



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION

AFRICAN STARTUP CONFERENCE, MINISTERIAL SUMMIT  
December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025

*Statement by Prof Gaspard Banyankimbona  
Commissioner ESTI/AUC*

*Your Excellency Amb. Salama Haddadi Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission,*

*Your Excellency, Dr. Nouredine Ouadah, our host, Minister in Charge of Startups and Knowledge Economy of the Peoples' Republic of Algeria,*

*The Guest of Honor for the 4<sup>th</sup> African Startup Conference, Honorable Yves IRADUKUNDA, Minister of ICT and Innovation, Republic of Rwanda*

*Your Excellency Ms. Lerato Mataboge, Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy at the African Union Commission,*

*Your Excellency Ms. Nardos Bekele Thomas, CEO of the African Union Development Agency,*

*Your Excellencies, Honourable Ministers in charge of Startups from the African Union Member States,*

*Distinguished Delegates,  
Esteemed Partners,*

It is with great honour that I join you today for this pivotal Ministerial Summit, marking a defining moment in the evolution of Africa's startup ecosystem.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Government and people of Algeria for their exceptional hospitality and the warm welcome extended to all of us.

Your generosity reflects your deep commitment to the Pan-African solidarity and shared progress.

My deepest and most special congratulations to His Excellency Dr. Nouredine Ouadah, Minister of Startups, Knowledge Economy and SMEs of Algeria, our host.

Your Excellence, Sir, your visionary leadership elevated Algeria's innovation landscape and positioned you as a true Champion of Africa's startup movement.

I reiterate my sincere support for, and active engagement with, your Ministry and the Startup Conference Secretariat, which continues to demonstrate remarkable leadership in coordinating and representing the institutions that drive startup development across our continent.

I encourage all AU Member States to recognize the significance of this gathering, and Algeria's pioneering role, as the foundation of a formal continental startup platform, rooted in shared values, mutual support, and collective ambition.

Since the inaugural session of the Startup conference in 2022, the ESTI Department has closely been involved in the African Startup Conference, particularly this Ministerial segment, as it has produced impactful resolutions that have been formally recognized and endorsed by multiple AU policy organs.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen

The composition of this gathering is no accident: it brings together ministers from cross-cutting portfolios: technology, innovation, industry, trade, finance, and education; precisely because startups thrive only when these sectors align. This holistic convening ensures our strategies are comprehensive, coherent, and grounded in the realities of enterprise development.

Champions do not emerge from thin air. Champions come from successful startups. Startups come from successful innovators. Innovators, in turn, emerge from vibrant research ecosystems. And if we trace this chain to its origin, we find that it all begins with talented people of goodwill, young women and men who are Africa's greatest resource and the driving force behind our historic youth bulge.

With over 70% of our population under the age of 30, this demographic reality is not a challenge to manage but an unprecedented opportunity to harness, if and only if our systems are designed to nurture their potential.

To make this pipeline sustainable, predictable, and scalable, we must urgently re-examine the very foundations that feed it: our education systems, our universities, our tertiary institutions, our industry partnerships, our cross-border research networks, and our continental collaboration frameworks.

We cannot afford to continue training minds for jobs that no longer exist—or worse, for economies that remain import-dependent. We must align learning with doing, knowledge with value creation, and classrooms with markets, particularly in frontier fields like Artificial Intelligence. Africa cannot be a passive consumer of AI developed elsewhere; we must equip our youth to co-create ethical, locally relevant AI solutions that address our unique challenges in health, agriculture, governance, and climate resilience. This demands embedding AI literacy, data science, and digital ethics across our curricula, starting now, precisely because our young people are ready to build, create, and lead.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen

Allow me to cite a powerful example: Zimbabwe's Education 5.0, officially launched in 2015 under the visionary leadership of HE Professor Amon Murwira, then Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education and a foremost advocate for Africa-centered knowledge systems. This doctrine explicitly links education to industrialization, innovation, and community development, moving beyond teaching *about* problems to empowering students to *solve* them. It embeds research, innovation, and community service as core pillars of higher education. Already, the doctrine has driven tangible outcomes: Zimbabwean universities have established innovation hubs and science parks that incubate student-led startups, and several institutions now mandate community-embedded projects as graduation requirements, directly linking learning to local economic and social needs. This is the kind of paradigm shift we need continent-wide

The Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI) is fully committed to advancing the continental strategies before us, STISA 2024, CESA 2025-2034, and the Continental TVET Strategy, to ensure that every African learner becomes a potential innovator, and every graduate a potential job creator.

We have already begun to support:

- Reforming TVET curricula to be industry-responsive,
- Promoting apprenticeship models co-designed with the private sector

- Facilitating the Harmonization of qualifications through the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF),
- Scaling STEM and digital competencies, and
- Strengthening regional innovation hubs, as affirmed during the 2025 Africa Skills and Innovation Week.

But none of this will succeed without inter-ministerial synergy. That is why this Ministerial Summit, bringing together portfolios of education, industry, finance, trade, science, and SMEs is so critical. I therefore call for:

1. A unified policy stance on startups across sectors,
2. Shared resources and expertise to de-risk innovation,
3. Joint regulatory reforms and incentives to accelerate growth, and
4. Integrated capacity-building for both entrepreneurs and public servants.

Your Excellencies, on a very personal assessment, I wanted to observe that the naming of the Ministry hosting this event speaks volumes: Startups, Knowledge Economy, SMEs. This integration is very strategic, and it might be possible to replicate it elsewhere in Africa and beyond.

If the Ministry in charge of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation were to named Ministry of Knowledge production, then the link would be very clear, possibly the focuss as well. I come for a country, Burundi where we have a say that: the name is indeed the Person ( Izina niryo muntu) meaning what you are named is what you really are.

As I conclude, I urge all over us to remember: When we invest in talented people, equip them with relevant knowledge, connect them to real-world challenges, and empower them through enabling ecosystems, we do more than launching startups, we launch sovereign, self-reliant, and prosperous nations.

The African Union stands ready, through ESTI, to support this journey every step of the way.

Thank you.