



Continental
Summit
Rwanda 2026



APRM
African Peer Review
Mechanism

Governing the Digital Future: Scaling Critical Infrastructure for Inclusion



Forward Africa
Leaders Symposium
Kigali 2026

In collaboration with



Context

As Africa accelerates its digital transformation agenda, the continent faces a defining challenge: how to build the infrastructure, governance systems, and institutional capacity required to support a digitally sovereign, inclusive, and globally competitive future. The Digital Resilience & African Infrastructure dialogue brought together policymakers, governance experts, development partners, legal practitioners, technology leaders, investors, and researchers to examine the foundations of Africa's digital future.

The session underscored a powerful consensus: digital transformation is no longer a technology issue—it is a governance, infrastructure, energy, and inclusion imperative. Participants emphasized that Africa's ability to compete in the age of artificial intelligence, digital trade, and data-driven economies will depend on its capacity to build resilient energy systems, expand digital infrastructure, harmonize regulations, strengthen digital governance, and ensure that no citizen is left behind.

The dialogue concluded with a call for greater continental cooperation, stronger public-private partnerships, increased investment in critical infrastructure, and a renewed focus on implementation rather than aspiration.

Key Insights

Digital Sovereignty Begins with Ownership of Infrastructure

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was that Africa's digital future cannot be secured without ownership and governance of its digital infrastructure. Participants argued that sovereignty in the 21st century extends beyond borders and natural resources to include data, computing power, artificial intelligence, and digital identity systems.

The panel highlighted the significant imbalance between Africa's demographic and economic potential and its digital infrastructure footprint. While the continent possesses vast agricultural resources and renew-

able energy potential, it accounts for only a small fraction of global data infrastructure.

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If Africa does not own and govern its data infrastructure, we will not own our digital future.

”



Dr. McBride Nkhalamba

Director of Governance
and Specialised Reporting,
APRM

Energy Security is the Foundation of Digital Transformation

The discussion made clear that Africa's digital ambitions are inseparable from its energy agenda. Data centers, broadband networks, artificial intelligence systems, irrigation technologies, digital public services, and industrial development all depend on reliable and affordable power.

Participants emphasized that digital infrastructure planning must be integrated with energy planning, particularly renewable energy investments. Kenya's experience in aligning energy policy with digital infrastructure development was highlighted as a promising example of how governments can unlock private-sector investment and create enabling environments for growth.

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No digital economy can be built on unstable power.

Energy is fundamental for digitization. The two cannot go separately.

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Pauline Anaman

Coordinator, Green Transition Practice, AB & David Africa

Governance Must Move to the Center of Digital Transformation

Fatimah stressed that successful digital transformation requires more than infrastructure investment. Strong governance frameworks, regulatory coordination, policy coherence, accountability mechanisms, and institutional capacity are equally important.

Participants argued that digitalization should be viewed fundamentally as a governance issue because it affects service delivery, transparency, trust, citizen engagement, and institutional effectiveness. The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) was identified as a key platform for promoting governance standards, peer learning, and regulatory harmonization across member states.

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Digitalization should not be seen as a tech system. It should be seen as a governance system.

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Fatima Lovetta Sessay

Resident Coordinator, UNDP Rwanda

Regulatory Fragmentation Remains a Major Barrier to Scale

One of the most significant challenges identified was the fragmentation of regulations across African countries. Participants noted that startups, innovators, and technology companies often face multiple compliance requirements and regulatory regimes when attempting to expand across borders.

The discussion highlighted the need for interoperable frameworks, harmonized standards, and mutual recognition systems that can support digital trade and innovation under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

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“One of the major barriers facing African startups and SMEs today is fragmented compliance and regulatory systems across member states.”

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Dr. Amina Sambo Magaji

Director, Information Technology Department, NITDA Nigeria

Inclusion Must Be the Measure of Success

Participants consistently emphasized that digital transformation cannot be considered successful if it excludes rural communities, women, youth, and underserved populations. The objective of digitalization should be improving lives, expanding access to services, and creating economic opportunities for all Africans.

The UNDP stressed the importance of placing people at the center of digital strategies and ensuring that digital systems are trusted, accessible, interoperable, and citizen focused.

"We can create systems unintentionally that leave some people behind."

Fatima Lovetta Sessay

Resident Coordinator, UNDP Rwanda

Africa's Youth Must Become Co-Creators of the Digital Future

The dialogue raised concerns about the limited representation of young people in digital policy discussions despite Africa being the world's youngest continent. Participants argued that young innovators, entrepreneurs, and digital users must be included in decision-making processes and innovation ecosystems.

"We can create systems unintentionally that leave some people behind."



Anthony Mveyanage

Director of Programme,
Synergy, APHRC

Strategic Policy Recommendations

Invest in Foundational Infrastructure

- Expand broadband connectivity.
- Strengthen national and regional data center capacity.
- Scale renewable energy infrastructure.
- Improve resilience of digital networks.

Build Digital Sovereignty

- Encourage local hosting and processing of African data.

- Strengthen data protection frameworks.
- Advance AI readiness and digital identity systems.
- Promote African ownership of critical digital infrastructure.

Harmonize Regulatory Frameworks

- Accelerate AfCFTA digital protocols.
- Promote interoperable digital identity systems.
- Develop continent-wide compliance frameworks.
- Facilitate cross-border digital trade and innovation.

Strengthen Governance and Accountability

- Integrate digital governance into national development agendas.
- Establish measurable indicators for digital readiness.
- Improve institutional coordination.
- Promote transparency and citizen trust.

Put Inclusion at the Center

- Expand digital literacy initiatives.
- Address gender gaps in technology.
- Increase rural connectivity.
- Ensure equitable access to digital services.

Mobilize Capital for Digital Infrastructure

- Expand public-private partnerships.
- Attract long-term infrastructure investment.
- Create investment vehicles focused on digital and energy infrastructure.
- Support African innovation ecosystems.



Contributors

MODERATOR



Blessed Soga

BROADCAST JOURNALIST,
MULTIMEDIA GROUP



Fatima Lovetta Sessay

RESIDENT COORDINATOR, UNDP RWANDA



Anthony Mveyanage

DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMME, SYNERGY, APHRC



Pauline Anaman

COORDINATOR, GREEN TRANSITION PRACTICE, AB & DAVID AFRICA



Dr. Amina Sambo Magaji

DIRECTOR, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT, NITDA NIGERIA



Dr. McBride Nkhalamba

DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND SPECIALISED REPORTING, APRM



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**Global
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FORWARD AFRICA LEADERS SYMPOSIUM

**GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS ON
THE NEXT DIGITAL DECADE**

Building the Next Frontier of Africa's
Digital Economy

**21st September 2026
Harvard Club, New York, USA**

In collaboration with

ABAN
african business angel network



**AFRICA
BUSINESS
COUNCIL**

For more information visit
www.forwardafricaleaders.com

Email: events@forwardafricaleaders.com