

Equitable AI for Africa

Unlocking new engines of growth and creativity

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AI 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

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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 AI'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 AI 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 AI 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 AI 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 AI was at the forefront. Harnessing this growing interest and momentum, the AI Hub convened a high-level roundtable with technology leaders, government officials and development experts to discuss concrete steps to support and accelerate local AI 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 co-organized 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 AI 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 AI.”



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Photo: UNDP Africa



- Tonee Ndungu, 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.

"AI 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 AI for Good initiative to provide support and capacity-building for African startups participating in the AI Hub.

solutions. Notable interest emerged around the compute–energy nexus, marked by discussions that forayed into ways to enable equitable access to computing capabilities while addressing Africa's renewable energy potential.

The AI Hub's momentum continues to build with its presence at the recent AI 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 AI 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 AI Hub is aimed at accelerating sustainable AI-driven industrial growth across the African continent.

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