

# 2021 Africa ThinkTank Summit



REPORT

## Digital Transformation in post-COVID-19 Africa: Opportunities, Challenges and Options for Building Back Better



THE AFRICAN CAPACITY BUILDING FOUNDATION | FONDATION POUR LE RENFORCEMENT DES CAPACITES EN AFRIQUE  
Securing Africa's future through capacity development



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

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/ ACRONYMS

ACBF	African Capacity Building Foundation
Afreximbank	Africa Export Import Bank
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Agreement
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency – New Partnership for Africa’s Development
BADEA	Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa
CEF	Connect Europe Facility
CERAPE	Center for Research on Economic Analyses and Policies
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CSEA	Centre for the Study of Economies of Africa
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EPRC	Economic Policy Research Centre, Uganda
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ERSF	Emergency Recovery Support Fund
ESRF	Economic and Social Research Foundation, Tanzania
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GNI	Gross National Income
ICC-NDRC	International Cooperation Center for the National Development and Reform Commission
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs
IsDB	Islamic Development Bank
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
KIPPRA	Kenyan Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis, Nairobi
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris
PRIDA	Policy and Regulation Initiative for Digital Africa
R&D	Research and Development
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
SAIIA	South African Institute of International Affairs, Johannesburg
USD	United States Dollar
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
YES	Youth Enterprise Services
ZEPARU	Zimbabwe Economic Policy Analysis and Research Unit, Harare

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## 1. PREAMBLE

Africa has over the last years witnessed a rise in the number and quality of think tanks, playing an important role in shaping policies for sustainable development of the continent. Since inception in 1991, the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), African Union's Specialized Agency for Capacity Development has established a track record in the development of, and support to, these think tanks across Africa, the majority of which now ranks among Africa's best.

ACBF through the Africa Think Tank Network (ATTN) collaborates with its key partners to organize the Africa Think Tank Summit annually on a topical issue to provide a platform for African Think Tanks and other key stakeholders to engage in a high-level deliberation on the most effective ways of addressing capacity challenges of Member States in a bid to enhance country readiness and accelerate policy implementation on the continent.

The Africa Think Tank Summit – which started in 2014 with 50 people attending the maiden summit in South Africa – has grown to become a high-level and well-attended annual event organized, where African think tanks share knowledge and experiences on what works and what does not, around critical development issues facing the continent.

The Africa Think Tank Summit has become a unique platform for the think tank community and an important platform for sharing knowledge and good practices while defining solutions on how to make sure that African think tanks play their role in supporting the continent's socio-economic transformation. Additionally, the past Summits have resulted in building capacities and bringing together the think tanks to come up with policy recommendations on issues related to industrialization in Africa, youth unemployment, implementation of the AfCFTA and partnerships for the sustainability of the think tanks themselves.

The 2021 Africa Think Tank Summit, the 8th edition, was convened virtually on 9-10 December 2021 under the theme ***“Digital Transformation in post-COVID-19 Africa: Opportunities, Challenges and Options for Building Back Better”***.

## 2. CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES<sup>1</sup>

The COVID-19 outbreak has forced most countries, institutions, and businesses to move to online platforms, accelerating a digital transformation that has been underway for decades, especially in Africa, and demonstrating the value of digitalization. The disruptions to overall economic activities by the pandemic have demonstrated beyond doubt that digitalization has become more critical for Africa, in particular, than before.

Digital transformation, known as the use of digital technologies, data, and interconnection to change existing activities or create new ones, could be a game-changer for African countries given its potential to foster economic growth and industrialization and improve the lives of people.

1. This section draws heavily from the Concept Note of the Summit.

Despite it being at the center of economic transformation, data from the Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA) Intelligence show that Africa is lagging when compared to the other regions (developed and developing) in the areas of digital transformation. For instance, the percentage of the population covered by the 3G and 4G networks in 2020 is respectively 76% and 58% in Africa, 94% and 84% in Asia, and 93% and 83% in Latin America and the Caribbean. While the global digital divide is still large, the gap between Africa and the rest of the world is narrowing fast, demonstrating the efforts being made by the continent to catch up with the rest of the world. For instance, internet penetration in Africa has increased tenfold since the early 2000s, compared with a threefold increase in the rest of the world. The proliferation of mobile technologies has been particularly pronounced in Africa, having the world's highest number of accounts (300 million). Evidence shows that there are more than 500 African Fintech companies and over 640 active tech hubs across the continent.

Although Africa has made much progress, some long-standing challenges explain the continent's relatively low performance in digital transformation compared to other regions. Key among the challenges are:

- The limited and high cost of connectivity and devices and operational costs which compromise innovation and scaling-up of digital services;
- The lack of relevant digital skills/expertise which limit the capacity of local stakeholders to drive the adoption and scaling up of digital services;
- The limited resources to continue building the capacity of all stakeholders in the ICT sector; and,
- The failure to adopt appropriate and coordinated policies and strategies at national, regional, and continental levels which hinder the digital transformation agenda of Africa.

While weak human and institutional capacity has been cross-cutting, consultations done by the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) revealed that (i) capacity to implement the policies for digital transformation; and (ii) capacity to mobilize adequate resources to finance the digital transformation are the most important and priority issues to be addressed by African countries.

Evidence from the ACBF's Africa Capacity Reports has always shown that amidst strong policy environments for capacity building, capacity to implement policies remains a major challenge for African countries. The problem with Africa's slow or lack of progress in implementing policies is not that Africa does not know "what" to do; rather, it lies in not knowing "how" to do it as well as not having the capacities to do it. Evidence suggests that the barriers to policy implementation include the lack of adequate monitoring and evaluation frameworks, limited skills required for implementation, lack of funding and resources to support delivery, lack of clear policy content, organizational culture and structure, and changes in policy priorities. Given the challenges faced by African countries to foster digital transformation and all the questions raised around the successful implementation of policies and strategies, the several hundreds of think tanks in Africa can and should play a critical role as organizations designed for and capable of long-term thinking and

reflection(s) to address the issues. Think tanks in view of their roles in conducting policy research, providing advice, building capacities, and advocating for change can contribute to fostering digital transformation in Africa.

It is against this background that ACBF, through the Africa Think Tank Network (ATTN), organized the 2021 Africa Think Tank Summit (the 8th edition) jointly with its partners.

The main objective of the 8th Africa Think Tank Summit was to explore policy and implementation modalities that are essential to leveraging digitalization to build African economies back better after the COVID-19 pandemic. Think tanks and other stakeholders, including policymakers and development practitioners, shared ideas and experiences and devised implementable recommendations on what works and what needs to change in Africa's approach to digitalization. Delegates particularly discussed what capacities are required to accelerate the implementation of Africa's Digital Transformation Strategy (2020-2030) developed by the African Union and how it translates into the implementation of sound digital transformation policies and actions at regional and country levels. More specifically, the 8th Africa Think Tank Summit provided an opportunity for all participants to:

- Examine the state of digital transformation and its potentialities and implications for Africa in light of the COVID-19;
- Present various initiatives and appropriate policy mix for digital transformation in Africa;
- Share Africa's experiences around the continental, regional and national experiences and interventions aimed at fostering digital transformation;
- Identify and examine key capacity challenges and critical technical skills deficits facing countries, key institutions and actors and determine the most effective ways of addressing these institutional and human capacity challenges hindering the adoption and use of digital solutions;
- Discuss the role of think tanks in fostering digital transformation in Africa and enhancing their sustainability; and
- Propose capacity building interventions, partnerships, and coordination mechanisms that will enhance the efforts in advancing the digital transformation agenda in Africa.

### 3. FORMAT

The two-day event was moderated by Mrs. Druscilla Mokosso Joki, Senior Reporter, CRTV (Cameroon) and Mr. Vincent Paul Atangana, Chef of Service, CRTV (Cameroon). The event was held online with simultaneous interpretation services in English and French.

The most influential and innovative think tanks in Africa gathered to discuss contemporary issues they are facing in respect of digital transformation in Africa. Apart from the Opening and Closing Sessions, the Summit was conducted in a Roundtable Format with panels that are intended to frame the key issues and provide constructively provocative questions to stimulate the discussion that followed each session.

The technical discussions of the Summit were organized into six major sessions and a special session as follows:

**Session 1:** Understanding digital transformation: state, implications, and potential for building back Africa better;

**Session 2:** Initiatives to foster digital transformation in Africa: sharing experiences at continental, regional and national levels;

**Session 3:** Identifying the right policies and building the capacities and critical skills needed for digital transformation in Africa;

**Session 4:** Digital transformation and public health: recent research on tobacco control issues in Africa;

**Session 5:** Role of think tanks in fostering digital transformation in Africa and enhancing their sustainability;

**Session 6:** Establishing partnerships and coordination mechanisms to support digital transformation in Africa; and

**Special Session:** Young Think Tankers Session

Across these seven (7) sessions, there were 31 panelists who made insightful presentations followed by interactions with participants. From introductory remarks, the keynote address, panelist presentations and contributions by the participants, several significant observations and actionable recommendations were made that could smoothen the pathway for digital transformation post COVID-19 in Africa to maximize the opportunities, overcome the challenges and optimize on options for building back better.

The 2021 Africa Think Tank Summit was also an excellent opportunity to explore how think tanks can implement the strategies developed in previous Summits to enhance capacity, increase impact and assure the long term viability of think tanks in the region. Some thinking has been done lately by the ACBF on the issue of making think tanks “fit for purpose,” in terms of quality, vibrancy, relevance, and sustainability.



## 4. OPENING SESSION

The Opening Session of the 2021 Africa Think Tank Summit commenced with introductory remarks by **Dr. Yebo Dossina**, Acting Director for Economic Development, Regional Integration and Trade, African Union Commission. He expressed sincere gratitude to the ACBF for the invitation extended to the African Union Commission to participate in the Summit and noted that this 8th edition of the Africa Think Tank Summit comes at a very critical time where Africa is experiencing several socio-economic shocks. COVID-19 has caused several fatalities in Africa, pushed about 40 million back into extreme poverty and destroyed millions of jobs. Africa has entered its first recession after two decades, a significant drop in tax revenues, remittances received from migrants, FDI, and ODA and a significant increase of external debt and budget deficit due to increased budgetary expenditure to cope with the pandemic.

Speaking further, he indicated that digital transformation in Africa remains a key component to “Building Back Better”. Digital technologies have accelerated the development of the digital economy and also reduced the impact of the pandemic as some transactions had to be concluded online. Digital connectivity has also significantly improved, and this has resulted in people, organizations, machines, and countries being more connected.

The advancement of the digital economy has meant that even country borders are now blurred where goods and services move across countries with less friction. This has created global and regional markets that are more connected than ever before. In Africa, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is set to be accelerated by digital technologies and the creation of a digital economy where goods and services are traded seamlessly across African countries.

However, Africa’s digital economy struggles with the lack of and inadequate digital enablers such as broadband infrastructure, cyber security, cloud computing and infrastructure, as well as intelligence solutions such as big data and artificial intelligence. These challenges have resulted in significantly low adoption of digital products in Africa. This is further accentuated by the inadequacy of the digital ecosystem where there is a lack of or limited digital economy support structures that can benefit digital entrepreneurs, consumers, policy makers, as well as regulators. These support structures can include but are not limited to adequate consumer protection frameworks, data governance frameworks, digital skills capacity building programs, and digital entrepreneur support programs and funding.

Whilst the pandemic dealt a huge blow to many economies, it was also a blessing in disguise for us to realize how much of an impact digital transformation can be on the continent. A report by Google and International Finance Corporation indicates that Africa’s digital economy has the potential to contribute US\$180 billion to the continent’s GDP by 2025 and this is expected to exceed US\$700 billion by 2050. With this huge potential and market that the continent has, it is important to support digital transformation in Africa.

The African Union Commission (AUC) has developed several strategies in this regard including the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa, the AU E-Commerce Strategy and the AU Digital Financial Strategy. One thing which is common in these AU strategies is the importance of capacity building in the development of a robust digital economy given the general lack of knowledge when it comes to digital economy policies and regulations. In that regard, there is need for a concerted effort to enhance the knowledge and capacity of African Policy makers, regulators as well as negotiators. Dr. Yeo Dossina rounded up his intervention by taking note of the rural-urban and gender divide that exists in the African digital economy and the need for digitalization policies and strategies to be inclusive.

**Professor Kevin Chika Urama;** Acting Chief Economist and Vice President for the Economic Governance and Knowledge Management Complex, Senior Director, African Development Institute, AfDB was represented by **Dr. Eric Ogunleye;** Advisor to the Chief Economist and Vice President of the African Development Bank. Dr. Ogunleye commenced his presentation by underscoring the imperatives of the digital transformation agenda in Africa by noting that schools, health institutions and e-learning centers now operate on digital platforms. In other words, Africa is increasingly experiencing digital transition. He, however, noted regrettably how access to digital platforms in Africa is constraining the continent and its people in several important ways, especially with respect to telemedicine, etc. For instance, an estimated 900 million people across Africa are not connected to the internet.

He indicated further that there is a growing importance of digitization in the global system with increased shared of digitally delivered services increasing from USD 1.2 trillion in 2005 to USD 2.9 trillion in 2018. And if we focus on the ICT services alone, it increased from USD 175 million in 2005 to USD 568 million in 2018. In fact, it is estimated that by 2022 which is just next year, 60 of the global GDP will be digitalized. That tells how fast the pace is moving and we already have evidence of this; internet of things (IoT), 5G mobile broadband, block chain technology, artificial intelligence, global internet mobile protocol traffic. All of this points to the fact that this is the trend.

He then expressed the strong opinion that something has to be done to ensure inclusivity in digital platforms participation and transformation in Africa. He noted that Africa has all it takes to be a leader in the transition to digital process and transformation, and the global system. He observed further that despite the numerous opportunities, significant challenges exist that cannot be overlooked. These include (i) gross expenditure on research and development remain very low in Africa. In high income countries, the gross expenditure on research and development has consistently been above 2% since 2000 but what we see in Africa, it has consistently been below 0.4 % up until 2004 when it rose marginally to 0.42% and then 0.61 % in 2016. A continent that is not spending on research and development would find it difficult to be able to develop a digital system and be able to be a leader in the global system. (ii) Investment in African think tanks has also been low; just only about 0.8% of about 2 trillion dollars that is spent on research and development comes to Africa when we use the reference year of 2018.

