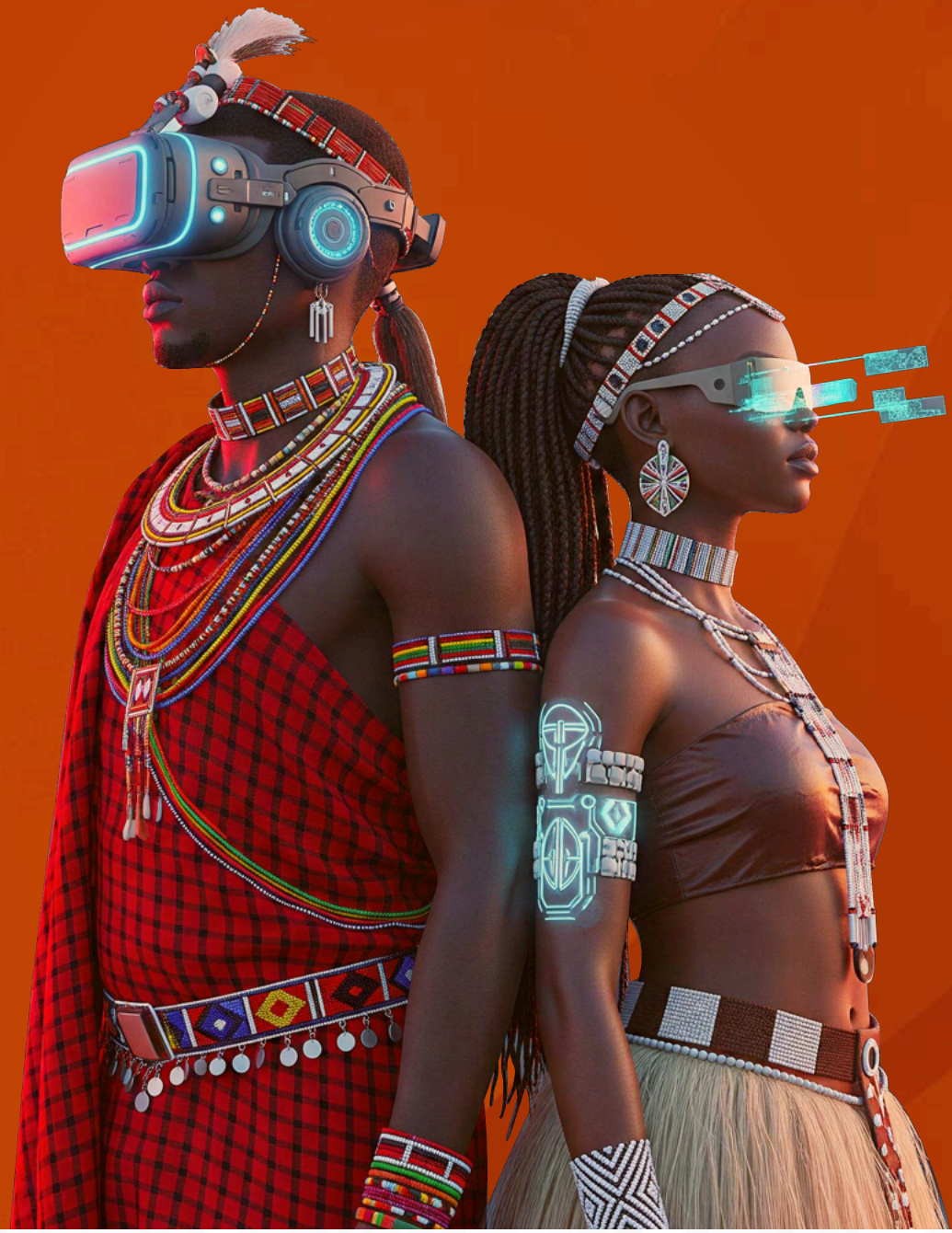
AFRICA AI VILLAGE



Insights from the Africa AI Village at UNGA 80

633 Third Ave 22nd Floor, New York | Sept 2, 2025

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Introduction

The Qubit Hub Vision

At the Africa AI Village held on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA 80), leaders, innovators, youth, and policymakers from across the continent gathered to reflect on one central question: What does it mean for Africa to own its AI future?

The discussions were anchored on the six pillars of the Africa AI Declaration: Compute, Investment, Governance, Talent, Market, and Data. From these dialogues emerged not just aspirations, but tangible insights into Africa's readiness, opportunities, and challenges in the age of artificial intelligence.

What follows is a distillation of those conversations; a continental pulse check, a situation analysis of where Africa stands and where it is headed.

Pillar 1: Compute - Building the Backbone of Africa's AI Future

AI sovereignty begins with compute sovereignty. Across the continent, innovators have the ideas and algorithms, but many lack access to affordable computational power. According to the United Nations Development Programme, only 5% of Africa's AI development talent possesses the necessary computational power for research, innovation, and complex tasks. Within this group, only one-fifth benefit from on-premise access to GPUs.

