

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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Africa Declares AI a Strategic Priority as High-Level Dialogue Calls for Investment, Inclusion, and Innovation

Leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Africa's Prosperity and Collaboration



The African Union Commission, in collaboration with the Government of Ethiopia and the Institute for Security Studies, convened a High-Level Policy Dialogue on the Development and Regulation of AI in Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The dialogue brought together participants from over 40 African countries, including Heads of State and Government, Ministers, AU Commissioners, diplomats, civil society, academia, and private sector leaders.

As part of the 'AI for Africa', a featured high-level event of the Ethio Tech Expo ETEX 2025, and anchored in the theme "*Leveraging Artificial Intelligence for Africa's Prosperity and Collaboration*," the event explored the potential of AI to transform Africa's development trajectory and accelerate the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The event builds on the AU Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy adopted by the African Union Executive Council in July 2024. Laying the ground for Africa's leadership on AI use and development,

leaders called for urgent interventions and collaboration. The Dialogue underscored the importance of fostering inclusive, ethical, and sustainable AI ecosystems where African nations can access, shape, and benefit equitably from AI-driven opportunities.

Declaring the event officially open, H.E. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, remarked, “AI is no longer a distant dream—it is the engine of transformation across sectors, geographies, and societies,” expressing optimism over the potential of AI to accelerate the implementation of the African Union Agenda 2063. “We made a deliberate choice not to remain passive consumers of imported innovation, but to become active contributors, leveraging AI to address challenges grounded in our own realities,” said the Prime Minister.



In her opening address, H.E. Selma Malika Haddadi, Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission highlighted African Union’s AI ambitions. 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.”

With the continent’s AI compute capacity accounting for just 1% globally, she urged investment in renewable-powered data centers, regional compute hubs, and cross-border digital infrastructure to enable local AI model development. She emphasized that data ownership and cultural identity are key: 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.

On a high-profile panel titled “*Collaborative Strategies for AI Adoption in Africa*,” that followed the official opening of the event, H.E. Lerato D. Mataboge, African Union Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy, offered a nuanced and pragmatic roadmap for scaling AI adoption across the continent by outlining existing challenges she identified as critical: digital infrastructure, the AI skills gap, absence of high-quality datasets, and the funding gap.

She acknowledged the growing presence of African startups using AI for public service delivery, particularly in agriculture, healthcare, education, and language services, but pointed out that innovation remains highly concentrated in just a few countries. “Over 83% of AI startup funding in Q1 2025 went to Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt. AI should help narrow the digital divide, not widen it,” the Commissioner underscored.

Africa currently houses only 3% of the global AI talent pool. She warned that brain drain continues to deplete local capacity and urged AU Member States to ensure that: “The next generation of AI architects must be African, educated in Africa, and working to solve African problems.”

The other High-level panelists featured in the panel including H.E. Dr. Gedion Timotheos, Minister of Ethiopian Foreign Affairs; AUC; and Dr. Fonteh Akum, Executive Director of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), reiterated that Africa, as the youngest continent, must innovate, create, and utilize AI



to its advantage and must lead in the AI revolution. Africa's ability to harness AI hinges on building foundational infrastructure, nurturing local talent, and developing smart, agile regulations that protect citizens while enabling innovation. Conversations around AI should go hand in hand with action, not one after the other.

In addition to the main plenary, the Dialogue featured two focused panel discussions that brought global and regional perspectives to the forefront. The first, titled *"AI for Africa: Lessons from Around the World,"* included speakers from the UK, UAE, China, and Brazil, and was moderated by Dr. Fonteh Akum. The second, *"Imperative for AI Development, Governance Approaches and the Need for Cooperation to Narrow the Gap,"* featured experts from Senegal, Meta, and Addis Ababa University, moderated by Ms. Souhila Amazouz of the AUC. The engaging panels provided rich insights into international best practices, governance models, and cross-continental cooperation in AI.

The **Communique** released at the conclusion of the event declared Artificial Intelligence as a strategic priority for the continent and committed to collaboratively develop the necessary digital infrastructure, high-quality datasets, compute capabilities, skills, and research capacity to underpin ethical and responsible AI development for sustainable development and to reduce associated risks to society.

It 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.

To continue the momentum, the next edition of the Dialogue will take place during the AU Summit in February 2026 in Addis Ababa.

The High-Level Policy Dialogue did more than initiate conversations on policy matters, it included an expo of home-grown digital innovations that showcased innovation and political commitment at the centre of Africa's long-term vision, as defined by Agenda 2063.

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