The need to urgently tackle these challenges head-on was emphasized and he recommended the following measures: (i) focused and significant investment in digitalization and digital technology, which he believes could help greatly in plugging the leakages in the public financial management system. Treasury single account process, tax system, tax collection and even spending could be digitized to improve transparency and accountability (ii) improve on the value adding system in agriculture and (iii) make improvement in urgently digitalizing health system so that social distance and lock down can be replaced with the digital means of health provision by way of telemedicine, e- health, etc.

**Her Excellency Ms. Cristina Duarte;** UN Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa, Office of Special Adviser on Africa, United Nations, in her remarks indicated that the theme of the summit could not be more timely. The COVID-19 has underscored the role that digitization can play to increase the resilience of our countries when facing systemic crises.

Ms Duarte underscored the fact that digitization, unfortunately, is not yet a reality in Africa as the continent is currently home to 21 of the 25 least connected countries in the world, with less than a third of its population having access to broadband connectivity. While half of the world turned to new technologies to overcome the challenge of school closures, in Africa, 32 million children dropped school in Eastern and Southern Africa during 2021 due to school closures. This means that 40 per cent of all school-aged children in the two sub-regions were out of school with devastating impact on human capital development. She warns that if African countries do not take decisive steps to change this reality, the digital revolution will become a new divide.

On an optimistic note, she observed that although the pandemic has exposed the challenges of digital divide in Africa, it is also serving as an accelerator for the development and spread of emerging technology on the continent leading to remarkable innovations. For example, according to a study by WHO, 13% of all new or modified health technologies developed to respond to COVID-19 are African, including COVID-19 tracker applications, solar-powered hand-washing stations, and private sector zipline drones to deliver COVID tests. A recent joint report by Google and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) estimates that Africa's internet economy could contribute up to US\$180 billion to the continent's GDP by 2025 and US\$712 billion by 2050. In this regard, promoting digital transformation and bridging the digital divide is key to sustain hard-won development gains and promote inclusive growth and sustainable development that is underpinned by structural economic transformation and regional integration.

Ms. Duarte enumerated several potential uses of digitalization in Africa which is critical to strengthen public institutions. She indicated that new technologies have supported African governments in improving process efficiency and service delivery, as well as in increasing engagement with their citizens. Furthermore, digital technologies can also prove useful in the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption. Moreover, adopting digital tools could increase indirect tax collection at the border by up to 2 percent of GDP per year, and increasing the resilience of the small-scale farmers that have to fight the effects of climate change and other vulnerabilities.

She noted that there are two crucial aspects that need to be taken into account in order to create a policy environment that makes the most of digitization. First, promoting sustainable and broadly-shared recovery requires mobilizing all sources of finance as the pandemic has exacerbated fragilities and further limited fiscal space. The World Bank for instance, estimates that achieving universal, affordable, and good quality internet access on the continent by 2030 will require an investment of US \$100 billion. In addition, Africa's digital infrastructure also requires policy support, digital skill-building and investment for internet infrastructure as these are key enablers for productivity and sustainable economic growth.

Second, rapidly accelerating technologies, including artificial intelligence will form an important part of the digital future, with the ability to revolutionize industries including agriculture, health-care, etc. There is an urgent need to ensure that African governments can identify and understand these emerging technology opportunities and support them in establishing pathways to realize their objectives and prevent tomorrow's gaps in advanced technology.

She concluded that against this background, the role of think tanks and academia cannot be over-emphasized. They have a central role to play in raising policymakers' awareness of the challenges and opportunities of digitization and ensuring that African countries leverage digital transformation to build forward and build better.

**Professor Emmanuel Nnadozie;** Executive Secretary, ACBF in his address welcomed participants and expressed sincere gratitude to ACBF partners who have contributed to the successful implementation of each Summit held since 2014. These include: 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),

He observed that the summit could not have been organized at a more opportune moment as the COVID -19 pandemic has accelerated the arrival of the future in Africa, with digital services being critical for lockdowns and working from home, leading to a huge surge in data traffic. Riding on COVID-19 calamity, young Africans have turned the crisis into an opportunity to find innovative digital solutions to the challenges posed by the pandemic. Examples include the mSafari contact-tracing application for travelers, created by FabLab in Kenya; the Wiqaytna application created in Morocco to notify people when someone they have been in contact with tests positive for COVID-19; and the Global Mamas in Ghana, which produces reusable masks and solar-powered contact-free hand-washing stations using local materials.

Professor Nnadozie noted, however, that despite the progress being made and the dynamism shown by Africa, the continent is lagging when compared to the other regions in the areas of digital

transformation. For instance, the percentage of the population covered by the 3G and 4G networks in 2020 is respectively 76% and 58% in Africa, 94% and 84% in Asia, and 93% and 83% in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is, therefore, an opportune time to discuss and provide solutions to the key challenges faced by Africa in advancing its digital transformation agenda.

He observed that the last five years have witnessed several transformative changes emerging in Africa, with huge implications in the digital agenda. Key initiatives include: (i) the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aimed at creating a single market to generate a combined GDP of more than US\$3.4 trillion and benefit more than one billion people; (ii) the launch of the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020-2030) by the African Union to harness digital technologies and innovation to transform African societies and economies; (iii) the creation of a new Center for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (C4IR) in South Africa to foster dialogue and cooperation on the challenges and opportunities presented by advanced technologies. These initiatives, if successfully implemented, may be game changers that galvanize the results of the digital revolution in Africa.

He indicated further that looking at the evidence and using the example of the mobile economy, Report by the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSMA) shows that mobile technologies and services contributed more than US\$130 billion of economic value added. The Report indicated that 300,000 people have formal jobs in mobile telecoms in sub-Saharan Africa, and the sector supports another 1.1 million livelihoods in the informal sector and 1.8 million other jobs. Moreover, it is estimated that tax revenue was US\$15 billion through consumer taxes and US\$5 billion through corporate and employment taxes.

Professor Nnadozie noted that despite these good examples, some challenges remain. For instance, evidence from the Africa's Development Dynamics 2021 shows that only 17% of self-employed workers living in rural areas use the Internet, compared to 44% for those in urban areas. Moreover, digital innovation is concentrated in very few places, with only five African cities hosting half of the most dynamic start-ups: Cape Town (12.5%), Lagos (10.3%), Johannesburg (10.1%), Nairobi (8.8%) and Cairo (6.9%).

He pinpointed reasons for the continent's low performance in digital transformation that are explained largely by structural and long-standing challenges, key among which are:

- The failure to adopt appropriate and coordinated policies and strategies at national, regional, and continental levels;
- The weak institutional and regulatory capacities, complicated by the variety of actors and new institutions along the supply chains value and across borders;
- The lack of adequate digital skills/expertise which limit the capacity of local stakeholders to drive the adoption and scaling up of digital services; and
- The limited resources to continue building the capacity of all stakeholders in the ICT sector.

He then indicated that African countries must address the capacity gap that feeds the digital divide. Unless this missing link around capacity is broken, it will be difficult to leverage the potentialities offered by digital transformation and upscale digitalization to unlock Africa's structural transformation.

He also enjoined participants to proactively share ideas and experiences and devise implementable recommendations on what works and what needs to change in Africa's approach to digitalization. In particular, the deliberations should among other issues discuss what capacities are required to accelerate the implementation of Africa's Digital Transformation Strategy (2020-2030) developed by the African Union and how it translates into the implementation of sound digital transformation policies and actions at regional and country levels.

**Ms. Souhila Amazouz;** Project Manager for African Union Policy and Regulation Initiative for Digital Africa (PRIDA) and Senior Policy Officer, Information Society Division, African Union Commission delivered the Keynote Address on behalf of the Department of Infrastructure and Energy, the department in charge of ICT and digital portfolio at the African Union Commission.

She congratulated ACBF for organizing this event and for selecting digital transformation as the central theme for this Summit's edition. Indeed, the global COVID-19 crisis has fast forwarded the digital transformation in new ways. She noted that we have witnessed an increased demand in broadband connectivity to perform both personal and professional activities. We have relied on digital technologies to ensure continuity of business during the lockdown and on digital solutions to counter the speed of the disease and save lives. At the same time, this pandemic revealed some of our weaknesses and vulnerabilities of the digital systems and urgent need for Africa to close the digital gaps that exist between countries and also within countries. In addition to the gender gap, we have also the digital gap between men and women as most women in Africa do not have access and are hardly involved in technology related fields. In this regard, and in response to the COVID-19 crisis, the African Union Bureau of the Specialized Technical Committee on ICT and Telecommunications held an extra ordinary session in 2020 where the Ministers of ICT considered appropriate measures and actions to support the continental response to the pandemic and among the priorities was to ensure affordable meaningful and secure access to digital networks and services mainly for health and education sectors as we have seen that many schools and hospitals continued working thanks to digital technologies.

She noted that Africa is embracing its digital future, and this is reflected and realized through different initiatives and policies both at national, regional, and continental levels. The African Union Commission has developed a continental strategy that was endorsed by the AU Executive Council in 2020 and known as '*the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa*'. The rest of Ms. Amazour's presentation was dedicated to an appraisal of this strategy. She indicated that the strategy aims to achieve an integrated, prosperous, and inclusive digital economy and society and will guide the common, coordinated digital agenda for the continent. The Strategy will enhance synergies, or create more synergies between the different initiatives and ensure more complementarity among a wide range of implementing partners and stakeholders.

Among the targets of the strategy are: by 2030 (i) 99% of African people to have their digital identity (ID); (ii) at least each citizen can have access to at least 6 megabytes per second for internet connectivity; (iii) to produce digital devices and ensure affordability such that the cost cannot exceed USD100; and (iv) to build the capacities of African citizens and the youths mainly. The specific targets are to achieve 100 million per year by 2021 and 300 million by 2025 on digital skills and competencies.

The five critical sectors that was selected as priorities for the African continent for the first phase mainly from 2020 to 2030, are education, health, agriculture, governance, industry, trade, and financial services. The strategy also identified data governance, cyber security, and front-end development as cross-cutting themes and the sectors emerging technologies.

To conclude, she reiterated that the African Union Commission devotes particular attention to building an African digital ecosystem and harmonizing all policies and regulations to create a conducive environment that promotes economic growth innovation and social inclusion.

## 5. TECHNICAL SESSIONS

### 5.1. Understanding Digital Transformation: State, Implications, and Potential for Building Back Africa Better

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has proven beyond doubt that digitalization has become most important now than any other time before to facilitate the transformation of the African economy. The key questions/issues that were examined under this sub-theme are as follows:

- (a) What is the state of digital transformation in Africa?
- (b) What are the opportunities/potentialities for accelerating digitalization in Africa, in light of the effects of COVID-19 on the economy?
- (c) How has COVID-19 affected the implementation of Africa's Digital Transformation, including national strategies?
- (d) What are the efforts being made and the various initiatives in place to ensure the use of digital solutions to build back African economies?

The session commenced with brief introductory remarks by the moderator, **Professor Emmanuel Nnadozie**; Executive Secretary, ACBF. He noted that the primary objective of the session was to share views and experiences on the state of digital transformation in Africa in terms of where Africa is, where it should be and how to close the observed gaps. He particularly expressed his belief that the assembled think tanks can discharge the assigned functions and proffer fresh and innovative workable solutions through shared rich and useful experiences.

**Dr. Anthony Coleman;** Principal Research Economist and Senior Manager, Afreximbank expressed the pleasure of Afreximbank to be part of the 2021 Africa Think Tank Summit. He noted that the theme of the Summit was very timely and that its focus aligns with the Afreximbank mandate to close the growing digital divide. He highlighted the several benefits of digitization to include enhanced data collection, stronger resource management, data-driven customer insights, a better customer experience, increased profit for businesses, increased agility, and improved productivity. Particular reference was made to how the development of digital platforms has proven useful in the financial sector in terms of mobile money as captured by the success story of *M-PESA* mobile money scheme in Kenya. However, Dr. Coleman identified the lack of access to the internet as a major challenge to digital transformation in Africa. He specifically noted the absence of the requisite digital infrastructure that is critical to facilitate the seamless movement of goods and services across the continent for the implementation of the African continental free trade agreement (AfCFTA).

Dr Coleman indicated further that the Afreximbank is currently implementing some initiatives to facilitate the digital transformation of Africa. Instructively, he disclosed that Afreximbank has created, and is implementing a digital platform to address the perceived risk of doing business in Africa – customer due diligence to reduce the risk or facilitate counterpart understanding of Africa business environment better, trader intelligence and regulation platform. These initiatives were premised on the need to ease liquidity challenges associated with the multiplicity of currency and reduction in transaction costs; knowing that the key inhibition to doing business in Africa is lack of information. The platform will provide relevant and timely information to ease doing business in Africa.

He concluded his presentation by stating that the Afreximbank values its relationship with the think tanks and the ACBF to achieve Agenda 2063 goals for Africa.

**Professor Alban Ahoure;** Director, CAPEC, Côte d'Ivoire, shared experiences from Côte d'Ivoire noting that there is a significant digital divide in Côte d'Ivoire which is affecting the productivity of several businesses despite recording a 542% increase in digital penetration in the country. However, it was observed that e-governance and service are working well in some aspects.

He identified the major challenges that account for the observed digital divide in the country to include: electricity provision, regulations (that has not allowed for an increase in digital infrastructure and greater penetration and e-commerce), skills gap (at the instance of low investment in digital skills acquisition), the preponderance of informal sector with little or no funding support, weak logistics to address cybercrime and low interconnectivity with other countries. He stressed the need to address all these challenges to facilitate digital transformation in the country.

**Mr. Tunde Fafunwa;** Advisor to the UNECA Digital Centre and Managing Partner, Kitskoo Inc., commenced his presentation on a note of appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the 2021 Africa Think Tank Summit. He expressed his concerns about digital transformation in Africa and the need for action; the fact that about 80% of Africa's economic activities still take place in the informal sector. This presents challenges as well opportunities considering that Africa has 70% youth population, and trade has commenced under the AfCFTA.



He observed that though significant gains have been made in terms of digitalization, penetration is still low. Internet access penetration is just about 30% due to infrastructural challenges. He was also of the opinion that a lot more needs to be done around getting fiber optics particularly to rural areas, of which the government must take the leading role. The use of the provision of necessary infrastructure and benefits of improved digital penetration by the Government to deliver financial assistance/palliative during the COVID-19 lockdown in Togo was noted to be instructive.

The need for full adoption of electronic payment and encouraging private investment in building the necessary capacity was also underlined. He noted that there is a need for the development of relevant digital platforms across all sectors and countries to build knowledge and capacity to bridge the digital divide. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) is already working in this direction.

Most importantly according to Mr. Fafunwa is the imperatives of developing a critical mass of indigenous *community digital workers* to drive and support community-level digital penetration and access initiatives.