The message from UNGA was clear: compute must be treated as a public good. The challenge is stark; currently, Africa accounts for less than 1% of global data center capacity, and the continent hosts fewer than 1,000 GPUs critical for AI development. The Middle East and Africa region together account for just 9% of the global cloud computing market, compared to 39% in North America.

Groundbreaking Infrastructure Investments

A landmark development came in March 2025 when Cassava Technologies, founded by Zimbabwean telecoms tycoon Strive Masiyiwa, announced plans to invest up to $720 million in Africa's first AI factory in partnership with NVIDIA. The initiative began with the delivery of 3,000 NVIDIA GPUs to a facility in South Africa by June 2025, with plans to expand to an additional 12,000 GPUs across data centers in Egypt, Nigeria, Kenya, and Morocco over the next three to four years.

"Building digital infrastructure for the AI economy is a priority if Africa is to take full advantage of the fourth industrial revolution," said Strive Masiyiwa, Founder & Chairman of Cassava Technologies. "Our AI Factory provides the infrastructure for this innovation to scale, empowering African businesses, startups and researchers with access to cutting-edge AI infrastructure to turn their bold ideas into real-world breakthroughs—and now, they don't have to look beyond Africa to get it".

In September 2025, Cassava Technologies and Accenture announced a partnership to deploy sovereign AI infrastructure, ensuring businesses and researchers have access to high-performance computing while keeping data within national borders and aligned with local regulatory requirements.

Adding to this momentum, Qubit Hub was launched in Nairobi in September 2025 through a partnership between Qhala, Angani Limited, and Amini AI. The hub provides free compute power, locally available storage, and access to AI-ready datasets designed to address Africa's critical infrastructure gap—where the continent currently holds less than 1% of global GPU capacity. Riyaz Bachani, CEO of Angani, emphasized at the launch: "While Africa may only account for a small percentage of exposure for global players, for Qubit Hub, it is one hundred percent of our focus". The initiative includes partnerships such as digitizing 66 years of Nation Media archives into an AI-driven knowledge base and creating fellowships for female AI leaders.

