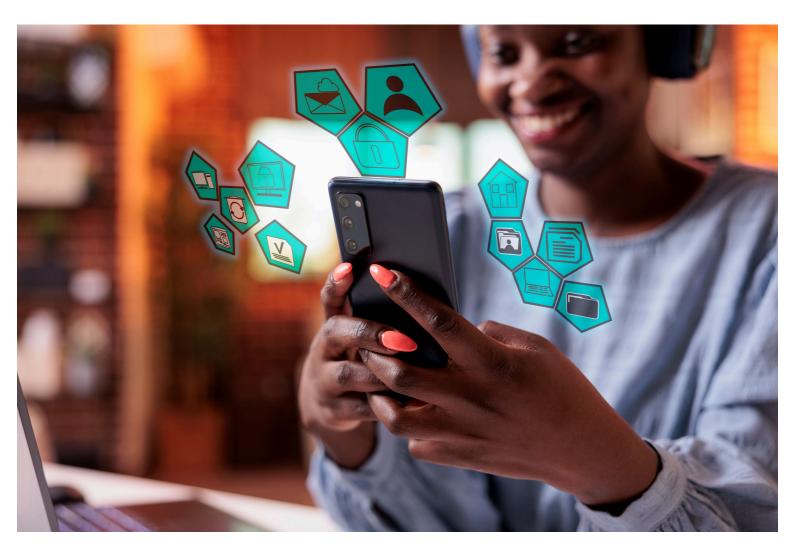


HOME / BLOG / EQUITABLE AI FOR AFRICA

Equitable AI for Africa

Unlocking new engines of growth and creativity

NOVEMBER 14, 2024



Al is expected to contribute US\$15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030, but only 10 percent of this will be felt in the Global South.

Photo: UNDP

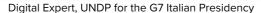
Authors



ALEX HRADECKY

Artificial Intelligence Policy Analyst, UNDP Chief Digital Office





The AI Hub for Sustainable Development is championing inclusive AI growth in Africa. Recent discussions at the UN General Assembly and the G7 Ministerial Meeting on Industry, Tech and Digital underscored the role of African countries as equal partners in shaping Al's development, governance and use.

The world stands at a critical inflection point with Artificial Intelligence (AI). While it's expected to contribute US\$15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030, only 10 percent of this will be felt in the Global South. This trajectory risks widening existing inequalities and deepening the digital divide.

It is an economic necessity to unlock new engines of growth and creativity. The AI Hub for Sustainable Development, launched with the Italian G7 Presidency and UNDP, represents a step forward. It focuses on strengthening AI foundations in Africa while ensuring development is responsive to current and emerging local priorities.

Addressing critical gaps in Al development

The AI Hub seeks to strengthen four foundational components of local AI ecosystems in Africa: inclusive and representative datasets, local AI talent development, accessible and green computing infrastructure, and enabling environments for responsible AI adoption. In line with the priorities of the Italy—Africa Mattei Plan, the AI Hub will work across six sectors — energy, agriculture, health, water, education and training, and infrastructure.

Throughout the co-design of the Al Hub in 2024, several African partners, governments, and the private sector engaged in shaping both its approach and programming. The following programmes are underway:

- The Startup Accelerator Pilot has connected over 300 African startups with selected innovators. The startups are receiving capacity-building support, with opportunities to showcase their work to technology investors and leaders in San Francisco.
- The Local Language Partnerships Accelerator Pilot has engaged over 80 global Al language innovators, with more than 30



During the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September, discourse around the challenges and opportunities of Al was at the forefront. Harnessing this growing interest and momentum, the Al Hub convened a high-level roundtable with technology leaders, government officials and development experts to discuss concrete steps to support and accelerate local Al ecosystems in Africa. Among the most salient takeaways were insights on the need for exploring viable, innovative partnership models and implementation strategies that consider local realities.

This was also the second year of SDG Digital, a flagship event coorganized by UNDP and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to showcase and promote digital innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals. In his keynote address, Italian Vice Minister for Enterprises and Made in Italy, Valentino Valentini, emphasized that, "Our journey in creating this AI Hub has been guided by collaboration, inclusivity, and a shared vision for the future of AI."

He further highlighted that the work of the Al Hub goes beyond technology transfer: "It's about co-creating solutions together, learning from each other and growing together. We believe that Africa must be a true partner in shaping the future of Al."



The AI Hub for Sustainable Development focuses on strengthening AI foundations in Africa while ensuring development is responsive to current and emerging priorities. Photo: UNDP Africa



- Ionee Naungu, CEO of Kytabu

Multilateralism and partnerships

The second G7 Ministerial Meeting on Industry, Tech and Digital took place on 10 October in Rome, which was pivotal on the heels of the adoption of the Global Digital Compact by 193 countries during the UN's General Assembly. The discussions echoed the call to action for global digital cooperation on digital technology and AI to close the digital divide and meet the needs of the most marginalized.

Realizing this outcome calls for innovative partnerships, including with the private sector, to unlock and harness Africa's AI potential. This aligns with the vision of the AI Hub, which resonated in the remarks Tonee Ndungu, CEO of Kytabu (one of the startups participating in the AI Hub's Startup Accelerator Pilot) delivered to the G7 delegates.

"Al cannot leave Africa behind," Ndungu said. "We must act now collaboratively with the right investment, deep talent development and data integrity to guide the continent to the place it needs to go."

Also addressing the G7 delegates was Karim Beguir, founder and CEO of Instadeep, who represented African leadership in the AI entrepreneurial ecosystem. He spoke to the benefits and potential of innovating in Africa, while affirming "it is possible to build win—win partnerships" with African and developed countries.

A digital future that leaves no country behind

The AI revolution is already underway, with immense potential to transform digital economies. As the global community moves to seize the manifold opportunities, AI's development, governance and use must be inclusive and equitable to ensure no country is left behind. The AI Hub shares this vision and is aimed at accelerating sustainable AI-driven industrial growth across the African continent.

UNDP, ITU, the Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Italian Republic are already collaborating to leverage the work under the Al for Good initiative to provide support and capacity-building for African startups participating in the Al Hub.

renewable energy potential.

WHAT WE DO



The Al Hub's momentum continues to build with its presence at the recent Al Expo Africa in Johannesburg, and an upcoming networking event in San Francisco that will convene G7 leaders, major tech companies, African innovators, and international development partners to advance public-private partnerships for Al in Africa.

For more information about the AI Hub for Sustainable Development and opportunities to get involved, visit aihubfordevelopment.org or contact digital.support@undp.org.



The Al Hub is aimed at accelerating sustainable Al-driven industrial growth across the African continent.

Photo: UNDP Africa

United Nations Development Programme



GET INVOLVED

Careers

Procurement

UNDP Shop

UNDP Giving

Contact us

 $\ \ \, \bigcirc$ United Nations Development Programme