**Mr. Ibukun Onitiju;** Head of Digital, Nestlé Central & West Africa in his presentation drew attention to the growth in e-commerce on the continent. He acknowledged efforts being made to provide digital infrastructure and payment systems across African countries, and the increasing realization that both the government and the private sector should work together. Some areas requiring closer attention were identified to include empowering more individuals, particularly the young ones to increase their access and skills to utilize digital technology; taking a concrete step to solicit the support and cooperation of educational institutions to help with developing the right set of skills towards closing the persistent digital divide within the population due to lack of digital skills.

He highlighted some interventions by Nestle in facilitating digital transformation. These include (1) investment in developing the youth, (ii) internship programs where interns are exposed to digital knowledge, technology, and applications, and (iii) partnership with UNESCO in Côte d'Ivoire in teaching/learning of basic digital technologies and applications.

**Ms. Camilla Rocca;** Head of Research, Mo Ibrahim Foundation, used data analyzed from the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance over the years to provide insights on the extent of the digital economy and the digital divide among African countries. The presentation began with showcasing the vast digital potentials that exist in the continent. The potentials that African countries can draw on include a young generation of digital entrepreneurs adapting to the new global conditions in the recovery. There are over 640 active tech hubs on the continent, 80% of young African's own a mobile phone, while 77% use their phone every day, and Africa has the world's highest number of mobile money accounts.

In the light of these potentials, a strong conviction was expressed that digitalization offers an opportunity for Africa to leapfrog against the backdrop of the following stylized facts: *access to financial services* has improved in 36 out of 39 African countries (Botswana, Mauritania, and Nigeria use digital payments more in 2019 than in 2010); ability to improve social safety nets; and use of digital technology in health response to the pandemic.

However, she observed that in too many African countries access to the internet and computers is still low and the digital divide holds back progress. The digital divide between countries and within countries results in inequalities both in physical access to ICTs and in the resources and skills needed to harness such technology effectively. It also hampers key COVID-19 response measures (social protections were limited by the digital divide as many could not access cash transfers), school closures meant being out of learning, 89% of learners in sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to household computers, 82% lack internet access and at least 20 million live in areas not covered by a mobile network, and many were unable to switch to working from home. Furthermore, the digital divide has repercussions for democracy, inequalities, and gender. Increased use of E-governance and E-democracy initiatives excludes those who lack the means, skills, or physical access to digital technology, rural-urban inequalities in digital access are widespread and areas without internet coverage are predominantly rural with pronounced gender inequalities in digital access.

She indicated also that the challenges to bridging the observed digital divide (which constitute policy imperatives) are mostly associated with cost, speed, and security. The relative cost of the internet in Africa is the highest of any world region. Costs have stagnated in most African countries over the decade. The 2020 median fixed broadband costs as a percentage of gross national income (GNI) per capital is 18.6% in Africa, Asia & Pacific 2.96%, and Europe 1.26%. Internet speed and security scored very low. There is also the challenge of access to energy which accounts for low digital access. It was noted that over 600 million Africans are still off-grid, equivalent to almost twice the total population of the United States of America (USA). Finally, and in closing the presentation, the challenge of data was also indicated. The significance of the data problem was underscored with statistics that showed that only 10% of deaths are registered in Africa compared to 98% in Europe, and over 50% of African children do not have a legal existence (i.e., not registered at birth).

During the interactions with participants, two (2) critical questions were raised. The first is the observed contradiction between the move towards digital transformation and the lack of infrastructure in Africa.

The second is the focus on digital penetration but little focus on content development. On the first question, Mr. Fafunwa re-echoed his belief and conviction that developing a critical mass of *community digital workers* is the way to go and a sustainable one to align the move towards digital transformation with requisite and adequate infrastructure in Africa.

On the second question, it was noted that digital transformation is occurring and Africa's participation is a must and the need to ensure she sits at the table when issues are being discussed and more instructively develop the required capacity to be a functional member on the table.

Therefore, there is the need for collaborations among all stakeholders and institutions, reconciling policy-making with data, improving on energy and infrastructure stock, rebuilding Africa's growth and development model to emphasize ownership, relevance based on Africa's ideals and ideas. A strong conviction was expressed and agreed to that digital transformation offers Africa a huge opportunity to leapfrog provided the needful is done.

## 5.2. Initiatives to Foster Digital Transformation in Africa: Sharing Experiences at Continental, Regional and National Levels

This session is premised on the observation that most African countries have digitalization agenda and are implementing several interventions aimed at contributing to the digital transformation of the continent. While at the continental level, a comprehensive Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020- 2030) has been introduced, countries are using digital technologies and innovation to transform their economies. Under this sub-theme, some questions were highlighted to guide discussions towards deepening understanding and sharing experiences. The questions include:

- (a) how is the continental agenda being implemented at the regional and national levels?
- (b) what are the related interventions being carried out at the Regional Economic Communities level?
- (c) what are the countries' experiences in utilizing digital technologies for economic development?
- (d) what works and what needs to change in Africa's approach to digitalization? and
- (e) what can we do differently to accelerate the implementation of digital transformation policies at the continental, regional, and national levels?

The session was moderated by **Mr. Yarik Turianskyj**; Deputy Programme Head, African Governance and Diplomacy, SAIIA, South Africa.

The session commenced with brief introductory remarks by the moderator who reiterated what should be the focus as indicated by the guiding questions and read the list of the panellists/presenters.

**Mr. Karim El Aynaoui**; Executive President, Policy Center for the New South, Morocco kicked off his presentation by noting that Information and Communication Technology (ICT), technology, and digital transformation rest on the intricate linkage among public policy formulation, academia, and private sector and hence the need for proper coordination and cooperation among the three. Fostering this cooperation and coordination is necessary for stimulating technological innovations and leapfrogging a country. He then shared experiences from Morocco on how these three interlinked and mutually interdependent dimensions have been made cooperative and properly coordinated. However, he pointed to the need to separate policy formulation from the regulation function of the government. On a final note, he drew attention to the fact that the telecommunication sector is the backbone of digital transformation and hence needs the requisite infrastructural development.

**Mr. Taurai Chinyamakobvu**; Partner and investor in Flocash Zimbabwe, Founder of Pazimba runs a digital payment platform firm called Flocash in his country, Zimbabwe. He began his contributions with a quick run-through of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on African economies. To him, technological advancement and digitalization over time has become a major tool in the pursuit

of development, politics and elections, and economic management in countries. This is because digitalization has become the backbone of the economy. He went on to present the profile of his Flocash company and then highlighted both the challenges and opportunities that the COVID-19 pandemic presented his company. He noted emphatically that indeed there has been a forced transition on everyone to move towards digital platforms. To facilitate the process of digital transformation in Africa, he outlined some actions that governments across countries need to take. These actions include government acting as an enabler of technology development, provision of resources to universities as centers of innovations, fostering collaboration between universities and industries, providing enabling environment with the conscious provision of venture capital for digital technological development, regulations to give space and support to technological innovators and AfCFTA should be properly aligned to post COVID-19 realities in terms of regulations on trade.

**Dr. Issiaka Ballo**; Assistant Professor of Linguistics, University of Letters, Bamako, Mali shared experience from Mali's *Robomali* project involving 20 students which focused on using artificial intelligence and digital devices and technology to translate French language into local Malian languages. Data collected from the project so far showed that about 5,000 pairings of French and Malian language sentences have been made through the website platform created. He noted that that generally, COVID-19 has raised awareness about digital devices, digitalization, and technological platforms in Mali.

### **5.3. Identifying the Right Policies and Building the Capacities and Critical Skills Needed for Digital Transformation in Africa**

Despite the recognition of digitalization as the catalyst for Africa's transformation, the continent still lags behind compared to other regions in the pace at which digital technologies are being adopted. The slow pace points to the fact that capacity in its various forms is hobbling digital transformation in Africa. It is essential to unpack the nature and form of these capacity challenges to understand how key stakeholders in this sector relate to these key issues. To this end, the following are among the key questions addressed under this sub-theme.

- (a) What are the capacity challenges faced by governments, the private sector (including SMEs), and CSOs in supporting digital transformation?
- (b) What challenges are these key sectors (government, private sector, and CSOs) facing in building capacities for digital transformation?
- (c) What are the options available to address these challenges? What is the appropriate policy-mix needed to foster capacity development for digital transformation?
- (d) What are the priority capacity needs of key stakeholders (government, private sector, and CSO), and how can these capacities be developed, retained and sustained for adaptive transformation?

**Dr. Thomas Munthali;** Director General, National Planning Commission, Malawi moderated the session, which aimed at identifying the right policies, building the capacities and skills needed for digital transformation. In his introductory remarks, he stated that it was important to note the status of digitization in Africa, as has been discussed in previous sessions. He observed that looking at the policy landscape, Africa cannot foster digitization without the right policies in place. The session focused on dissecting the challenges around establishing policies on digitization for advancement in digital transformation in Africa. The session also considered whether Africa can implement the policies once they exist and, by extension, looked at advancing capacity building on digitalization on the continent.

**Mr. Tapiwa Ronald Cheuk;** Trade Policy Officer, African Union Commission, spoke on the emerging issues in African countries concerning capacity for establishing the right policies and competencies for implementing digitization policies. He started the discussion on data noting that it is paramount in every economic activity worldwide and Africa is not exempt from this.

According to him, data is the foundation for the digital economy, and Africa must recognize that the data-driven economy wields a lot of power in the world today as it is contributing more than the traditional economy, and this has to be our main focus.

With this realization, it is pertinent for Africa to ask what data governance policies should be put in place while noting that data policies around the world are guided by different models driven by their peculiar priorities. For example, the South Asian models where data is focused on sovereignty, national security, and cyber security, and China is an example here. From a Western perspective, looking at the United States of America, it is a free market. Their model is based on preserving company interests and the dominance of some of their companies as far as the digital economy is concerned, while the European model, which is the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is used by most European countries, is based on the protection of personal data; data is considered a fundamental human right that must be protected.

On what model Africa should adopt for its policies, Mr. Tapiwa noted that Africa should consider a balanced model that will favor its unique perspective and address its shortfalls concerning the digital economy, as we do not have many existing data value chains. There is a need to create these value chains that will drive the digital economy. He called for a regional approach to policy issues, considering the need to enhance regional integration in Africa. Taking the example of the Asian Pacific, Africa as a region can come together (the government, the private sector, civil society organizations, and consumers) to recommend competencies that we need in the region. By highlighting these recommendations of competencies in the digital economy, they will be passed on to academia and other institutions that breed these competencies to guide capacity-building initiatives around the continent. These competencies then become the basis for developing competencies within the region.

In summary, he urged Africa to consider the chain of data, taking the regional approach and identifying our priorities, as we cannot adopt the free flow of data in the economy, believing this will not serve the interests of Africa as our cultural background, our social background, and our economic history should fit into the kinds of policies that are established.

**Professor Kgomotso H. Moahi;** Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic Services, Botswana Open University in her intervention appraised how Africa can ensure that the right policies are formulated and that there is the capacity to deliver on them. She started by highlighting the three key missions of the university, which are teaching, research, and service. According to her, for universities to participate not as ivory towers but also as institutions that involve their communities and engage with them in all three areas would be ideal. Likewise, when policies around digitization are considered, it is important to ensure that the voices of the members of the community are heard and taken on board. They should be made to understand the rationale for the policy and how it fits into their needs.

She noted that traditional policy-making is viewed as making policy for the community rather than developing and designing policy with the community. Community engagement must be at the core of policy. She gave an example of how Botswana harnessed community engagement for a successful national identity card project. There was a concerted drive to inform and educate Botswana citizens on why there was a need for national identification, and by the time the identification was introduced, people were ready to get on board. Likewise, with digitization, she called for Africa to first engender an understanding of what digital transformation is amongst our people, in our countries, and ultimately, this will translate to what happens on the continental level. Digitization should not just be about technology; it should encompass socioeconomic issues as well so that citizens can understand what the concept is about, what it means for them in terms of the services they can get, the benefits, and how it affects their everyday lives.

Professor Kgomotso recognized that many countries have developed policies for digital transformation and many countries have national policies for information and communication technology (ICT), but there does seem to be an implementation disconnect, noting that the way digital transformation policies are designed matters because it affects implementation if the people whom these policies are developed for do not appreciate or understand what it is all about. She highlighted that the Brookfield Institute talks about policy innovation versus traditional policy-making; the right approach is that policies should be designed with the communities and for the communities. Communities should be able to participate in the framing of the issues, know what is relevant to the people while considering their preferences, and should be based on their contextual lived experiences to determine what is relevant for the people. This will enable a better understanding of their needs as individuals and as a community and increase the chances of success in terms of implementation.

Speaking further, she noted that digital transformation requires innovation. Find what people need and innovate, then design policies based on that, rather than innovating and trying to get the community to adopt the innovation. Innovation must be tied to needs. She commended the creation of different digital applications by African youths to meet the needs of people during the pandemic.

In concluding, Professor Kgomotso indicated that once there is a policy in place, there needs to be an action plan that involves the participation of all the relevant stakeholders—the public sector, private sector, academia, and the citizens. She commended smart bots Botswana, which is the digital transformation strategy of Botswana that involves the active engagement of the communities, talking to them about what is required, and building the digital infrastructure required.

**Ms. Elisa Saint Martin;** Policy Analyst, Africa Unit, OECD Development Centre, \ spoke on the implementation gaps, best practices based on international experience for establishing and implementing policies, and how the OECD can support capacity building institutions such as ACBF on the African continent to help countries with digital transformation. She first reflected on how digital transformation has become more important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. She highlighted that although the pandemic has taken a huge toll on African economies, it has also accelerated digital transformation as governments were forced to implement many initiatives on digital solutions to cope with the effects of the pandemic. This can be seen in the financial sector with the rise of mobile money, and education with the set-up of distant learning mechanisms by African governments. She noted that most digital transformation strategies focus mainly on the information and communication technology (ICT) sector. This will not create enough jobs for the twenty-nine million people that are expected to enter the job markets each year within the next ten years. She advocated the use of technology in all the economic sectors, such as agriculture, education, manufacturing, health, and commerce.

Ms. Elisa identified three gaps that need to be adequately tackled by specific policies to foster digital transformation in Africa. The first gap is spatial. Place-based policies will be needed to create employment opportunities beyond large urban areas. Digital infrastructure should be accessible to all. Prioritizing the development of broadband infrastructure in rural and intermediary cities will yield high returns as 73% of Africans will continue to live in rural and intermediary cities by 2040. Data services should also be more affordable, as only 17% of Africa's population can afford 1 gigabyte of data. She suggested a reduction in the cost of digital services by half; this would make them affordable for about 75% of the population, thus creating more access. In this vein, policies should be targeted at making digital services more accessible and affordable.

