Towards Just, Equitable Data and AI Governance in Africa

A Side Event ahead of the T20 Mid-Term Conference
Johannesburg, South Africa | 18 June 2025

Convened by Research ICT Africa in partnership with AI4D Africa Network and D4D Network

Concept Note

This workshop convenes key partners from the Digital for Development (D4D) Hub, AI for Development (AI4D) Africa, and the T20 knowledge partners to deliberate on the priorities of the G20 Digital Economy Working Group (DEWG) under the South African Presidency. With the G20's agenda increasingly focused on harnessing digital technologies for inclusive development, this event provides a critical platform to analyse the G20's approach to key issues such as Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), digital innovation for MSMEs, and equitable Artificial Intelligence (AI). The primary aim is to foster a shared understanding and develop a powerful, unified message on how the collaborative efforts of the T20 and G20 can be strategically channelled to accelerate the African Union's digital transformation agenda, ensuring the continent's specific challenges and immense opportunities are central to global digital cooperation.

To this end, the workshop aims to share research outputs from African think tanks and provide a platform to deliberate evidence-based solutions to key priorities. The South African G20 Presidency, following presidencies by two Global South nations, seeks to build on their strategic work focused on developing countries(India and Brazil), this time with a specific emphasis on contributing to Africa's development priorities. This presents a strategic opportunity to advance international cooperation and a global agenda on Africa's data governance priorities. This high-level workshop will convene continental leaders, think tanks, and development partners to seize this opportunity, articulating unified African positions on data and AI governance that align with continental development priorities while influencing global frameworks through G20 platforms.

Ultimately, the workshop seeks to synthesise partners' research outputs and expert insights into a clear and actionable communique for the G20.

Programme

TIME	TOPICS	FACILITATORS/PANELLISTS
8:30 - 9:00	**Arrival and Registration**	
9:00 - 10:00	**Welcome and Opening Remarks**	
	● **Welcome**	**Liz Orembo,** Research ICT Africa (MC)
		Pria Chetty, Research ICT Africa
	● **Opening Remarks (IDRC)**	**Loise Ochanda**, International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
	● **Overview of the G20 (Digital) Priorities (Digital Economy Working Group & Task Force on AI, Data Governance, Innovation and Sustainability)**	**Alison Gillwald,** Research ICT Africa & T20 Digital Transformation Task Force, co-chair
	● **Overview of T20 Digital Transformation Task Force agenda, communique and recommendations**	**Arina Muresan**, Institute for Global Dialogues **(T20 Knowledge Partner)**
	● **Overview of the Digital Priorities emerging from the High-Level T20 Africa Meeting**	**Pamla Gopaul**, AUDA NEPAD
10:00 – 11:00	**Session 1: Digital Public Infrastructure and the African Digital Transformation** *Africa stands at a critical juncture in defining its Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) trajectory. While India's DPI success story has captured global attention and influenced G20 digital development discourse, Africa must chart its path that reflects the continent's unique socio-economic characteristics, development priorities, and integration aspirations. As countries progress with DPI initiatives, they face challenges related to digital inequalities, data governance, and regulatory frameworks, which must be addressed to maximise benefits.*	

