

2021 Africa ThinkTank Summit



Communique

**“Digital Transformation in
post-COVID-19 Africa:
Opportunities, Challenges and
Options for Building Back better”**

9 - 10 December 2021 | Virtual



THE AFRICAN CAPACITY BUILDING FOUNDATION | FONDATION POUR LE RENFORCEMENT DES CAPACITES EN AFRIQUE

Securing Africa's future through capacity development



Preamble

We, representatives of African Think Tanks, and delegates and participants to the 8th Africa Think Tank Summit, met virtually on 9 and 10 December 2021. As we conclude the 2021 Summit on the theme “*Digital Transformation in post-COVID-19 Africa: Opportunities, Challenges and Options for Building Back Better*”, we **EXPRESS** our deepest and sincere appreciation to the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) for convening such a gathering in partnership with the African Development Bank (AfDB), the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), the Development Centre for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD-Dev), the International Cooperation Centre of China’s National Development and Reform Commission (ICC-NDRC), the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the On Think Tanks (OTT), the Southern Voice, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (UNOSAA).

AFFIRM that digital transformation remains essential for the achievement of the objectives set for African Union’s Agenda 2063 and the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Experiences and studies shared during the 2021 Africa Think Tank Summit shows that digital transformation help to set the direction; achieve better outcomes; provide goods and services more effectively and efficiently in all countries and regions; and find effective and innovative solutions to policy, and implementation challenges faced by African countries.

ACKNOWLEDGE the substantial technical work and the potential role of African think tanks in supporting the digital transformation agenda of the continent. Africa’s think tanks stand ready to contribute to the African Union, Regional Economic Communities and African countries’ efforts toward fostering and implementing digital transformation, including on policy design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation as well as building the adequate competences and skills.

Right policy mix for building the critical capacities for digital transformation in Africa

WELCOME the ongoing effort by African countries and continental institutions to develop and implement policy actions in accordance with the Digital Transformation Agenda for Africa and call on the African Union Commission to utilize the services and expertise of African think tanks providing technical support and in continuing the analytical work to help identify countries where support is most needed and where additional actions may be required.

NOTE with concern that there is a dearth of reliable data in Africa for evidence-based planning and policy formulation to support the digital transformation of the continent. This compromises the design of adequate mix of right policies and their implementation. The use of evidence needs to be systematic as it is an important element of sound policymaking.

CALL UPON African countries to design the right and evidence-based policies for digital transformation which might require transforming bureaucracies, institutional arrangements, and governance cultures that have been in place for decades as well as developing skills—especially critical technical skills in science, technology and innovation. Also, to develop and implement the right policy mix, taking into account issues of coherence and coordination, as well as comprehensiveness of capacity building for digital transformation, which is even most critical.

REITERATE that capacity in its various forms is hobbling digital transformation in Africa. There is therefore need to identify, attract, train and retain new sets of skills and capacities in the public sector to address new political and technological developments effectively. Human and institutional capacities, critical technical competences and transformative leadership skills need to be built for all actors and key stakeholders including government, private sector, and civil society organizations.

ENCOURAGE key stakeholders and policymakers to promote the use of digital strategies/options to support tobacco control in Africa, through web-based interactions and online training platforms. Moreover, there is need to promote alternative livelihoods and continue raising awareness on dangers of tobacco use to the large youthful population in Africa through digital solutions.

Role of think tanks: supporting digital transformation while enhancing relevance and sustainability

RECOGNIZE that think tanks can and should play a critical role and contribute to the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of digital transformation policies, strategies and plans at local, national, regional, and continental levels.

UNDERSTAND that African think tanks can support by providing advice on the policy options and innovative solutions to successfully tackle the bottlenecks facing the implementation of digital transformation policies, strategies, and plans. We therefore urge African countries and institutions as well as key actors to utilize these intellectual resources and call on African think tanks to intensify their research and policy advice, capacity building, advocacy, and technical support to fast-track Africa's journey toward digital transformation.

RECOGNIZE the urgent call for African think tanks to lead the process and work with ACBF on the setting of a long-term continental research agenda and the design of a comprehensive capacity development program both for accelerating Africa's digital transformation and for the continued enhancement of the relevance and sustainability of African think tanks. This will contribute to addressing gaps identified in key areas such as human capital and skills development, institutional and policy support and knowledge sharing and advocacy to accelerate the implementation of Africa's digital transformation strategy.

Moving forward

REAFFIRM the importance of establishing partnerships and coordination mechanisms to support digital transformation in Africa. The success of Africa in the digital era depends on how the key stakeholders and actors work together by pooling resources and competences and adequately reporting on same on a regular basis guided by evidence. Partners and actors taking part in the 2021 Africa Think Tank Summit have committed to building relationships to ensure that information and knowledge is shared, technical expertise is built, and necessary financial resources are mobilized to support digital transformation in Africa.

CALL ON ACBF in partnership with supporters of this Summit and African think tanks to work together to develop programs in digital capacity building for Africa to fast-track digital transformation in Africa. The program will support digitalization policy formulation and implementation in African countries.

EXPRESS our profound concern that African think tanks are facing sustainability issues exacerbated by COVID-19. We therefore stress the need to support African think tanks and call upon AUC, AfDB and other supporters of think tanks to work with ACBF to mobilize adequate resources exclusively dedicated to African think tanks. There is need to capacitate existing think tanks to ensure that they pay attention to emerging areas such as digitalization and AfCFTA; and provide the needed support so that platforms such as the African Think Tank Network and the Africa Think Tank Summits are sustained.

RESOLVE to support ACBF to continue providing leadership in coordinating our efforts towards staying engaged and working together to efficiently contribute to tackling Africa's development challenges. We will reconvene in 2022 to take stock of progress in implementing the decisions we have taken today.

Presented on 10 December 2021



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