The second gap is building the right capacity; African youths need to undergo adequate training to prepare them to embrace digital transformation. According to her, surveys conducted in 11 African countries show that one in every two young people believes their skills are insufficient for current job opportunities. She called for policies to increase on-the-job training for youths in partnership with the private sector to embrace digital transformation and to create opportunities for formal and informal jobs. The third gap is the competitiveness gap. There should be policies to support Africa's dynamic SMEs and start-ups to enable them to prosper and actively compete on the continent and globally. One of the key areas of intervention is regional cooperation. The implementation of the African Continental free Trade Agreement (AfCTA) and the upcoming protocol on e-commerce will help tackle barriers to e-commerce as it relates to cross-border payments and other issues. Also, harmonizing regulations across countries in the right way will be crucial. There is a need for many policies to fill the three gaps identified, and learning from the experiences of other countries on the best practices will be useful. The OECD facilitates such dialogues on best practices.

In conclusion, she indicated that the OECD stands ready to work with ACBF in building capacities to harness Africa's digital transformation by promoting capacity building through its extensive networks' collaboration with 56 governments and international organizations.

**Mr. Bakary Kone;** Head, Regional Office for West and Central Africa and Director, Resource Mobilization, Strategic Planning & Partnerships, ACBF in his intervention highlighted the need to deal with the gap between education and the development sector. He indicated that at the 2019 World Bank Annual Meeting on Africa with the theme ‘connecting Africa through broadband: roadmap for inclusive growth’ it was stated that digitization is the fourth industrial revolution. Africa missed the first three revolutions. He emphasized that Africa cannot afford to miss out on the fourth revolution having missed out on the first three revolutions. Digitalization requires several elements. The first element is people. There is a need to ensure that we have the people with the right talents, and getting this talent calls for deliberate actions including investing in talent.

He called for investment in human capital while noting that the investment by countries should start from domestic resources before seeking additional resources, as this would signal that it is a priority for the country. He noted that a major challenge for some countries that want to digitize is that they are not making the necessary adjustments required to be able to afford the digitalization sector. Mr Kone noted that some countries are doing well concerning digitalization and that it is linked to leadership. In such countries, they have given themselves the tools to focus on making progress on digitalization.

He advocated for opening up to digitization; there should be policies to open up the digital sector to youths. He stated that African youths are creative and that access to the internet should not be seen as a threat. Many Africans are users of content rather than creators of content; to boost the creation of more content, there is a need to provide an incentive for that. In 2019, at the Annual Meeting of the World Bank, he had a brief consultation with the experts on digitization, and their recommendation for success with digitization was simply to train the right people and get the right policies; noting that these two key things are the right start for digitization, while emphasizing that discussions on the internet of things, artificial intelligence, and other subjects merely complicate matters. There is a need to get the policies right, train people, and do solid planning that can be adjusted progressively till the desired results are achieved.

On the ACBF’s readiness to support countries with digitization, *Mr Kone* stated that one of the major assets of ACBF is its partnership with African think tanks, and that is what will be explored to help make the right policies in different African countries. He also stated that ACBF will collate all the recommendations from the summit and work with partners to develop programs that can be promoted to get African institutions—government, private sector, and civic organizations—to fund Think tanks at the right levels.

Noting that policies are critical for digitization, the challenge is that think tanks are still struggling to get to know the continent’s priorities as some of them are still literally commissioned for studies that are diverting them from the main issues in some of the countries. The major thing, the first point of consideration, will be to get African institutions – at the highest levels to get think tanks funded adequately because the competencies are there, which ACBF has confirmed through years of partnership.

In closing, Mr Kone stated that there are some countries where almost everything is digitized, and we need to see more of that in different countries as that is not the most difficult thing to do. We should explore digital solutions to make life easier, and this has more to do with policies than the financial means to do it.



**Dr. Charles Nyuykonge;** Founder & Director, Peacebuilders without Borders, South Africa started by noting that most African countries have a national development plan, and some have developed it with the assistance of ACBF; others have engaged ACBF to assist them with the capacity needs of their respective countries. However, the conversation should be on how these policies are developed and how development priorities are determined. He senses that the development priorities of African countries, particularly digital transformation, should reflect the development priorities of African countries, stating that in some African countries (particularly the French-speaking countries), their national development plans are sometimes not different from the political party memorandum to the extent that a look at the voting lines or the adoption even in parliament is largely along party lines, and this raises the question of how the countries can have an inclusive or long-term system that can sustain a policy such as digitization.

The second is the fact that, despite its success on the continent, considering the use by youths to innovate and make things simpler for them, we must avert our minds to the fact that many youths use the opportunities we have for digitization largely for entertainment purposes because the link between a national development plan and national priorities to issues driven by citizens is largely missed. He gave the example of how Comoros grew its oil drilling capacity; Comoros, as part of its development plan to boost its oil drilling capacity knew that the capacity was needed in different areas and those who had the capacity were outside the country and did not realize that the country needed them.

According to him, the major challenge is how the government can translate its development priorities into opportunities that the citizens can take advantage of. This is one of the challenges that continue to bedevil the continent. He noted there are many good policies the government may have, but not being able to drive them from top to bottom, not being able to get some kind of inclusive or national buy-in leaves the national development priorities hanging, which could benefit greatly from the technical know-how which is a large part of the continent.

Professor Kgomotso emphasized the need to look at the entire education system to develop a curriculum that will prepare Africans for the fourth industrial revolution noting that youths have aligned towards developing economies that utilize digitization. Digitization has become a basic need.

**Mr Adeyinka Adeyemi;** Senior Advisor, UNECA, noted that government policies on digitization should emphasize growth and no new taxes, as all parties lose; the government loses the opportunity to expand its tax base, and innovators crumble under the weight of tax. Again, Mr. Adeyinka Adeyemi highlighted the importance of investment and training on digitization, noting that we need to develop an appropriate curriculum to teach digital tools as the youth have simply learned the wrong lessons and are using them effectively.

According to Joan Singh, a participant, digital literacy must be combined with business and entrepreneurial skills. Another participant called for the digitization gap between Africa and the world to be closed as it is a major issue today. First, that education must be reformed across the continent to deal with the reality of our continent.

Second, each African country cannot, by itself, create digitization; this must be a continental agenda. We need to build an African state to help the continent with infrastructure, inclusive digitization, agriculture, roads, etc. We should look at the private sector. Strong national service is the starting point rather than just following what international institutions want us to do. Right policies start with an education based on African values and traditions. Innovation is to be based on tradition.

In response to a question from Thomson Mutama on the way to make digitization processes cheaper and driven by the private sector, Ms. Elisa stated that Africa has led the trend in mobile money; that innovation is driven by the private sector, not the government; the government should support innovation to enable the private sector to meet the needs of people. Using Ghana as an example, she stated that around 2014, the government had regulations on mobile money providers that were too restrictive to enable the providers to reach more people, but after they reformed the regulations, there was increased adoption and the use of mobile money solutions skyrocketed. She called for the government to drive policies that will spur the growth of such innovations, dialogue with the private sector to identify the policies and skills that are needed to develop their different innovations.

The moderator concluded the session by summing up the key issues discussed during the session are data, that examination of issues of implementation disconnect, and digitization should expand beyond the information and communication technology (ICT) sector, more access to the internet for more countries in Africa, including those in the formal and informal sectors, promoting competitiveness so we can compete favorably with other regions. Equally important were harmonizing our regulations across Africa, and emphasizing education—teaching our youths in the direction of digitization; and training our people around the policies that have been developed. He commended ACBF's readiness to partner with think tanks to support countries in meeting the demand of having the right policies established and capacity-building programs to support implementation.

#### **5.4. Digital Transformation and Public Health: Recent Research on Tobacco Control Issues in Africa**

With COVID-19, it is evident that digital health interventions can help to alleviate issues of reach, and access across diverse populations to support tobacco control and improve public health. This notwithstanding, e-cigarettes and online surveys/adverts are a demonstration of the innovative use of digital solutions by the tobacco industry. The session focused on the research conducted by think tanks on tobacco issues in Africa.

This session was moderated by Dr. Barassou Diawara; Senior Knowledge Management Expert, ACBF. He kickstarted the session by noting that it is focused on how following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, digital health interventions have helped to alleviate issues of reach, and access across diverse populations to support tobacco control and improve public health. Very instructive is the observation that e-cigarettes and online surveys/adverts have becoming increasing used as a demonstration of the innovative use of digital solutions by the tobacco industry. Research on various issues related to tobacco control in Africa has been conducted by think tanks. The session, therefore, was aimed at sharing experiences from the research findings. The guiding questions for

presentations/discussions include: What has been the main results and key recommendations of the studies conducted by think tanks on tobacco issues in Africa? What are the socio-economic impacts of disease burden due to smoking? What is the impact of tobacco control measures on livelihoods? What are the interventions undertaken by African countries to support tobacco control programs and what results/ outcomes are beginning to show? Answer to these questions were sought from studies conducted in Malawi, Zimbabwe and Nigeria, and presentations/discussions were sequenced accordingly.

**Dr. Mariam Kadzamira**, Founder and Director, Youth Enterprise Services (YES), Malawi, started the discussion on the topic based on findings from research recently conducted in Malawi and co-authored by Dr. Harriet Guasi and Tamara Phiri. Introducing the topic, she noted that Malawi is one of the top ten tobacco producers and that Malawi's economy is highly dependent on tobacco.

And that this, coupled with the increasing usage of tobacco products due to increased marketing of tobacco products by the tobacco industry, has led to the country experiencing the consequences of tobacco-related deaths and diseases. There has been a constant increase in deaths linked to smoking between 1990 and 2017. What this means for the country is that developing tobacco policies that are coherent and consistent with the health and economic sectors has been a challenge for the country. In general, there is little to no data on the cost of smoking in the country.

The study aimed to fill this gap by quantifying the economic costs of smoking on individuals and their families using case studies of actual smokers that have been affected. They had been sick and looking at how that has affected them, providing recommendations for public health policymakers.

The study revealed that tobacco usage is prevalent in rural and urban Malawi. The current rates are unclear due to the lack of a national statistical database that captures smoking or links between smoking and diseases. Data from 2015 and 2016 indicates a national representative sample showing that just over 12% of men in Malawi smoke and 1% of women smoke; the smokers are likely to be older, poorer, less educated, and living in rural areas. This statistic does not only apply to cigarette smoking but also other forms of tobacco use.

The disease burden associated with tobacco usage in Malawi is difficult to quantify due to the lack of a national representative sample and how patients' data is collected, transferred, and stored in the public health care system. She, however, stated that further research is needed using a national representative sample to do similar studies, scaling them up to a broader level.

The methodology for the research started with a rapid evidence review of what was already in existence; focus groups with the general public. It included sixty men, women, and youths to get their views on the tobacco control policies. Subsequently, two case studies emerged. One was a rural smoker and the other an urban smoker, both of whom have become sick after being affected over the years. Both smokers had smoked for over 20 to 30 years, and a key finding from the studies is that illness related to smoking results in three things: direct ill health for the smoker and sometimes for the family members due to secondary smoke; an economic burden for the smoker and

their families; and community and mental health effects. The mental health effect has not been well documented; both case studies show that the smokers suffered from depression and anxiety, not just because they were sick but because of the economic burden. Surprisingly, both case studies were male, and both of them also thought that the loss of income was quite de-masculinizing, and they were not happy with that. The studies showed that the costs arising from tobacco disease spill over to the family and the community. It also showed that social capital is important for individuals affected by tobacco disease as it helps to mop up high social and economic costs. It also affects the public health system in various ways.

Key recommendations include that the government should put in place policies that will control the usage of tobacco and smoking. The policies will be effective if they are consistently implemented, have budgetary commitment, and are enforced via various local stakeholders such as traditional leaders.

She observed that these policies can be implemented effectively with the emergence of digital tools and especially in the face of the pandemic where it has been difficult for people to meet physically and have large meetings of sensitization and educational training. The emergence of digital tools can help the government implement these policy recommendations.

Dr. Kadzamira proposed digital solutions to tackle the menace of smoking. These include the use of web-based systems and the internet to sensitize the public, train public health workers, and clinicians on the detection of tobacco-related illnesses. The digital solutions, including the utilization of digital health record-keeping and capturing of patient data to track the increasing rate of tobacco-related diseases. Similar web-based interventions should also receive attention to curb the widespread effect of smoking.

In conclusion, she emphasized the need to digitize patient data as the study shows that this is one of the weaknesses. The digitization of patients will reveal when a particular illness is associated with tobacco use history, it will be easier to quantify the social and economic burdens of smoking and tobacco use. Therefore, it will be easier for policymakers to understand the cost and tackle it. Various digital tools provide the opportunity to make it easier for the Malawi government to implement different programs aimed at curbing the effects of smoking in the country.

**Dr. Gibson Chigumira;** Executive Director, ZEPARU, Zimbabwe, presented the Zimbabwe study. He stated that the study conducted in Zimbabwe considered the impact of tobacco control measures on livelihoods from a grower-based perspective. Zimbabwe is one of the leading tobacco producers in Africa; most of their farmers' livelihood depends on it. Therefore, measures to reduce tobacco use affect their economic potential. The study also sought the perspective of the growers on tobacco control and the initiatives that will assist them as they transition from growing tobacco to other crops.

He gave a brief context of Zimbabwe and tobacco. He highlighted that tobacco contributes almost 10% of gross domestic product (GDP); it is the second-largest foreign currency earner in Zimbabwe after gold. These statistics show that the economy is highly dependent on tobacco. Over the years, there has been an increase in tobacco farmers. For example, in 2019, there was a 400% increase

in new tobacco farmers to about 155,000. Tobacco growing has become a livelihood issue as it is a significant source of income. In 2019 alone, each farmer earned about USD 3.4 thousand, a significant contribution to their income base.

While the importance of tobacco's contribution to economic growth, exports, and livelihoods is celebrated, its use also creates significant health challenges. Tobacco also affects the environment because tobacco curing uses a lot of forests and deforestation. Its associated risks include green tobacco sickness and acute nicotine poisoning that occur as people harvest the leaves and inhale them. There has also been evidence of the link between tobacco use and tuberculosis.