Convened by

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	Key Discussion Questions: ● How can countries ensure that DPI development benefits all segments of society and addresses digital inequalities? ● How do open standards and open-source software contribute to interoperability and innovation in DPI? How can these standards be used to propel innovation in SMEs? ● What democratic data governance structures can guide equal opportunities, digital commons, and human rights in the deployment and use of DPIs in Africa? ● How can South Africa use its G20 Presidency to ensure that emerging global DPI standards and cooperation frameworks accommodate African multi-level governance structures and development priorities rather than imposing one-size-fits-all solutions based on other regional experiences?	**Moderator: Pria Chetty,** Research ICT Africa **Panellists:** **Leonida Mutuku**, Local Development Research Institute **Dr Sandra Makumbirofa**, Research ICT Africa **Prof Ntsibane Ntlatlapa**, WITS Link Centre
11:00 – 11:30	**Tea Break**	
11:30 – 12:30	**Session 2: Regional and Global AI Governance Models for Just AI in Africa** *The G20 Digital Economy Working Group recognises that while AI offers significant opportunities for socio-economic development, it also risks deepening existing inequalities, especially in Africa. A key issue is data inequality, as most Africans are excluded from the datasets used to train AI systems, leading to biased technology that fails to reflect Africa's diverse realities and perpetuates discrimination. Without strong, rights-based governance frameworks, AI deployment could cause unequal harms and limit opportunities, risking marginalisation of African nations in the global digital economy. How can Africa develop an inclusive and effective AI governance framework that addresses data injustices and supports the continent's development goals?*	
	Discussion Questions ● Africa's various AI strategies (e.g., AU Continental AI Strategy) emphasise ethical principles. What are the most critical practical steps governments	**Moderator: Dr Scott Timcke**, Research ICT Africa

	and regional bodies must take to translate these principles into **enforceable, rights-based governance frameworks** that prevent algorithmic bias, ensure human oversight, and provide effective redress mechanisms for AI-related harms? ● What concrete, practical strategies can African nations implement to actively foster the creation and ethical curation of diverse, representative, and high-quality *African datasets* for AI development, ensuring fair compensation and consent for data providers? ● How can South Africa use the G20 Presidency to champion the development of global AI governance frameworks that ensure meaningful participation of developing countries and the recognition of Just AI? ● What strategies are needed to build coalitions amongst African think tanks for collective influence in international AI standard-setting processes?	**Panellists:** **Dr Melisa Omino**, Centre for Intellectual Property and IP Law **Dr Winston Ojenge**, African Centre for Technology Studies **Mark Gaffley**, Global Centre on AI Governance **Patricia Ainembabazi**, Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa
12.30 - 14.00	**Lunch Break**	
14:00 -15:00	**Session 3: Operationalising the African Digital Transformation Policy Frameworks** *The African Union has initiated several policy instruments towards digital transformation. Key among them are the Data Policy framework, the Cybersecurity Malabo Convention, the digital protocol on Africa Free Trade and the AI strategies. Effective implementation of these policies requires policy harmonisation between African states and international cooperation between Africa and other regions. However, challenges towards this exist: different levels of digital development, different levels of democracies, different policy frameworks, insufficient coordination and policy pressures from bigger economies. With these unique conditions, how can Africa develop, implement and coordinate effective policies towards digital transformation?*	
	Discussion Questions:	**Moderator: Pamla Gopaul**, AUDA NEPAD

	• Given the wide disparities in digital development and regulatory maturity across African states, what are the most pragmatic and effective strategies for achieving genuine policy harmonization for digital transformation at the continental and regional levels? • Beyond government, how can multi-stakeholder approaches, involving civil society, academia, local innovators, and the private sector, contribute to building resilience against external policy pressures and ensure African digital transformation is driven by public interest agendas? • How can South Africa use its G20 presidency to mobilise international investment and technical cooperation for African digital infrastructure development, particularly in addressing the continent's digital divide and connectivity challenges?	**Panellists:** **Amb Lavina Ramkissoon**, AU_ASRIC, AU6RG. **Dr Alison Gillwald,** Research ICT Africa, T20 Digital Transformation Task Force, co-chair **Teki Akuetteh**, Africa Digital Rights' Hub, T20 Digital Transformation Task Force, co-chair
15:00 - 15:30	**Tea Break**	
15:30 - 16:30	**Open Discussion on Statement to the G20** *Participants will identify key policy recommendations, strategic priorities, and actionable proposals for the G20 towards a global cooperation that is inclusive of the African digital development agenda.*	**Session Facilitators:** **Pria Chetty**, Research ICT Africa **Andrew Rens**, Research ICT Africa
16:30 - 16:40	**Closing Remarks**	**Alison Gillwald**, Research ICT Africa **Loise Ochanda**, IDRC **Pria Chetty**, Research ICT Africa