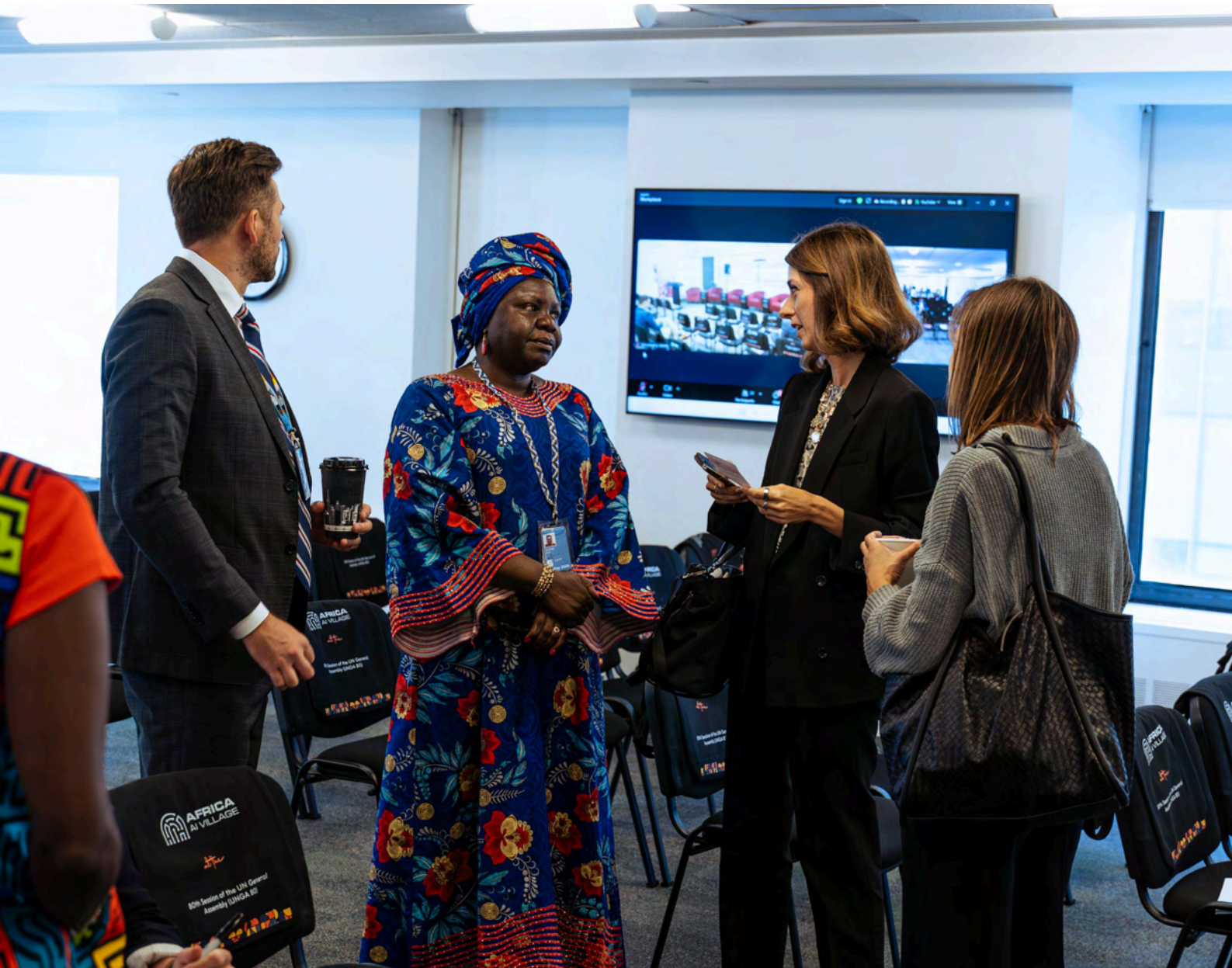
National Strategies Take Shape

Countries like Nigeria and Rwanda are already embedding compute infrastructure into national AI strategies. Rwanda's National Artificial Intelligence Policy aims to position Rwanda as a host for cloud infrastructure with AI-ready storage and compute capacity serving the region and the continent. In October 2025, Rwanda launched the Rwanda AI Scaling Hub with over $15 million in funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, focusing on developing AI technologies that tackle issues in health, education, and agriculture.

Rather than building isolated infrastructures, the call is now for regional compute hubs, shared GPU clusters, open-access cloud platforms, and collective procurement models that pool bargaining power. This would democratize access to AI infrastructure and empower startups, researchers, and universities to compete globally.

Africa's data center market, estimated at $3.49 billion in 2024, is projected to reach $6.8 billion by 2030, reflecting growing momentum. However, estimates suggest that to meet growing demands, African countries will need to more than double their data center hosting capacity by 2030.

Compute is no longer a purely technical matter; it is a question of digital sovereignty, inclusion, and fairness. Without it, Africa remains a consumer of other nations' innovations. With it, Africa can design, train, and deploy systems that serve its own people and priorities.



Pillar 2: Investment – Financing Africa's Leap into Intelligent Economies

Africa's AI potential is enormous but underfunded. According to the GSMA's 2025 report, AI could add between $2.9 trillion and $4.8 trillion to Africa's GDP by 2030, leading to an annual 3% GDP increase, lifting 11 million Africans out of poverty, and creating jobs for 500,000 people annually. However, financing remains fragmented, often favoring fintech and logistics startups over education, agriculture, and governance solutions that create real public value.

Current Investment Landscape

As of June 2025, 159 AI startups across Africa have raised external funding totaling $803.2 million. In 2025 alone, eight early-stage African AI startups raised over $40 million, with Egypt accounting for three of them. The African AI sector, valued at $4.51 billion in 2025, is projected to reach $16.53 billion by 2030, marking a 27.42% annual increase.

After a funding slowdown in 2023 and 2024, tech startup investment across Africa is rebounding. In the first half of 2025, funding rose 78% compared with the same period the previous year, and AI companies are among the beneficiaries. The release of open-source AI models such as DeepSeek and OpenAI's open-weight offerings has lowered infrastructure costs, helping early-stage startups prototype and scale in areas including logistics, healthcare, customer service, and fintech.

Notable Funding Examples

- **Infinilink (Egypt)** – $10 million: Semiconductor startup developing optical connectivity solutions for AI data centers
- **Kera Health (Senegal)** – $10 million: AI-powered e-health platform digitizing medical records, prescriptions, and payments
- **Cerebium (South Africa/US)** – $8.5 million: Tools for developers to deploy and manage AI applications efficiently
- **Leta (Kenya)** – $5 million: AI-driven logistics platform for route optimization and shipping insights

Global Partnerships and Strategic Investments

Major technology companies are making significant commitments. Google has pledged $1 billion to support digital transformation in Africa, including landing a subsea cable into the continent, low-interest loans for small businesses, equity investments into African startups, and skills training. In Nigeria, Google awarded NGN 2.8 billion (US$1.8 million) to Data Science Nigeria to upskill 20,000 young Nigerians with technical skills in data science and AI, and equip 25,000 educators to teach 125,000 young people about AI.

In Kenya, Microsoft announced a $1 billion partnership with G42, which includes the establishment of green data centers and skills development initiatives. The Africa Center of Competence for Digital and AI Skilling, launched at the Kenya School of Government, aims to train 300,000 public servants. Separately, Microsoft committed to training 1 million Kenyans in AI and cybersecurity through its AI National Skilling Initiative.

Regional Success Stories

According to a 2024 report by Afrilabs, over 2,400 companies in Africa now specialize in AI, with approximately $2.02 billion invested in these activities. However, 63% of African AI startups are still in their early, experimental stages. The report estimates that capturing just 10% of the global AI market could add $1.2 billion to Africa's GDP by 2030.