The study involved a sample interview of about 598 farmers for their perspectives. They sought to find out why they were growing tobacco despite the health issues in one of the questions. The response from the study showed that farmers have the perception that tobacco cultivation is more profitable compared to other crops. Meanwhile, this is only a perception. Evidence has shown there are other more lucrative crops. A key finding is that if farmers are empowered with the capacity and knowledge, they will move from tobacco to other areas. The analysis revealed that the greater percentage of the farmers (about 79%) indicated that they were in tobacco farming because of the attractive returns, a different group claimed it was their only source of livelihood. These factors also contribute to Governments' challenges in implementing the world health organization's (WHO) framework convention for tobacco control in Zimbabwe. The current national development framework, which is the NBS 1, shows that there is an increased target for tobacco growing. From 2020, with about 1554,926 metric tons as the baseline for 2020, targeting 300,000 metric tons in 2025. The government is also facing challenges of adequate funding for the national health care system; compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Disease burdens have been alluded to as consequences of the direct and indirect costs associated with tobacco use, such as premature loss of life and productivity loss due to illness. These issues present challenges, and the country needs to reflect on the need for tobacco control programs to be prioritized in Zimbabwe while exploring other viable alternative livelihood options for tobacco farmers.

From the findings, there is a need for the country to enhance measures on tobacco control, and in line with the theme of the summit, this can also be done through the utilization of digital tools. Firstly, to bring awareness to the populace about the challenges that tobacco use presents. Second, they will demonstrate to tobacco farmers other crops that can be grown and their economic benefits. This way farmers will have a much broader range of livelihood options available through the use of digital platforms, extension services, and research.

Another element the study covered was to help farmers realize the various measures put in place for tobacco control. Of the 598 farmers that participated in the study; 17% were smokers, 83% were non-smokers, but only 20% of the farmers interviewed did not support tobacco control measures. This means 80% of the farmers supported moves to reduce tobacco production and use even though they would be affected. The only limiting factor for them is whether there are viable options.

Dr Chigumira posited that there is need for enough investment in developing the capacity for the other alternatives, just like the tobacco, which is a well-structured sector with marketing and funding. Other crops will be viable if the same support structure is extended.

Overall, the study summarizes that the farmers are aware of the dangers of tobacco, they are willing to transition from growing tobacco to other cash crops, but there is a need for capacity building and the scope and potential of the digital platforms to facilitate the education of farmers.

**Dr. Chukwuka Onyekwena**; Executive Director, CSEA, Nigeria, spoke on exploring digital options for tobacco control strategies in Nigeria. The study was funded by ACBF and covered tobacco control policies in Nigeria. He said that although tobacco prevalence is relatively low in Nigeria, it is growing due to the promotion of the tobacco industry to encourage smoking amongst the youths in the country.

Tobacco is associated with about 29,000 deaths in Nigeria. The estimated cost of tobacco smoking in Nigeria is about USD1.71 billion a year, which is a huge amount when compared to the budget of the entire country for healthcare. In 2017, 4.9% of all the deaths in Nigeria were linked to smoking.

The work of CSEA reflects on the six proven policies by WHO to reverse the global tobacco epidemic. These range from monitoring tobacco use to protecting people from tobacco smoke. The two main areas where the research is concerned are the dangers of tobacco and taxation. The study revealed taxation as the most effective way of reducing tobacco consumption as the tobacco industry can sidestep most of the tobacco control measures. Taxation is an enormous burden on the tobacco industry. It has proven to be the most effective. The WHO recommends that the tax should be at least 75% of the retail price, but in most countries, particularly in Africa, the tobacco tax is far from that 75% of the retail price.

The study covered the fiscal and health effects of tobacco excise tax changes in Nigeria. It was a simulation of the effects of increasing excise taxes on tobacco products to evaluate the impact on tobacco consumption and government revenues and other key indicators. Under the government's proposed policy, which entails retaining the 20% based on value plus a 20 Naira specific tax, the model found that severe consumption will fall by at least 7.58% on the assumption that there is slow economic growth, and the tobacco industry increases its price by 10%. Under the WHO's proposed policy intervention, the model found that if the 75% recommended is in place, the reduction will go as much as 18.5% in all the twelve scenarios conducted. The study found that an increase in taxes on tobacco will likely increase revenue for the government significantly and reduce smoking.

The CSEA conducted a study recently on the effect of fixing health warnings on cigarette packs for preventing premature deaths and diseases. A summary of findings shows that previous health warnings were just text-based but have evolved to graphic health warnings, which increase the averted events of deaths, cardiac diseases, and cancer by a very large margin. For example, if graphic health warnings are placed on 50 to 80 percent of the product package, averted death increases from 748 in-text warnings to around 7748.

The graphic health warnings came into place within the past year. Moving from text warnings to graphic health images increases preventable deaths by 10 times, and this doubles when the warning on a cigarette pack is placed on at least 80% of the package surface having the health warning.

More than USD180,000 in costs is avoided when a graphic health warning is placed within 50 to 80% of the packaging. This increases to USD343,000 with plain packaging plus a health warning on greater than 80% of the packaging surface.

Both studies show that taxation and health warnings on cigarette packs have substantially reduced cigarette smoking and its adverse effects.

Nigeria can leverage the high level of digital adoption to enhance tobacco control measures. Nigeria has a high youth population and in 2019, the population using the internet in Nigeria increased to about 33%, and most of the users are youths. Based on reports by Statista in 2021, about 43 million Nigerians use social media. The increase in digital adoption increases the options to disseminate information. CSEA called on Nigeria and other African countries to focus more on digital strategies for tobacco control, noting that well-targeted short videos and documentaries would effectively reach a large youth population.

Dr. Onyekwena responded to a question by Seve Adjovi; one of the participants on the use of schools and colleges to communicate the adverse effects of tobacco. He stated that the tobacco industry targets young people early enough to initiate tobacco smoking and, therefore, it is good that tobacco control measures should also target schools and colleges. Applying digital technology is an effective way of preventing the initiation of smoking.

Dr. Kadzamira responding to the same question stated that it is crucial to teach children early about the effects of smoking using schools, sports, and different kinds of activities. This is to ensure children are not influenced to emulate smokers and have a chance to make their own choices.

Dr. Chigumira responded to a comment on the need to organize agriculture, observing that if tobacco farmers get other viable crop options that are equally as good, if not better, in terms of remuneration, this will enable farmers to move to those other crops. He proposed that the structure of tobacco; in terms of research and development and marketing options should be replicated for other crops. This will ensure a transition from tobacco growing to other viable crops, and the resistance of tobacco control measures from a livelihood point of view will be unlikely. This will be facilitated by knowledge, capacity building, extension services, and general support. He agrees with the organizing of the agriculture sector and the optimization of the crop options available.

The moderator thanked the speakers for sharing the perspectives from the three countries while noting that the research is ongoing and there is research from eight other countries incoming for better understanding.

## 5.5. Role of Think Tanks in Fostering Digital Transformation in Africa and Enhancing their Sustainability

Think tanks, given their mandate and roles, could make a significant contribution in providing solutions to some of the issues identified and to support the implementation of Africa's digital transformation agenda. Specific issues to be addressed under this subtheme include:

- (a) What has been the experience of think tanks in informing public debate on digital transformation through knowledge production, sharing and advocacy as well as capacity building, with reference to communication and dissemination as well as utilization of knowledge being generated by the targeted beneficiaries or consumers of knowledge?
- (b) What are the key lessons that can be derived from countries beyond Africa that can be adapted to the African context, to improve uptake and utilization of research output in digital transformation?
- (c) What roles can think tanks play in supporting key stakeholders (government, private sector, SMEs, and CSO) in using digital solutions for the socio-economic transformation of African countries?
- (d) How can think tanks be better supported to play their roles in Africa's digital transformation agenda?

To guide the discussions, the moderator, **Mr. Desmond Mushi**; Economic and Public Policy Expert, Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF), Tanzania introduced the panel and reiterated the specific issues to be addressed.

**Dr. Rose Ngugi**; Executive Director, KIPPRA, Kenya commenced on an appreciative note to ACBF for the invitation and opportunity to be part of the Summit. She gave a brief overview of the mandate of the Kenya Institute for Public policy and research analysis (KIPPRA) and what it has done over time. KIPPRA is a government-owned think tank institution established to provide advice and evidence to support policy formulation in Kenya. Several instances of the pursuit and fulfilment of this mandate were recalled. In particular, and very instructive for the focus of the session was the disclosure that KIPPRA has come up with various projects in collaboration with other institutions to understand the occurrence of digital transformation better. Studies on *FINTECH* (computer programs and other technology used to understand or enable banking and financial services), and Smart Cities (in the context of urbanization and digital learning), setting up a Committee to push the agenda on Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) and serve as a platform for exchange of views among stakeholders, and participation in several policy debates/initiatives on digitalization and digital technology were highlighted.

Specifically, on what think tanks can do in fostering digital transformation in Africa and enhancing their sustainability, Dr. Ngugi expressed the opinion that think tanks need to invest in the right tools for virtual meetings, teleconferencing, and e-technology generally. In addition, think tanks must adapt themselves in terms of how data is collected as it has become obvious that data can be



collected by virtual means and through digital platforms. Think tanks are also enjoined to increase their visibility by taking advantage of digital devices and technology to disseminate and promote their research activities and findings. Finally, think tanks should ensure that disabled persons in society are integrated through digital means and platforms.

**Mr Enrique Mendizabal;** Director, On Think Tanks hinged his contributions on reflections from his work in institutions around the world, and the lessons learnt. He particularly noted the engagements with the issue of digital transformation; primarily in communication, doing research in different ways, and focusing on digital transformation as a subject of research. He observed that increasingly, think tanks are beginning to reach out to many more stakeholders than before. A demonstration of this was the Chatham House study on how countries are doing at the instance of COVID-19 pandemic and the impact. He also noted that think tanks are increasingly working with organizations that they are comfortable with. However, he indicated the need for local think tanks to reach out more to their counterparts in other climes.

On how think tanks in Africa can be better supported, Mr. Mendizabal called on international research funders to make a shift of focus from research institutions in the Western world but to other regions of the world. And funding support should not just be to projects but also capacity building and development while paying special attention to the next generation of think tanks and not only the top-level executive think tanks.

**Professor Jean-Christophe Boungou Bazika;** Executive Director, CERAPE, Congo thanked ACBF for the participation in the Summit and made brief introductory remarks about his organization – i.e., Center for Research on Economic Analyses and Policies (CERAPE). He then specifically indicated the strategy of CERAPE towards developing the digital economy in Congo in terms of knowledge sharing through digital tools, what government can do to facilitate better participation of the citizens in the digital economy and how to strengthen think tanks. CERAPE recognizes the importance of the digital economy and has been conducting research/studies on digitalization and producing newsletters to disseminate findings/information in virtual form.

CERAPE studies are also focused on contributing towards the requisite training on digitalization and digital technology, against the backdrop of the fact that digital tools and technology are still inadequate in Congo. Many citizens do not have digital tools such as computers, internet connectivity, etc. He noted that think tanks need to do a lot considering the daunting situations facing the government, businesses, and civil society organizations in terms of usage of digital technologies; and entrepreneurs generally in Africa with knowledge and skills to embrace digital technologies. However, he noted that the think tanks need to be supported with ICT equipment, and capacity building especially for young think tanks in digital skills acquisition.

**Dr. Paul Kariuki;** Executive Director, Democracy Development Program, South Africa, noted in his presentation that Africa is a continent of opportunities –political and socio-economic –that can make the most of the digital transformation and that virtually all sectors can be transformed digitally. Thus, digital transformation is a critical driving force for innovative, inclusive, and sustainable growth. Indeed, innovations and digitalization are powerful instruments for stimulating job creation

and contributing towards poverty alleviation, reducing inequality, facilitating trade, breaking the digital divide, and contributing to the achievement of Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Given the current pace of adoption of technology across the continent, Africa is ready to leapfrog and take advantage of the opportunities that digital transformation is presenting towards socio-economic development. Recognizing these opportunities and immense potential to enhance their economies, leaders of most countries in Africa are prioritizing digital transformation by allocating resources and developing relevant policy frameworks to support digitalization. He also noted instructively that Africa has substantial potential in some significant dimensions. These include the fact that Africa possesses 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land, 23% of Africa's land area is forest, has 75% of global platinum deposits, 50% of diamonds and precious stones, 50% of chromium, 20% of gold and uranium deposits, and Africa's population under 18 years will be one billion by 2050. However, Africa faces the socio-economic structural challenge of transiting the agricultural age to the industrial age and the information age.

The overview of digital transformation in Africa was highlighted in terms of the imperatives of digital transformation and building on existing socio-economic development initiatives and frameworks to align with the priorities of the African Union (AU). The primary objectives of digital transformation on the continent as identified are to create an integrated and inclusive digital society geared towards the improvement of the quality of life of Africans, strengthen the existing economic sectors, promote economic diversification and development, ensure the continent becomes a producer and not a consumer of goods and services in the global economy and break the digital divide.

Digital transformation is primarily supported by internet penetration; however, internet penetration is lowest in Africa at 43% compared to the rest of the world averaging about 69%. The experience of think tanks in knowledge production in the COVID-19 era indicated that adapting to changing operational contexts during COVID-19 and thereafter is a must.

Key lessons learnt from outside of Africa that can be adapted to our continental context include embracing change, collaboration with like-minded organizations, sharing resources, establishing support systems, leveraging technology to the maximum, financial prudence, partnerships for long term sustainability, and flexibility to adapt to changing operational context to remain relevant and effective.

Dr. Kariuki held strongly that think tanks have major roles to play in the digital transformation agenda in Africa. The role that think tanks can play in supporting key stakeholders in using digital solutions for socio-economic transformation was listed. These include spearheading the use of technology, utilization of technology to create solutions to societal challenges, supporting the development of ICT skills in a non-discriminative manner across society, sustain the ongoing use of evidence-based information to inform and support decision making and policy-making processes, and continuous engagement with think tanks' clientele.

To assist the think tanks in the discharge of the foregoing responsibilities, the necessity to support think tanks in several ways was emphasized. Some of the ways Dr. Kariuki pointed to include strengthening policy-making processes to support the use of ICTs, mobilizing resources – local philanthropy and external funding, collaborating with other think tanks in Africa and abroad coun-

tries by forming resourceful partnerships, repurposing spending – directing resources to relevant aspects of the operations, investing in human resource development of think tanks – scholarships and peer-exchange opportunities, etc. – and investing in young people as a key population for driving digital transformation in Africa.

The numerous opportunities and possibilities for think tanks in the post-COVID-19 era were then identified. These are to strengthen the generation and use of data as evidence, leverage the use of digital technologies for collection and processing of data, and partner with government in the complimentary role – providing evidence-based information as well as assisting in policy formulation and implementation. They also include mobilizing resources – local philanthropy and external funding – investing in skills acquisition for digital entrepreneurs in Africa, collaborating with other think tanks by forming resourceful partnerships, and enlisting private sector support – funding for investment in skills development, co-learning opportunities and prudent use of financial and human resources.

