e-commerce programmes depends on addressing the connection, digital skills, and lack of underlying laws specific to African countries.

What role digitalization can play in overcoming Africa's trade hurdles?

There is a trade deficit on the continent of Africa, and we need to think about how the advent of digital technology might help reduce this deficit. Better access to markets, particularly for the small businesses that make up the vast majority of companies in the majority of African countries. How can the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) be used to improve a digital payment system, keep track of non-tariff barriers, and eliminate them? There needs to be good digital connectivity for these goals to be reached.

Digitalisation optimises trade and commercial operations, hence reducing costs, and digital technology can reduce traditional distribution channel transaction costs, such as search, language, and

logistics coordination. Digitalising customs systems and procedures can eliminate regulatory inefficiencies and speed export transit and clearance, reducing supplier demurrage payments. More importantly, strengthening the continent's digital sector is critical for economic integration and might help resolve long-standing structural trade barriers while ensuring that the AfCFTA's benefits are fairly distributed.

Digital platforms have proven particularly effective in linking potential buyers and sellers across many jurisdictions and reducing cumbersome processes in the value chain, allowing for faster and more accessible information flow and improved involvement in the global supply chain. Two benefits of digitally sharing this data among market parties are a better understanding of customer preferences and greater access to information about regulations and standards.

Digital technology can help disadvantaged people, such as those in the informal sector and rural areas, expand their businesses and provide more efficient services to the continent's increasing consumer class. Digitalisation could also increase access to fintech lending facilities, crowdfunding, and other flexible funding and payment options for small export enterprises, helping them grow and service more customers. E-commerce platforms provide for cheaper internet presence and track record building.

Africa should examine "Digital Capitalism" through a different lens, focusing on ownership, equity, and competency if all other variables remain constant. The digital revolution is a "two-edged sword"; on the one hand, automation makes life easier, but it also threatens human labour, which was previously subservient to the productive system.

Digital capitalism poses a fundamental threat to the transformation of human labour into a commodity, diminishing the value of human intelligence. It fragments the workforce, lowers social standards, worsens working conditions, and exacerbates power disparities between developed and underdeveloped nations.

The Digital Transformation Strategy, on Broader Societal Benefits

There is a concerted effort to ensure that the public sector, civil society, academia, and business upgrading processes and technologies are closely coordinated and integrated. However, much still has to be done to the integration of people, processes, and technology will be the defining element for the success of the continuing digital transformation endeavour.

As automation advances, the public sector, civil society, academic institutions, and commercial procedures within any ecosystem expedite service delivery and become more transparent and simplified. The adoption of technologies was also cited as an essential aspect of digital transformation;

however, the role of technology dominated all responses without taking human participation into sufficient account.

Numerous studies on people's attitudes toward technology revealed that many viewed it as a potential replacement for humans as opposed to an instrument to help them achieve their objectives. Only structural changes in digital transformation can alter this view, revealing the ways in which policy frameworks, organisational structures, and competencies can be moulded. Despite the fact that technology and automation have a substantial impact on human intervention replacement, this generation should view business differently and develop alternative employment and business opportunities.

Understanding the significance of data and the African Union interventions!

The Malabo AU convention on cyber security and personal data protection is, all things being equal, a thorough instrument that member nations should recognise and execute. African countries and the continent may face difficulties because they do not have access to their own "big data centre" or independent ICT infrastructure.

For example, Baidu, the Chinese search engine, is giant than Google in China. There's Youku instead of YouTube. As an alternative to eBay, there is Taobao, and as an alternative to Facebook, there is RenRen. In lieu of Twitter, China has Weibo. China has banned YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter in order to encourage the use of domestic alternatives. Instead of prohibiting the existing Western platforms, I propose establishing alternative ICT products.

The Chinese people are very proud of their domestic companies and provide consistent support. The countries of Africa need to develop a more vital awareness of economic issues. Every dollar counts when it comes to most African countries' economies. It is in the best interest of Africans to support African manufacturers and brands whenever it is in their power. If people on the African continent produce, consume, and trade within the continent, then Africa will have a more considerable degree of economic control.

The way forward !!

In order to accomplish results in sustainable development on the African continent, it is essential to have successful regional and continent-wide or interoperable digitalisation. In this hypothetical situation, if the digitalisation of the nation's government fails, it will be challenging to attain the continental goal.

Thus, short-term regional digitalisation efforts should primarily develop uniform regional standards and facilitate, support, and enable national digitalisation triumphs. Connecting national systems to regional networks would create a robust and competitive platform that protects Africa and

its citizens and offer an alternative solution. Otherwise, Africa will remain under siege and western private sector control.

Enhancing cross-border economic activity on the African continent will promote cross-border data exchange. In order to increase the competitiveness of the African digital economy and maximize the potential of the AfCFTA, governments, non-state actors, and development institutions should collaborate to ensure the speedy implementation and enforcement of data governance policies and laws that guarantee trust, and transparency and increase digital inclusiveness.

Beyond maintaining the security of data flows, it has become crucial to provide the soft and hard infrastructure for a prosperous digital economy in Africa. The development of such an option is strictly contingent upon increased access to digital technologies. A more welcoming regulatory climate for private sector investments increases governmental spending on ICT infrastructure, and more widespread internet usage is necessary for ICT to reach its full potential.

Seife Tadelle Kidane (PhD): is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Pan African Thought and Conversation (IPATC); Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Johannesburg.