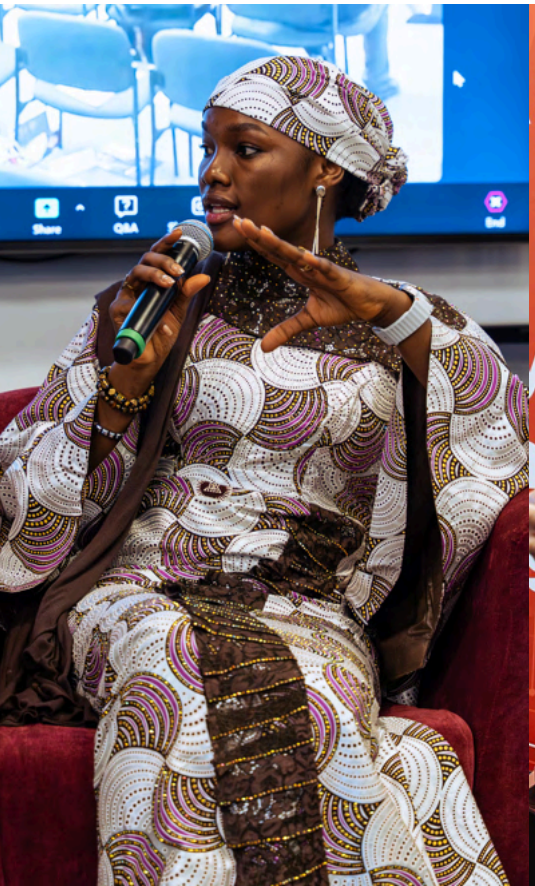
A landmark exit demonstrated the continent's potential: InstaDeep, a Tunisian AI startup founded in 2014, was acquired by German biotech giant BioNTech in 2023 for approximately $682 million, the largest-ever acquisition for an African deep-tech company. Before this acquisition, the company had raised $107 million to develop self-learning decision-making systems for industries like logistics, robotics, and biotechnology.

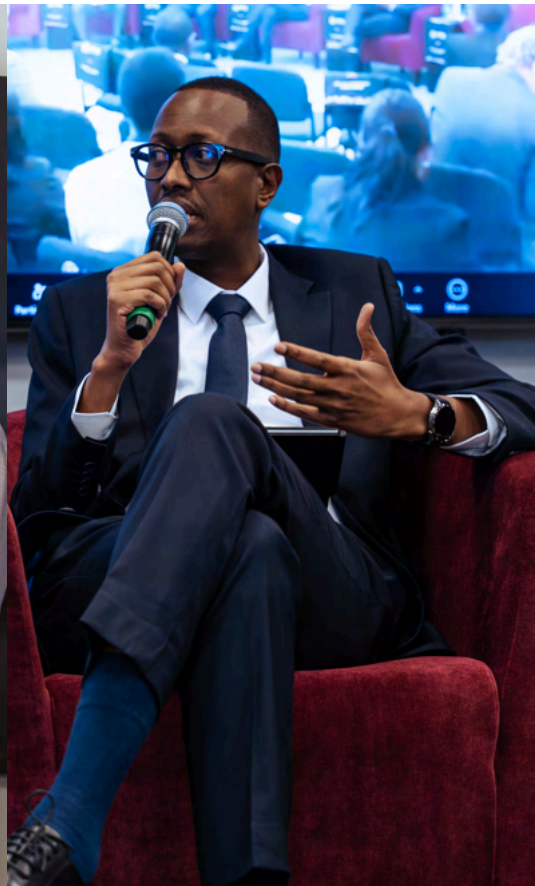
Investment Recommendations

AI Village UNGA discussions emphasized that Africa must design its own financing instruments akin to an AI Investment Compact, bringing together governments, private investors, and development partners to align incentives and de-risk innovation. Ideas such as Diaspora AI Bonds could enable Africans abroad to invest directly in homegrown innovation, while innovation sandboxes could help regulators and entrepreneurs learn together.

Countries like Sierra Leone and Kenya are showing the way. In October 2025, Sierra Leone launched a National AI Readiness Assessment with support from the World Bank under the Sierra Leone Digital Transformation Project, a $50 million investment aimed at expanding broadband coverage, strengthening digital skills, and modernizing government services. Kenya launched its National AI Strategy 2025-2030 in March 2025, focusing on dedicated pillars on AI Digital Infrastructure, Data, AI Research and Innovation, Governance, Talent Development, Accelerating Investments, and Ethics, Equity, and Inclusion.

The broader vision is a continental AI financing mechanism under the Africa AI Council that ensures equitable access to funding across all member states. Investment is not merely capital, it is confidence. When citizens see AI improving lives, their trust and participation will follow.





Pillar 3: Governance – Ethics, Safety, and the Architecture of Trust

AI governance is the cornerstone of a trusted digital future. At UNGA, participants warned that unregulated AI could create moral and social chaos. AI itself is morally neutral; it can heal or harm. Governance determines which path it takes.

Continental and National Frameworks

The African Union Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy, adopted in mid-2024, is a key AI governance instrument at the continental level, providing a strategic blueprint for all African nations. The Strategy champions an Africa-centric, development-oriented, and inclusive approach to AI, emphasizing ethical principles, responsible innovation, and the need for appropriate governance systems and regulations at regional and national levels.