In concluding the presentation, several instructive and action inspiring statements were made. Noteworthy is that ‘Africa is in a race against time –there is a sense of urgency to hasten our digital transformation agenda to be at par with the rest of the world’.

**Mr. Boubacar Macalou;** Expert in Capacity Development, Mali, began his presentation by appreciating the ACBF for the opportunity to participate in the Summit. He noted that his presentation will be on sharing his experiences and knowledge from Mali and across the globe. Experience from Mali showed that the establishment of a data bank reduced the difficulty of a data base for policy-making and indicated the need for capacity building of all stakeholders in utilizing the information contained in the data bank optimally. He also underscored the need to complement the establishment of the data bank with appropriate technological support, processes, and organizational changes to make the digital transformation agenda realizable and sustainable.

**Ms. Juliet Himuan;** Director, Google West Africa who presented the keynote speech at the session, underscored the important role of digital transformation to economic growth and development and how it has become increasingly so. She, therefore, harped on the need to combat the several challenges of Africa and strengthened the coordination framework of policy formulation and implementation. The role of the governments across African countries in fostering partnership with the private sector was listed to include promoting innovation, ensuring low-cost internet access and connectivity, supporting the think tanks to offer quality advice. She believes that think tanks have a lot to offer concerning digital transformation. She particularly noted that the perception about Africa has changed from low to high due to the role of think tanks. Some of the challenges faced by think tanks in Africa were listed. These include over-reliance on external funding, limited independence, and autonomy (especially in terms of the space and freedom to declare the outcomes of their research outputs without influence and/or suppression), internal low perception about the role of specific think tank institutions; the low quality of work and capacity issues of think tanks and institutions even though some think tanks and institutions are doing good quality research. However, she noted that a good number of think tanks and institutions falls short of the expected standards and therefore exert little or no impact on policy makers and the public.

Furthermore, she feels a number of think tank institutions are struggling for recognition and the position to wield the right type of impact and influence on policymakers. Hence, the limited ability to forge any meaningful and lasting partnership with relevant stakeholders.

In her concluding statement, she enjoined think tanks and their institutions to strengthen their strategic partnership for improved funding, to be more data and fact-driven, deliver bold and consistent policy prescriptions, and develop capacity-building logistics to ensure that a critical mass of think tanks with requisite skills are always available.

## **5.6. 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 source and communicate good-quality and accessible information on digital transformation. Such undertaking requires building relationships with partners who hold this information and knowledge, have the technical expertise, or mobilize necessary financial resources to support the digital transformation. Therefore, the following issues were examined under this sub-theme:

- (a) What coordination mechanisms are required to support Africa's digital transformation?
- (b) What kind of partnerships can be harnessed from the Summit to support the development of a comprehensive capacity development program for digital transformation, and what role can each stakeholder/partner play in the process?
- (c) What immediate actions should be taken by each stakeholder group in supporting the implementation of Africa's digitalization agenda?

**Dr. Christiane Abu Lehaf**; Senior Manager, International Cooperation, Afreximbank moderated the session. She commenced on a note of appreciation for being allowed to be part of the Summit, and particularly to moderate the session. She did a quick recap of the focus and questions for discussions.

**Mr. Adeyinka Adeyemi**; Senior Adviser, African Trade Policy Centre, ECA began his presentations with a call on the need to clarify the nomenclature of "transformation" and be humble with approaching it. He drew attention and requested for remembrance of how long we have been pursuing the "economic transformation" of Africa. He suggested four imperatives to promote digitization; (i) a push for completion of the negotiations on e-commerce (ii) forging broad partnerships to improve broadband penetration in Africa (iii) deploying digitalization to improve trade, peace, security, and development, and (iv) be prepared for the unintended consequences of rapid digital transformation. The partnerships should be broad and include innovators, users, and victims of digitalization: women's groups (especially in informal trans-border trade), youth groups, Governments, Businesses, Tech companies, young innovators, and tech enthusiasts.

For effective coordination, he advised ACBF to set up a representative panel to work, within 1-3 months; ensuring not to duplicate existing mechanisms and developing synergies and complementarities where practical.

**Mr. Chang Hao;** Deputy Director-General, ICC-NDRC, China thanked the ACBF for the invitation extended to him and his organization to be part of the Summit. He then enumerated the several ways that China government and particularly his institution can help Africa with its digital transformation agenda. He expressed the readiness of China to share her experiences with Africa as well in a China-Africa economic forum as well as the willingness of the ICC-NDRC to organize and engage in round table meetings with entrepreneurs was announced.

**Mr. Sameh Hussein;** Reverse Linkage Section, Islamic Development Bank's presentation was organized around bilateral partnership in digital transformation, multilateral coordination, and role of think tanks.

Bilateral partnership in digital transformation is considered cost-effective on three grounds. The first is its *low-cost compared to other sectors*. He said that transferring a developmental solution - that is based on ICT from one African country to another requires minimal investment in fixed assets, but in other sectors such as agriculture, water resource management, energy, equipment, and civil works are needed. The second is the *high impact to every person*; even people with special needs are potential users of an IT system, and this is different from other sectors where the expertise acquired from another country is beneficial to certain sector specialists. The third is that it is a *win-win situation*. Through the partnership, one country gets a proven IT system for addressing a developmental challenge. The other country deploys that system in a new business environment to become more robust.

Mr. Hussein identified the private and public sectors as those that should build partnerships. The private sector which he considered growing is to form partnerships in terms of joint projects, mergers, and acquisition, technology licensing, while the public sector focuses on strategic alliance towards addressing common social problems. The areas of partnerships between the private sector and the public sector include e-content, IT systems, and connectivity to seize the opportunities that digital technology offers and effectively tackle the associated challenges to promote ICT for inclusive development and national competitiveness. In more specific terms, the partnership should cover using ICT as a channel for sharing expertise, collaboration in developing ICT systems and collaboration for developing human capacity.

The multilateral coordination mechanisms that could be considered include (a) establishing regional funding facilities in the mold of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF, 2014-2020), Connecting Europe Facility (CEF, 2021-2027), Digital Europe Program (DEP, 2021-2027), and Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF, 2021-2026); (b) facilitating the reusability and interoperability of IT systems across countries, and (c) commitment to exchange certain electronic information.

To nurture these partnerships and coordination mechanisms to support digital transformation, Mr. Hussein recommends that Africa's think tanks do the following: (i) identifying and sharing practical examples of partnerships for realizing digital transformation, especially in health, financial inclusion and education, (ii) facilitating the establishment of multi-country coordination mechanism while benefiting from the experience of the European Union, and (iii) undertaking technology foresight exercise to advise on the technologies to focus on, in terms of deployment and research.

**Dr. Arthur Minsat;** Head of Unit for Africa and the Middle East and Senior Economist, OECD Development Centre spoke on the main blocks of digital transformation, which are often classified into broad categories, namely technology platforms and organizational capabilities. The technology platforms include operational backbone, digital platform, and external developer platform. The organizational capabilities are shared customer insights and an accountability framework. He, therefore, called for partnerships between governments and private sectors within countries, governments across Africa and Africa and the rest of the world. The crux of the partnerships according to him should focus on investments in critical infrastructure, science, technology, and innovation to facilitate the participation of the majority of the populace across locations and strata to have access to the required devices, platforms, and technology; and capacity building towards closing the observed wide divide in digital knowledge and usage.

Some insightful experiences on how Europe approached and advanced its digital transformation as well as how Europe could be of assistance to Africa was provided. To conclude, he expressed the readiness and willingness of the OECD to assist Africa in her pursuit of digital transformation in all ways possible.

**Ms Anne Rita Ssemboga;** Programme Officer, ITU Regional Office for Africa expressed appreciation to the ACBF for organizing the Summit and the invitation extended to her to make a presentation. She first examined how the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessitated digital transformation agenda as an opportunity for building back better to leapfrog.

According to her, COVID-19 increased the use of digital devices, platforms, and technologies in Uganda. She, therefore, called for public investment in infrastructure to strengthen digital transformation not just as a means of collecting tax/revenue but to identify the building blocks required for the digital transformation to occur (in terms of a defined policy, finance and partnerships, coordination across all levels/stakeholders and strengthen capacity as a cross-cutting issue). The need to identify who should be in the lead position and what strategy to adopt was also emphasized.

She advocated for a coordinated focus and approach by all stakeholders for the digital transformation by engaging in the proper mapping of what is been done across levels for proper information sharing. Detailed discussions of what her organization is doing to foster a coordinated national and continental framework towards digital transformation were highlighted.

**Dr. Tshelayi Kabata;** Technical Advisor to the Director-General, BADEA commenced his presentation by emphasizing that COVID-19 taught us all a very bold lesson on the effect of digital transformation; therefore, the imperatives and importance of digital transformation cannot be overlooked again. He thereafter provided perspectives on the mandate of BADEA as a financial institution and how it has been contributing to the digital transformation agenda. Particular mention was made of the collaboration on the Smart Africa project; an initiative that is being led by the African Union to support rural platforms and capacity building. He expressed a strong opinion on what the key priorities in the drive towards digital transformation should be. The first is infrastructure provision, especially given the limited access to the internet in Africa. The second is on the noticeable digital divide and digital gender bias. The third is cooperation among financial institutions and lastly innovative financial solutions to fund ICT infrastructure projects.

## 5.7. The Young Think Tankers Session

This interactive session was led by young think tankers across Africa, to share ideas and discuss proposals on how present actions, such as exploring new working models, attracting, and developing new skills and competencies, and positioning the organizations to engage with new stakeholders and audiences, can equip us to respond better to future challenges. The session explored the key policy issues that think tanks of the future will have to engage with concerning digital transformation and feature innovative ideas from participants on how to strengthen the position of think tanks both within the region, the Global South, and in larger global debates.

The session was moderated by **Mrs. Andrea Baertl**; Coordinator, On Think Tanks and co-organized by OTT and Southern Voice. The moderator introduced the aim of the session which is for young think-tankers to share their thoughts on the future of think tanks. She indicated that the speakers would share insights on what think tanks will look like in the future and how think tanks can prepare for the impending changes.

The session was particularly interested in the voice of the young think tankers because they will be the ones working on these issues in the future and they should help in shaping the discussion which explore if there is a need for different working models. What are the new skills should think tankers should be focusing on? What are the competencies that they should be focusing on, share their ideas on how organizations should position themselves to engage with different stakeholders, and what key policy issues that think tanks of the future will have to engage with concerning digital transformation?

**Mr. Regean Mugume**; Research Analyst, EPRC-Uganda, in his intervention highlighted the key issues that policy think tanks should be tackling in the future with a focus on the economic perspective. These include population; how to harness the demographic dividend given that Africa will be experiencing rapid population growth, migration, and urbanization, and how we can better serve the population. Human capital development, education, health, and service delivery will also be prominent.

**Mr. Bakang Ntshingane**; Programme Officer, Southern Voice, highlighted discussions at the last southern voice conference on population and its implication on developing countries in Africa and Asia and how governments in these countries can harness the demographic dividend, migration, and the aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Ms. Jackline Kagume**; Programme Officer, IEA Kenya, opined that think tanks need to see the possibility of dealing with abstract policy challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that they would always be able to pre-empt challenges and foresee or craft solutions that can respond to abstract challenges. She was also of the view that think tanks will focus more on issues such as environmental justice and social justice.

The audience responded to what think tanks should focus on, some aligning with the panelists. They mentioned diverse issues such as climate change, reforming education, engagement of the youths, proliferation of affordable computers, access skills, and use of digital platforms for women in business among others.

The moderator asked how think tanks should prepare for the unexpected in light of the COVID -19 pandemic. Ms. Jackline responded to the question, stating that the first step is harnessing the various digital resources available to think tanks to implement their work. The ability to realize what resources are available and then use those resources to advance the mandate of the think tank. For instance, part of the core mandate is research and policy engagement; so basically, using the digital tools to expand the scope in terms of engagement and reaching policymakers considering that physical movements were restrained but using the resources to ensure they can get to a large audience. Moreover, think tanks should explore the best way to deal and be in multi-disciplinary teams. COVID-19 has shown that just focusing on one expertise within an institution may not yield or lead us to gain the most inclusive solutions.

Mr. Reagan stated that think tanks need to forge more partnerships not just with the few stakeholders but also look out in the public and private spaces. These partnerships with the private sector will ensure access to more data, resources, and sustainability.

In light of the pandemic, think tanks should develop new ways to work and develop partnerships together for the usage of resources. These resources are not limited to funds; but include data to perform timely research that will inform policy. In addition, think tanks need to utilize virtual public dialogues to provide solutions to the public.

Mr. Bakang agreeing with the two co-panelists, reflected on insights from his work with Southern voice that has allowed him to see how many think tanks adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic. The main point is that think tanks must continuously adapt or become irrelevant.

Mrs Gabrielle Alves, a researcher, contributed to the conversation in light of her experience in Brazil. She maintained that digital exclusion is present in the lives of about 46 million and suggested that think tanks should ensure that they do not replicate the physical exclusion in the digital world.

The moderator questioned all the panelists and participants on what think tanks will look like in the future. The participants indicated that they expect think tanks to be futuristic, robust, and proactive to current issues, digitized and multidimensional.

Mr. Reagan emphasized that think tanks will be multi-disciplinary to remain relevant and to address issues that affect the world instead of sacrificing depth for breadth.

Also, in terms of recruitment, think tanks will employ people with diverse skills. Traditionally, we have had think tanks recruiting many academic people as researchers. In the future, he predicts that think tanks will recruit many professionals from diverse fields especially communication professionals, people who are good in digital, social media communications such as Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook.



Think tanks will also have more strategic partnerships with not only the government but also the private sector, and civil society organizations to extend their reach to ensure that they are making an impact.

In terms of research, the way think tanks conduct research will change to reflect the demand for evidence-based policy, and research. Think tanks will conduct real-time research leveraging big analytics, machine learning, and the internet of things (IoT). They will become more dynamic in their way of doing things so that they can respond to the public and the government in real-time.

Mr. Bakang spoke in the context of African think tanks navigating tough terrains; struggling with capacity, struggling with funding, and struggling with independence to set their agenda and to do the work they want to do. He observed that many think tanks in Africa are funded through the government and still have co-dependent relationships with their government. This makes it difficult for them to assert their independence and set their research agenda in communities that they work in.

In the future, African think tanks will be independent, and not just in the formal sense but in the procedural sense as well. The government will have a role to play in think tanks but will not be as influential as it is now. He sees think tanks having a very independent relationship with the government and will have a reciprocal relationship and as equal.

Think tanks of the future will be a direct reflection of the social, political and economic landscape of the world and the continent, and from a leadership perspective, think tanks will have good leaders with transformative ideas and strategies to take them forward with clear, transparent succession plans to empower more young people to play active roles.

He sees think tanks to have a more powerful role to play and impact the communities that they operate in and have direct links to continental and regional inter-governmental bodies such as SADC, African Union, and ECOWAS.

Finally, think tanks will play an activist role to offset the many years of post-colonial economic and social impact and bridge the gap between policy and evidence and also speak to transformational policies that can help countries to overcome the impact of corruption in society.

Ms. Jacklin believes that with the rise of digital transformation, think tanks will have more inclusive teams across different geographical locations. Also, think tanks will invest a lot in technology; digital skills for their personnel as many think tanks will be using the digital space most to advance their various objectives.

The moderator observed that working with different teams across the world affects diversity and inclusion. More equal opportunity for females and more diverse groups will be reflected in think tanks. She posits that think tank of the future should reflect the diversity of the world.

Mr. Reagan believes that many think tanks are in the process of preparing for the future- building back better. Secondly, from a gender perspective, the role of women has to be prominent; women are still underrepresented in most think tanks. For think tanks to make an impact and foster inclusive and sustainable development, women need to be represented equitably.

Ms. Jackline suggests that there should be an incentive for think tanks to hire people in the under-represented groups such as women, and disabled.

On how think tanks should prepare for the future, Mr. Bakang suggests that think tanks should mainstream young people, into different aspects such as research, grant making and communication. Inclusion of the youths should be deliberate, not an afterthought. He observed that technology has been a game-changer for many researchers from the global South as they now have access to international conferences that they previously could not participate in due to difficulty in getting visas, costs of travel, accommodation, and other requirements. Technology should be at the forefront of everything think tanks do including governance and research.

Think tanks should build internal capacity; train their teams to produce high-quality research outputs, capacity to communicate those outputs in an accessible and engaging manner. The Moderator wrapped up the session by emphasizing the positive impact of tech on think tanks.

## 6. CLOSING SESSION

**The 8<sup>th</sup> Africa Think Tank Summit** on digital transformation has given a platform to assess needs, smooth out the roadblocks, and clear the path to build Africa better post-COVID-19. ACBF provided the opportunity to discuss relevant and crucial themes to digital transformation.

The key concepts and the prevailing situation were better understood and dug deeper into initiatives to foster the digital transformation identifying the policies and critical skills needed in the first three sessions of day one.

**Mrs. Grace Kamilla-Kanjo**, Director Finances, and Administrative Department, ACBF, read the communique containing key messages from the 2-day of the 2021 Africa Think Tank Summit.

The representatives of African think tanks, delegates, and participants expressed gratitude to the ACBF and partners for convening the 8th African think tank summit.

They affirm that digital transformation remains essential for attaining the objectives set for AU's agenda 2063 and the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Experiences and studies show that digital transformation helps to save the direction, provide goods and services more efficiently, achieve better results in all countries and regions. Find functional and innovative solutions to economic and implementation challenges faced by African nations.

African think tanks confirm their readiness to contribute to the African Union. They called on the African Union Commission to utilize the services and expertise of African think tanks to provide technical support to help identify African countries where support is most needed and where additional actions may be required.

They highlighted that the lack of reliable data in Africa for evidence-based planning and policy formulation to support the digital transformation in the continent and compromises the design of the right policies and implementation. They called upon African countries to design the right and evidence-based policies for digital transformation.

Think tanks can and should play critical roles and contribute to the design, implementation and monitoring, and evaluation of digital transformation policies, strategies, and plans at local, national, regional, and continental levels. They urged African countries and institutions to utilize intellectual resources and call on African think tanks to intensify their research and policy advice, capacity building, advocacy, technical support to fast-track Africa's digital transformation.

On partnerships, the consensus was that the ACBF should partner with supporters of the 8th Africa think tank summit, and African think tanks to develop a Program on digital capacity building for Africa to fast-track digital transformation in the continent.

There was a spotlight on the sustainability issues faced by African think tanks as exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. They stressed the need for the African Development Bank, African Union, and other supporters of think tanks to work with ACBF to mobilize adequate resources exclusively dedicated to African think tanks.

In conclusion, they resolved to support ACBF to continue providing leadership in coordinating the efforts of the think tanks to work together in tackling Africa's development challenges and expressed commitment to reconvene in 2022 to take stock of progress in implementing the decisions from the summit.

**Dr. Ibrahim Assane Mayaki**; CEO, AUDA-NEPAD was represented by **Mr. Martin Bwalya**; the Director of Knowledge Management and Programs Evaluation of AUDA-NEPAD who provided some reflections on the Summit as an important aspect of the continent's development agenda. He congratulated ACBF for a successful 8th Africa Think Tank Summit and indicated that the fundamentals on digital transformation does lay the foundation for Africa's prosperity through both enormous and rapid transformative actions to support the Continent's digital economy. Speaking further, he indicated that the relevance of 2021 Africa Think Tank Summit theme had set the platform to rally top-class science and knowledge in support of informed policy and investment choices to harness digital based innovations in national and regional initiatives to respond to the challenges created or accentuated by the COVID-19 in building back better.

He enunciated that the characteristic of prosperity must encapsulate what he dubbed the four P's:

(1) Policies - creating policy scenario labs to model our digital economies to support policies and plans that will provide resilience and flexibility for the broader African countries, its economies, and its people

(2) People - the need for content developers and education levels to be dramatically increased through addressing the fourth industrial revolution, artificial intelligence and the opportunity of new and specialized skills set, to map a path for digital infrastructure and digital content.

(3) Processes - understanding what knowledge capital is required to witness the impact of the digital economy which does not only create jobs, but specialized jobs directed to our young talent who are ready for this rapid shift.

(4) Potential- the potential of digitalization providing growth to our economies by lifting country's productivity and manufacturing specially to grow new industries and support its long-term future plans towards wealth prosperity of its citizens.

In conclusion, he dwelt on the tremendous potential of Partnerships which must support Africa to move forward the digital transformation, especially working together with key institutions for pooling of resources on the implementation of this Summit's recommendations.

**Professor Emmanuel Nnadozie**, Executive Secretary, ACBF in his closing remarks recognized the African Union Commission, AUDA- NEPAD, the African Development Bank as well as the United Nations Office of the Special Advisors in Africa, and the other distinguished representatives of organizing partners in making the Summit a success.

He expressed great satisfaction on the success of two incredible days of intense engagement, enlightenment and motivational presentations in the 8th Africa think tank Summit while emphasizing that the main object was to explore policy and implementation modalities that are essential to digitization to build African economies back better during the period of COVID-19 as well as the post-COVID-19.

He underlined that the Summit successfully achieved its objectives as evidenced by the high-level engagement, quality interactions, together with the brilliant policy actions that have come out of the esteemed gathering. He acknowledged the opportunity to hear from the young think-tankers and learn about the future.

Professor Nnadozie commended everyone for recognizing capacity building as a catalyst through which digital transformation can be propelled and the need to design a comprehensive capacity development program that can address the capacity gaps in the different facets of our economy. He assured that ACBF with the support of its partners would ensure action is taken.

He noted that policy is one major issue that emerged from the Summit. Two things were underlined; the first is getting the policy right. The second is implementing the policies. Implementation is the gap that Africa faces; this hurts development and prevents African countries from moving from fantastic strategies to visible desirable development outcomes.

He emphasized that policy implementation requires capacity more than anything else as one can have financial means without competence. He announced that ACBF would continue to play three crucial roles in this regard.

The first is to help develop a credible digital capacity development program for Africa. He mentioned that ACBF is currently doing this with some partners and welcomed others to join. This capacity development program will aid the digital transformation strategy for Africa. Second, ACBF will continue and intensify work coordinating the African think tanks through the Africa think tank network. ACBF will ensure that the coordination is deepened and expanded to bring in more think tanks and make it more effective in its operations. He mentioned that ACBF has created and supported over 50 think tanks in Africa and welcomed any support to assist in building the network.

Professor Nnadozie reiterated what he said at the opening of the summit; that the ACBF has many distinguished partners well-endowed with billions of dollars in resources who are yet to agree to collaborate with ACBF to strengthen African think tanks, and ensure that they have predictable, adequate, and sustainable financing to make them more relevant, effective, and sustainable. He called upon all to join ACBF to address this critical issue of financial sustainability of African think tanks so that they can effectively play their role.

Thirdly, ACBF will help in mapping and landscaping what is happening on the ground at various levels. It will work with the think tanks to know who is doing what, where, and how as a first step towards better coordination mechanisms in line with the call by many participants for ACBF can assist in the mapping exercise.

In closing, Professor Nnadozie acknowledged the valuable partnership of ACBF with the African Union Commission and AUDA-NEPAD and called for the establishment and operationalization of an effective mechanism for the implementation of the digital transformation strategy for Africa. He emphasized that now is the time to implement the strategy, and systematically monitor its implementation as ACBF has done for Agenda 2063 and some other continental initiatives. He highlighted that the strategy is a shared strategy; ACBF contributed its design, and it will pursue its implementation.

The moderator of the Summit, Mrs. Druscilla Mokosso Joki stated that the 2021 8th African Think Tank Summit has led the stage on opportunities for building back Africa better. She expressed gratitude to ACBF for its phenomenal work.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Africa's digital transformation is underway, and it is creating opportunities for transformational change(s) across all economic sectors. While Africa is still behind the rest of the world in terms of internet penetration, the gap is quickly closing. Since the early 2000s, the population of internet users in Africa has grown tenfold, as compared to a threefold increase in the rest of the world, according to the International Monetary Fund. From financial services to power and agriculture, digital technology is being leveraged to deliver greater access and usher in the "future of everything" on the continent.

The COVID-19 has underscored the role that digitization can play to increase the resilience of our countries when facing systemic crises. The disruptions to overall economic activities by the pandemic have demonstrated beyond doubt that digitalization has become more critical for Africa, in particular, than before.

Despite the recognition of digitalization as the catalyst for Africa's transformation, the continent still lags compared to other regions in the pace at which digital technologies are being adopted. The slow pace points to the fact that capacity in its various forms is hobbling digital transformation in Africa.

The 2021 Think Tank Summit was thus an opportunity to dissect the various issues affecting digital transformation in Africa and how to accelerate the pace of its adoption.

There was general applause and commendation for ACBF for the choice of Digital Transformation as this year's theme. In going forward, the Summit noted that accelerating digital transformation in Africa would involve actions on several fronts. The Summit reaffirmed 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. Governments across the continent should strive to be an enabler of technology by crafting policies to support innovation. ACBF in partnership with supporters of this Summit and African think tanks are called 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.

However, cognizance was taken of the profound concern that African think tanks are facing sustainability issues exacerbated by COVID-19. Emphasis was, therefore, placed on 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. It was considered imperative 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 Africa Think Tank Network and the Africa Think Tank Summits are sustained. The Summit resolved to support ACBF to continue providing leadership in coordinating efforts towards staying engaged and working together to efficiently contribute to tackling Africa's development challenges, and that when the Summit reconvene in 2022, it would take stock of progress in implementing the decisions reached in this year (2021) Summit.



## Annex 1. Agenda of the 2021 Africa Think Tank Summit

**Thursday 9 December 2021 – DAY 1 [11:00 – 16:00 Harare time; GMT +2]****Hosts**

**Mrs. Druscilla Mokosso Joki;** Editorialist & Journalist, CRTV  
**Mr. Vincent de Paul Atangana;** Grand Reporter, CRTV

**11:00 to 11:30 (GMT+2) – Opening Session (30 mins)**

- Dr. Yeo Dossina; Acting Director for Economic Development, Regional Integration and Trade, African Union Commission
- Prof. Kevin Chika Urama; Acting Chief Economist and Vice President for the Economic Governance and Knowledge Management Complex, Senior Director, African Development Institute, AfDB
- Her Excellency Ms. Cristina Duarte; UN Under-Secretary-General & Special Adviser on Africa, Office of Special Adviser on Africa, United Nations
- Prof. Emmanuel Nnadozie; Executive Secretary, ACBF

**11:30 to 12:00 (GMT+2) – Keynote Speech**

Ms. Souhila Amazouz; Project Manager for AU Policy and Regulation Initiative for Digital Africa (PRIDA) & Senior Policy Officer, Information Society Division, African Union Commission

**12:00 to 13:30 (GMT+2) – Session 1**

*Understanding digital transformation: state, implications, and potential for building back Africa better (60 mins)*

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has proven beyond doubt that digitalization has become most important now than any other time before to facilitate the transformation of the African economy. The following are among the key questions/issues that will be examined under this sub-theme. (a) What is the state of digital transformation in Africa? (b) What are the opportunities/potentialities for accelerating digitalization in Africa, in light of the effects of Covid-19 on the economy? (c) How has COVID-19 affected the implementation of Africa's Digital Transformation, including national strategies? (d) What are the efforts being made and the various initiatives in place to ensure the use of digital solutions to build back African economies?

**Moderator** (5 mins)

Prof. Emmanuel Nnadozie; Executive Secretary, ACBF

**Speakers** (8 mins per speaker)

- Dr. Anthony Coleman; Principal Research Economist & Senior Manager, Afreximbank
- Prof. Alban Ahoure; Director, CAPEC, Côte d'Ivoire
- Mr. Tunde Fafunwa; Advisor to the UNECA Digital Centre and Managing Partner, Kitskoo Inc
- Mr. Ibukun Onitiju; Head of Digital, Nestlé Central & West Africa
- Ms. Camilla Rocca; Head of Research, Mo Ibrahim Foundation

**Interactions with participants** (45 mins)**13:30 to 13:40 (GMT+2) – Health break (10 mins)**



### 13:40 to 14:40 (GMT+2) – Session 2

Initiatives to foster digital transformation in Africa: sharing experiences at continental, regional and national levels (60 mins)

Most African countries have digitalization agenda and are implementing several interventions aimed at contributing to the digital transformation of the continent. While at the continental level, a comprehensive Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020-2030) has been introduced, countries are using digital technologies and innovation to transform their economies. Under this sub-theme, the following questions will be addressed to deepen understanding and share experiences. (a) How is the continental agenda being implemented at the regional and national levels? (b) What are the related interventions being carried out at the Regional Economic Communities level? (c) What are the countries' experiences in utilizing digital technologies for economic development? (d) What works and what needs to change in Africa's approach to digitalization? (e) What can we do differently to accelerate the implementation of digital transformation policies at the continental, regional, and national levels?