The year 2024 was a pivotal year for AI governance on the continent. Six AI-specific documents were published: five at the national level by Ethiopia, Libya, Mauritania, Nigeria, and Zambia, and one at the continental level. In 2025, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Namibia published national strategies, while countries such as Lesotho and Tanzania released draft strategies. In total, at least fifteen countries now have national AI strategies, in addition to two continental frameworks.

Kenya's National AI Strategy 2025-2030, launched in March 2025, explicitly outlines a government-led vision for ethical, inclusive, and innovation-driven AI adoption. Rwanda's National Artificial Intelligence Policy, launched in 2023, positions the nation as an early mover with a vision to become a global center for AI research and innovation. Ethiopia's National AI Policy outlines a vision to integrate AI across core sectors, with the Ethiopian Artificial Intelligence Institute (EAII) serving as the national hub for AI policy, research, and regulation.

Regulatory Development

In Nigeria, on February 25, 2025, Senate Bill 731, establishing the National Artificial Intelligence Commission, passed its first reading. The Bill seeks to establish a regulatory body to govern the development, implementation, and responsible application of AI in Nigeria to ensure its alignment with the country's national and economic objectives.

African leaders are reimagining regulation as a framework that enables innovation while preventing abuse. Some governments have begun experimenting with digital governance tools—from "avatar ministers" that simulate public decision-making to AI-powered anti-corruption dashboards. The principle is simple: regulation should build the guardrails of safety without erecting barriers to progress.

Safety and Protection

Safety, inclusion, and governance are inseparable. Research from the African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) and ChildFund International revealed alarming statistics:

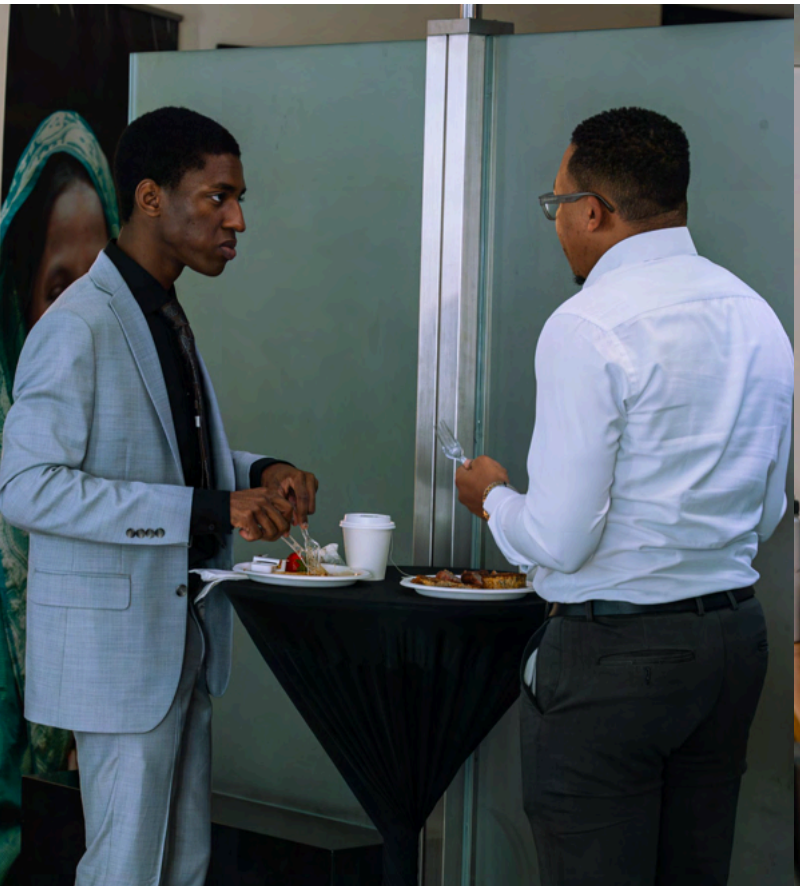
- In some African countries, around one-fifth of children under 17 have received unsolicited online requests to talk about sex or sexual acts
- 19% of children aged 9-17 in South Africa and 21% aged 15-17 in Uganda received unwanted online requests
- Up to one-third of children aged 12-17 in Ethiopia and Mozambique shared personal information with strangers online
- Globally, over 300 million children a year are victims of technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse

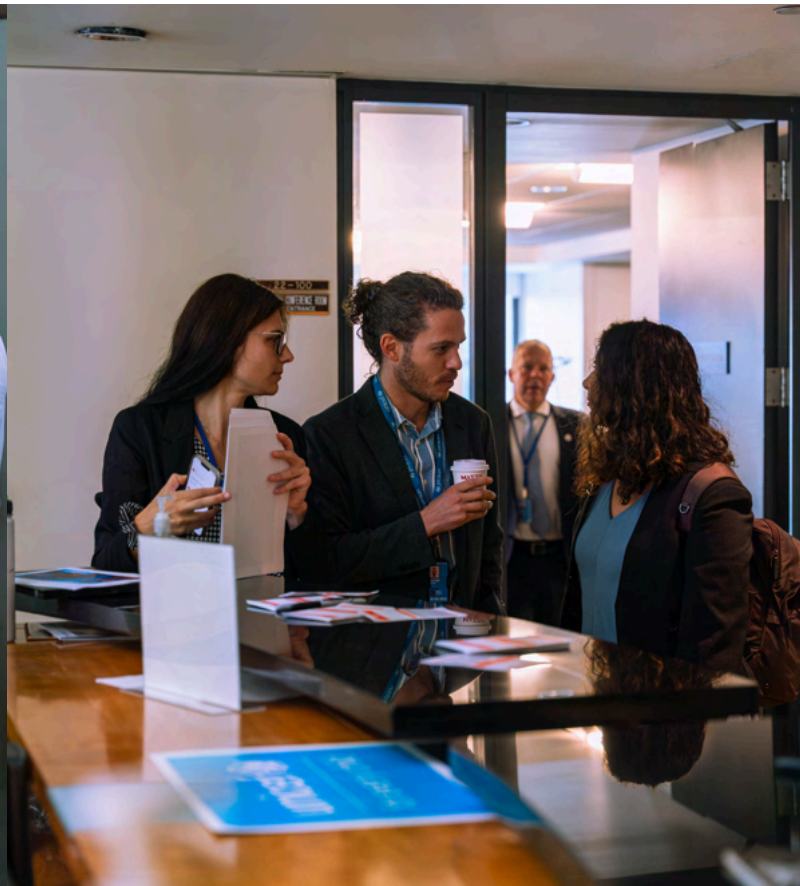
In May 2024, Africa became the first region in the world to adopt a Child Online Safety and Empowerment Policy, demonstrating continental leadership on digital safety. With these risks, safety-by-design must become a legal and ethical standard. Child impact assessments, AI safety audits, and inclusive digital rights frameworks should guide every large-scale AI deployment.

Regional Oversight and Ethics

Africa also needs regional oversight structures such as AI observatories under the Africa AI Council to track implementation and harmonize standards across borders. According to participants at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace dialogue, "Each African nation must chart its own AI destiny while contributing to a collective vision". Harmonization efforts are crucial for avoiding policy fragmentation and duplication and for supporting the African Continental Free Trade Area, as well as providing the continent with a unified and influential global voice. The African Declaration on Artificial Intelligence also seeks to harmonize the continent's governance efforts, and discussions at the AI Village centred on how to move the Declaration from commitments to action.

Rooted in the ethics of Ubuntu - compassion, community, and shared humanity - governance becomes not bureaucracy, but the architecture of trust on which Africa's digital transformation will stand.





Pillar 4: Talent - Africa's Demographic Dividend in the Age of AI

Africa's most powerful comparative advantage is its people. The continent's demographic profile is staggering: Africa's population crossed 1.5 billion in 2024, expanding from 283 million in 1960. Africa's working-age population (20-64 years) will increase from 883 million in 2024 to 1.6 billion in 2050 and constitute almost 25% of the global working-age population.

By 2030, young Africans are expected to make up 42% of the world's youth. Even as the proportion of youth population (15-24 years) will decline from 19.4% in 2024 to 17.5% in 2050, in absolute terms Africa will add 138 million to its youth population in this period, and by 2050 one in every three young people globally will be African.

The AI Talent Gap

However, Africa faces a critical skills shortage. Africans account for only 1% of the global AI talent pool, and Africa currently hosts only around 3% of global AI talent. According to a JICA report from August 2025 based on research conducted from October 2024 to March 2025, there is a shortage of AI professionals across the continent.

A 2025 SAP report on Africa's AI Skills Readiness revealed that:

- All organizations surveyed expect the demand for AI skills to increase in 2025
- All organizations also expect an AI-related skills gap in their organization this year
- 85% say AI development skills are a priority, and 83% prioritize Generative AI skills
- 90% of companies cite negative impacts from lack of AI skills, including project delays, failed innovation initiatives, and inability to take on new work

To further quantify this readiness, Qhala released the AI Talent Readiness Index, a comprehensive quantitative report measuring the ability of all 54 African countries to develop, deploy, and retain AI talent. The index evaluates countries based on three core pillars: Digital Skills, Data & Infrastructure, and Government Readiness. The report identified the top 10 most prepared countries as South Africa, Tunisia, Egypt, Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda, Ghana, Algeria, Morocco, Seychelles.

Education and Skills Development

The consensus from UNGA was that AI literacy must be universalized. Digital and analytical reasoning should be taught as early as numeracy and reading; not to make every child a coder, but to ensure every citizen understands how AI affects daily life.

AI has the potential to drive efficiency and innovation across diverse sectors, generating up to $1.5 trillion in economic impact for Africa by 2030. For example, in agriculture, advancements in weather forecasting and soil analysis could boost smallholder farmers' productivity by up to 30%. In healthcare, AI-assisted diagnostics have been reported to significantly reduce neonatal mortality rates.

Youth Innovation Platforms

Across the continent, youth are already innovating; building chatbots, civic-tech platforms, and startups that respond to local needs. Programs such as Generation Unlimited, Zindi, and the AI & Youth Empowerment Initiative in Ghana demonstrate what is possible when young people are given mentorship, funding, and digital access.