#### **Moderator** (5 mins)

Mr. Yarik Turianskyi; Deputy Programme Head, African Governance and Diplomacy, SAIIA, South Africa

#### **Proposed Speakers** (8 mins per speaker)

- Dr. Jonathan Pinifolo; Digital Financial Inclusion Manager; COMESA Business Council
- Mr. Karim El Aynaoui; Executive President, Policy Center for the New South, Morocco
- Mr. Taurai Chinyamakobvu; Partner and investor in Flocash Zimbabwe, Founder of Pazimba
- Dr. Issiaka Ballo; Assistant Professor of Linguistics, University of Letters, Bamako, Mali

#### **Interactions with participants** (23 mins)

### 14:40 to 15:40 (GMT+2) – Session 3

Identifying the right policies and building the capacities and critical skills needed for digital transformation in Africa (60 mins)

Despite the recognition of digitalization as the catalyst for Africa's transformation, the continent still lags behind compared to other regions in the pace at which digital technologies are being adopted. The slow pace points to the fact that capacity in its various forms is hobbling digital transformation in Africa. It is essential to unpack the nature and form of these capacity challenges to understand how key stakeholders in this sector relate to these key issues. To this end, the following are among the key questions that will be addressed under this sub-theme. (a) What are the capacity challenges faced by governments, the private sector (including SMEs), and CSOs in supporting digital transformation? (b) What challenges are these key sectors (government, private sector, and CSOs) facing in building capacities for digital transformation? (c) What are the options available to address these challenges? What is the appropriate policy-mix needed to foster capacity development for digital transformation? (d) What are the priority capacity needs of key stakeholders (government, private sector, and CSO), and how can these capacities be developed, retained and sustained for adaptive transformation?

#### **Moderator** (5 mins)

Dr. Thomas Munthali; Director General, National Planning Commission, Malawi

#### **Speakers** (8 mins per speaker)

- Mr. Tapiwa Ronald Cheuka; Trade Policy Officer, African Union Commission
- Dr. Charles Nyuykonge; Founder & Director, Peacebuilders Without Borders, South Africa
- Ms. Elisa Saint Martin; Policy Analyst, OECD Development Centre- Africa Unit, OECD
- Prof. Kgomotso H. Moahi, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic Services, Botswana Open University
- Mr. Bakary Kone; Head, Regional Office for West & Central Africa & Director, Resource Mobilization, Strategic Planning & Partnerships, ACBF

#### **Interactions with participants** (15 mins)

### END OF DAY 1 – WRAPUP

- Mrs. Druscilla Mokosso Joki; Editoralist & Journalist, CRTV
- Mr. Vincent de Paul Atangana; Grand Reporter, CRTV

## Friday 10 December 2021 – DAY 2 [11:00 – 16:00 Harare time; GMT +2]

### Hosts

**Mrs. Druscilla Mokosso Joki**; Senior Reporter, Department of News, CRTV

**Mr. Vincent de Paul Atangana**; Grand Reporter, CRTV

### **11:00 to 12:00 (GMT+2) – Session 4**

*Digital transformation and public health: recent research on tobacco control issues in Africa (60 mins)*

With COVID-19, it is evident that digital health interventions can help to alleviate issues of reach, and access across diverse populations to support tobacco control and improve public health. This notwithstanding, e-cigarettes and online surveys/adverts are a demonstration of the innovative use of digital solutions by the tobacco industry. Research on various issues related to tobacco control in Africa has been conducted by think tanks. What has been the main results and key recommendations of the studies conducted by think tanks on tobacco issues in Africa? What are the socio-economic impacts of disease burden due to smoking? What is the impact of tobacco control measures on livelihoods? What are the interventions undertaken by African countries to support tobacco control programs and what results/ outcomes are beginning to show?

#### **Moderator** (5 mins)

Dr. Barassou Diawara; Senior Knowledge Management Expert, ACBF

#### **Presenters** (10 mins per speaker)

- Dr. Mariam Kadzamura; Founder and Director, Youth Enterprise Services (YES), Malawi
- Dr. Gibson Chigumira; Executive Director, ZEPARU, Zimbabwe
- Dr. Chukwuka Onyekwena; Executive Director, CSEA, Nigeria

#### **Interactions with participants** (25 mins)

### **12:00 to 13:00 (GMT+2) – Session 5**

*Role of think tanks in fostering digital transformation in Africa and enhancing their sustainability (60 mins)*

Think tanks, given their mandate and roles, could make a significant contribution in providing solutions to some of the issues identified and to support the implementation of Africa's digital transformation agenda. Specific issues to be addressed under this subtheme include: (a) What has been the experience of think tanks in informing public debate on digital transformation through knowledge production, sharing and advocacy as well as capacity building, with reference to communication and dissemination as well as utilization of knowledge being generated by the targeted beneficiaries or consumers of knowledge? (b) What are the key lessons that can be derived from countries beyond Africa that can be adapted to the African context, to improve uptake and utilization of research output in digital transformation? (c) What roles can think tanks play in supporting key stakeholders (government, private sector, SMEs, and CSO) in using digital solutions for the socio-economic transformation of African countries? (d) How can think tanks be better supported to play their roles in Africa's digital transformation agenda?

#### **Moderator** (3 mins)

Mr. Desmond Mushi; Economic and Public Policy Expert, ESRF, Tanzania

**Keynote speech** – Ms. Juliet Ehimuan; Director, Google West Africa (12 mins)

#### **Proposed Speakers** (8 mins per speaker)

- Dr. Rose Ngugi; Executive Director, KIPPRA, Kenya
- Mr. Enrique Mendizabal; Director, On Think Tanks
- Prof. Jean-Christophe Bounou Bazika; Executive Director, CERAPE, Congo
- Dr. Paul Kariuki; Executive Director, Democracy Development Program, South Africa
- Mr. Boubacar Macalou; Program Coordinator, GRAD, Mali

#### **Interactions with participants** (13 mins)

**13:00 to 13:10 (GMT+2) – Health break (10 mins)**

**13:10 to 14:10 (GMT+2) – Session 6**

*Establishing partnerships and coordination mechanisms to support digital transformation in Africa (60 mins)*

The success of Africa in the digital era depends on how the key stakeholders and actors source and communicate good-quality and accessible information on digital transformation. Such undertaking requires building relationships with partners who hold this information and knowledge, have the technical expertise, or mobilize necessary financial resources to support the digital transformation. Therefore, the following issues will be examined under this sub-theme: (a) What coordination mechanisms are required to support Africa's digital transformation? (b) What kind of partnerships can be harnessed from the Summit to support the development of a comprehensive capacity development program for digital transformation, and what role can each stakeholder/partner play in the process? (c) What immediate actions should be taken by each stakeholder group in supporting implementation of Africa's digitalization agenda?

**Moderator** (7 mins)

Dr. Christiane Abou Lehaf; Senior Manager, International Cooperation, Afreximbank

**Proposed Speakers** (7 mins per speaker)

- Mr. Adeyinka Adeyemi; Senior Adviser, African Trade Policy Centre, ECA
- Mr. Chang Hao; Deputy Director-General, ICC-NDRC, China
- Mr. Sameh Hussein; Reverse Linkage Section, IsDB
- Dr. Arthur Minsat; Head of Unit for Africa and Middle East & Senior Economist, OECD Development Centre
- Ms. Anne Rita Ssemboga; Programme Officer, ITU Regional Office for Africa
- Dr. Tshepelayi Kabata; Technical Advisor to the Director General, BADEA

**Interactions with participants** (11 mins)

**14:10 to 15:10 (GMT+2) – Young thinktankers Session (60 mins)**

This interactive session is led by young thinktankers across Africa, to share ideas and discuss proposals on how present actions, such as exploring new working models, attracting, and developing new skills and competencies, and positioning the organizations to engage with new stakeholders and audiences, can equip us to respond better to future challenges. The session will explore the key policy issues that think tanks of the future will have to engage with in relation to digital transformation and feature innovative ideas from participants on how to strengthen the position of think tanks both within the region, the Global South and in larger global debates.

**Moderator:** Andrea Baertl; Coordinator, On Think Tanks

**Speakers:**

- Mr. Regean Mugume; Research analyst, EPRC-Uganda
- Mr. Bakang Ntshingane; Programme Officer, Southern Voice
- Ms. Jackline Kagume; Programme Officer, IEA Kenya

**The session is co-organised by OTT and Southern Voice.**

**15:10 to 15:30 (GMT+2) – Closing Session (20 mins)**

**Hosts:**

Mrs. Druscilla Mokosso Joki; Editorialist & Journalist, CRTV  
Mr. Vincent de Paul Atangana; Grand Reporter, CRTV

**Key messages (communiqué):**

- Mrs. Grace Kaimila-Kanjo; Director, Finances and Administration Department, ACBF

**Remarks**

- Dr. Ibrahim Assane Mayaki; CEO, AUDA-NEPAD

**Closing Remarks**

- Prof Emmanuel Nnadozie; Executive Secretary, ACBF

## Annex 2. List of participants

No.	Country	Surname	Name	Organization	Position
1	Algeria	Chafik	Kellala	Ambassade d'Algérie à Addis-Abeba	Conseiller des Affaires Etrangères
2	Belgium	Beg	Asad	European External Action Service	Senior Expert
3	Belgium	Francis	Gabriella	European Commission	Policy Officer
4	Belgium	Roijers	Rolinde	European External Action Service	Trainee
5	Belgium	Roijers	Rolinde	European External Action Service	Trainee
6	Benin	Adjovi	Servais	AfCoP	Président AG
7	Benin	MORIBA DJIBRIL	Aliou	Consultant	Consultant indépendant
8	Benin	Pedro	Ernest Comlan	CoP-BENIN/PASCiB	Trésorier Général
9	Benin	Atidegla	Aurélien	PASCiB / Dynamique OSCAF	Président
10	Benin	Boko	Sylvain	The African Capacity Building Foundation	Consultant
11	Benin	Aizonou	Bertin	MEF	DSPSSEL
12	Botswana	Moahi	Kgomotso	Botswana Open University	Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic Services
13	Botswana	Ntshingane	Bakang	Southern Voice	Programme Officer
14	Botswana	Paledi-Mokou	Pauline	The African Capacity Building Foundation	Member of the Executive Board
15	Brazil	Alves	Gabrielle	Plataforma CIPÓ	Junior Researcher
16	Burkina Faso	Kabre	Evence Eymard	AfcoP_burkina	Président
17	Burkina Faso	DABIRE	Nab Léonard	RAME	Directeur des Opérations
18	Burkina Faso	Napon	Alima Paule Ariane	Université Thomas Sankara	Enseignant chercheur
19	Burundi	Siniremera	Valérie	Indépendant	Expert/Facilitateur AfCoP
20	Burundi	Nsabimana	Salomon	CURDES Université du Burundi	Vice Doyen
21	Burundi	Gahungu	Dieudonne	Ecole doctorale / Université du Burundi	
22	Burundi	Mbonigaba	Cyprien	Future Thinking s.a	International Results Coach
23	Burundi	Ngendakumana	Deo	IDEC	Directeur
24	Cameroon	Barnabe	OKOUDA	CAMERCAP-PARC	Executive Director
25	Cameroon	MAHAMAT ALLAMINE	ABDOULLAH ALHADJI	CAMERCAP-PARC	Expert IFEJ
26	Cameroon	Atangana	Vincent de Paul	CRTV	Animatrice
27	Cameroon	Asanga	Fri	Denis and Lenora Foretia Foundation	Chief Executive Officer
28	Cameroon	Mokosso Joki	Druscilla	Crtv	Editorialist
29	China	Jiao	Xueli	ICC-NDRC	Engineer
30	China	Wang	Yingsi	International Cooperation Center, National Development and Reform Commission, PRC	Deputy Division Director
31	China	Chang	Hao	International Cooperation Center National Development and Reform Commission (ICC-NDRC)	Deputy Director
32	Comoros	Mondoha	Said	UCCIA	Advisor
33	Congo	Bazika	Jean-Christophe	CERAPE	Directeur Exécutif
34	Congo, Democratic Republic of the	Idumba	Victor	African Programme for th Economic and Social Development (PADES)	Executive Director
35	Cote d'Ivoire	Ogunleye	Eric	AfDB	Advisor to the Chief Economist/Vice President
36	Cote d'Ivoire	Ahoure	Alban Alphonse Emmanuel	Cellule d'Analyse de Politiques Economiques du CIRES (CAPEC)	Directeur
37	Cote d'Ivoire	Niamien	Kadjo	CoP Côte d'Ivoire	Président de la CoP Côte d'Ivoire
38	Cote d'Ivoire	Kouame	Nestor	IAPPSE	Expert en Planification et Suivi-Evaluation
39	Côte d'Ivoire	Traore	Idrissa	AfcoP	Responsable plateforme UEMOA
40	Côte d'Ivoire	ABBAS	Sanoussi	Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Protection Sociale	Directeur de l'Observatoire de l'Emploi et des Métiers
41	Djibouti	Abdoulkader	Mohamed	IED	Directeur
42	Ecuador	Ordonez	Andrea	Southern Voice	Director
43	Egypt	Abou Lehaf	Christiane	Afeximbank	Senior Manager, International Cooperation
44	Egypt	Yousry	Sandra	African Export Import Bank	Group Support - Research and International Cooperation
45	Egypt	Coleman	Anthony	The African Export-Import Bank	Principal Research Economist/Senior Manager
46	Eswatini	Dlamini	Thandeka	Business Eswatini	Senior Officer: Trade and Commerce

47	Eswatini	Sacolo	Thabo	Eswatini Economic Policy Analysis & Research Centre	Executive Director
48	Ethiopia	Nabatta	Habiba	Africa Capacity Building Foundation	Administrative Assistant - AUC liaison office
49	Ethiopia	Abdelsadick		African Union Commission	Legal officer
50	Ethiopia	Mbokazi	Sabelo	African Union Commission	Head: Labour, Employment & Migration
51	Ethiopia	Poukre-Kono	Fernand	Ambassade de la Republique Centrafricaine - Ethiopie	Ambassadeur
52	Ethiopia	Chicaia	Agostinho	African Union Commission	SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE COMMISSIONER
53	Ethiopia	Moach	Mesganu Arga	MOFA Ethiopia	Ambassador
54	Ethiopia	Uachisso	Cremilde	Mozambique Embassy	Third Secretary
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