Zindi, Africa's largest platform for data science and AI challenges, released a groundbreaking 2025 report showing that nearly one in five Kenyan users on Zindi secured a career change after joining the platform. The study tracked more than 8,000 Kenyan users and found:

- Over 80% of users with fully completed profiles progressed in their professional journeys, compared to just 3% of those with incomplete profiles
- Completing four or more challenges on Zindi made participants four times more likely to secure employment
- Collaborative teamwork tripled job opportunities
- Even a single learning course taken on the platform increased employability outcomes threefold

Generation Unlimited, in partnership with SAP, is supporting young people across Africa through Yoma World, a platform that connects them to skills, volunteering, and work opportunities. Already active in seven African countries, Yoma has reached over 434,000 users and enabled more than 51,000 certifications.

Government Training Initiatives

Governments are taking action. In Kenya, AI training for public servants was launched in July 2025, targeting all professional cadres within the public service with tailored AI training modules. The Africa Center of Competence for Digital and AI Skilling at the Kenya School of Government aims to train 300,000 public servants.

In Sierra Leone, the government partnered with Qhala in October 2025 to integrate AI in government operations. The program's first phase targets 500 civil servants and the creation of 10-15 AI-driven workflows in government operations.

Gender Inequality: A Critical Barrier

However, gender inequality remains a structural barrier. Women and girls are still the most excluded; underrepresented in STEM education, underconnected online, and underfunded as entrepreneurs. According to a 2023 UNESCO report, fewer than 30% of STEM graduates in sub-Saharan Africa are women. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics reports that only 28% of researchers worldwide are women, with the percentage being even lower in Africa.

In Africa, 30% of science professionals are women, and women constitute less than 15% of engineering and technology researchers in some West and Central African countries. Currently, 7.19% of women are enrolled in universities and colleges in sub-Saharan Africa compared to 10.41% of men enrolled, far below the global average for women of 41.66%. To help address this gap, Qubit Hub is tackling the challenge head-on through initiatives such as the IDIA Fellowship, a 12-month program designed to empower African women researchers in co-designing the next generation of AI tools.

Indeed, empowering women through targeted training in AI ethics, leadership, and innovation is both a social and economic imperative. When young Africans - especially women - design, lead, and own AI solutions, the continent will no longer be shaped by external technologies; it will shape its own digital destiny.

Pillar 5: Market - Building Africa's AI Economy

Africa is no longer just a consumer of technology; it is a co-creator of innovation. Startups, researchers, and policymakers are collaborating to design AI systems that reflect African realities. Yet, scaling remains the challenge: bridging pilots into products that reach the masses.

Market Potential

The African digital market, if unlocked, could become the engine of this transformation. With 1.4 billion people and rapid urbanization, the continent holds one of the world's fastest-growing consumer bases. Africa may hold just 2.5% of the global AI market, but the sector is valued at $4.51 billion in 2025 and is projected to grow to $16.53 billion by 2030.

With Africa's digital economy set to grow from 5.2% of GDP in 2025 to 8.5% by 2030, a great part of this growth is anticipated to be around new AI developments.

Sector Focus

The sector distribution of African AI companies reveals clear prioritization of immediate commercial opportunities:

- Financial technology dominates with 20.9% of companies
- Talent technology at 19.9%
- Education technology at 14.8%
- Healthcare AI represents only 5.8% of companies
- Agriculture technology represents 3.9% of companies, surprisingly low given that agriculture employs 60% of Africa's workforce
- Climate technology accounts for just 1.3% of AI development

Connectivity as Gateway

Connectivity is the gateway to market growth. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), as of November 2024, only 38% of Africa's population is using the internet as opposed to the global average of 68%, making Africa the least connected region globally.

The ITU estimates that by the end of 2025, there will be 500 million mobile phone users in Africa, with mobile phone penetration at a rate of 65% annually. However, about 43% of the African population still has no smartphone access, and the cost of a smartphone for the average African is nearly 30% of their salary.

In 2021, the usage gap was estimated at 61% for Sub-Saharan Africa, representing the percentage of people covered by mobile broadband but not using it. Governments must treat broadband and electricity as fundamental enablers of economic competitiveness.

Local Procurement and Trust

To translate potential into prosperity, policies must support local procurement and trust in African-made technology. Too many ministries still rely on foreign contractors for systems that local developers could build more affordably and contextually.

In countries like Sierra Leone, AI is being integrated into education and disaster management, proving that innovation can be practical and transformative. Rwanda's regulatory sandbox illustrates how enabling policy accelerates market entry while maintaining oversight.

Geographic Concentration

Geographic concentration reveals distinct strategic approaches:

- Kenya leads in total capital raised with $242.3 million across 19 companies, achieving an average funding level of $12.8 million per startup
- Tunisia's 9 companies have captured $244.4 million, averaging $27.2 million each
- Egypt leads in company count with 44 AI startups but only $83.4 million in total funding
- South Africa's 31 companies with $150.4 million demonstrate the advantages of established financial and industrial infrastructure
- Nigerian companies have raised only $47.3 million across 34 startups

For Africa's AI marketplace to flourish, it must mirror African values; collective progress, trust, and shared prosperity. Technology is not only about efficiency; it is about identity, ownership, and the ability to participate fully in the digital economy.

Pillar 6: Data – Powering Africa's Digital Sovereignty

Data is the new oil of the AI era - but unlike oil, which is finite, it can renew itself if governed well. Africa's data sovereignty begins with owning the narratives, languages, and histories that feed its algorithms. Too many AI models today are trained on datasets that exclude African realities, leading to systems that misrepresent or ignore the continent's context.

The Case for Data Sovereignty

Prof. Mirjam van Reisen, a leading expert in International Relations, Innovation, and FAIR Data Science, highlighted in July 2025 that AI could contribute $3 trillion USD to Africa's economy by 2030. However, she cautioned about significant challenges, including concerns over African representation in datasets, data ownership, and individual data protection. She stressed that without control over data, Africa risks entering a "new age of colonialism," where African digital information is exploited abroad without oversight or accountability.

"Digital data is the raw material, the resource for AI," she stated. To prevent this, Africa must assert control over its data to ensure sovereignty over the tools and platforms used.

Data Infrastructure Investment

Investing in data infrastructure—local repositories, data centers, and open-data platforms—is essential. Africa's data center market, estimated at $3.49 billion in 2024, is projected to reach $6.8 billion by 2030. Currently, 87 data centers operate across 15 African countries, with major clusters in South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and Egypt.

However, Africa controls less than 1% of global data center capacity, and the continent owns fewer than 1,000 GPUs, critical for AI development. This infrastructure gap poses a significant threat to data sovereignty and economic competitiveness.

Digitizing African Knowledge

Digitizing African knowledge - stories, languages, and cultural archives - must form part of the global digital commons. When African children see themselves represented in data, AI becomes a mirror of their identity rather than an imported abstraction.

Africa possesses vast datasets and linguistic diversity which, if leveraged ethically, can drive inclusive, culturally relevant AI systems that preserve Africa's heritage while meeting modern needs. The conversation also calls for a rethinking of data ownership. Farmers, patients, and consumers generate valuable data but rarely share in its benefits. Data cooperatives, inspired by African traditions of collective ownership, could ensure that communities co-own and co-profit from their information.

Data Protection and Governance

Safety is integral to data governance. With one in five children facing online exploitation, data protection is a form of social protection. Prof. Mirjam van Reisen proudly noted Africa's proactive stance, citing the 2014 AU Malabo Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection as a pioneering continental legal framework, predating Europe's GDPR. She showcased numerous African initiatives, like the Africa University Network on FAIR Open Science and VODAN-Africa, that are already championing data autonomy and ethical data reuse, including the concept that AI producers should pay for African data as a valuable resource.

The Path Forward

The call is clear: Africa must leverage its youth, creativity, and heritage to build a secure and inclusive digital future, ensuring data is Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable (FAIR) with Ownership in Locale under Regulatory compliance (OLR). This framework is not just an ethical imperative but an economic necessity for the continent.

Ultimately, data sovereignty is economic sovereignty. Owning Africa's data, servers, and stories ensures that value creation remains within the continent. Infused with Ubuntu ethics - empathy, community, and respect - data governance can transform AI from an extractive force into an instrument of empowerment.

Conclusion

The Africa AI Village at UNGA 80 reaffirmed that Africa's digital transformation is not a distant dream; it is underway. The Africa AI Declaration has evolved from words to movement, from a declaration to action; inspiring the creation of the Africa AI Council to institutionalize collaboration across governments, industry, academia, and civil society.

From $720 million compute investments to data sovereignty frameworks, from 434,000 youth trained on platforms like Yoma to inclusive governance models spanning 16 national AI strategies, Africa is building an AI ecosystem grounded in its own values and realities.

The statistics are compelling:

- AI could add $2.9 to $4.8 trillion to Africa's GDP by 2030
- 159 AI startups have raised $803.2 million as of June 2025
- Africa's AI market is projected to grow from $4.51 billion to $16.53 billion by 2030
- By 2050, one in every three young people globally will be African
- Africa's working-age population will reach 1.6 billion by 2050

The lesson from UNGA was simple yet profound: no country can do this alone. Africa must move together, sharing infrastructure, harmonizing standards, co-financing innovation, and co-governing technology for the collective good. Together, the continent can turn AI from an imported tool into a homegrown force for equity, creativity, and shared prosperity.

As H.E. Selma Malika Haddadi, Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission noted, "Our vision is Harnessing AI for Africa's Development and Prosperity with focus on making AI available for socio-economic development, fostering homegrown and domestic AI capacity, advancing a multisectoral and multistakeholder AI governance approach and promoting innovative regulations that can enable AI uptake in Africa and protect its people".

Together, the continent can turn AI from an imported tool into a homegrown force for equity, creativity, and shared prosperity.

Appendix

Resources and Links

- Event Recording: Africa AI Village at UNGA 80
- Event Media: Photos