

cross-border data flows, digital corporation,
and identity and harmonized digital frameworks

FORWARD
AFRICA
LEADERS
SYMPOSIUM

Pathways to Digital Prosperity

by Dr. Kahifu Lawal, Director General, National
Information Technology Development Agency, NITDA at
the Forward Africa Leaders Symposium 2025



Africa's AI Leap

"AI offers Africa a 10x leap in productivity and efficiency—across agriculture, finance, education, and beyond. This is our moment to build, innovate, and lead."





Building Our Own Systems

"Africa cannot import its future. Our AI systems must be built here rooted in our data, our realities, and our aspirations."



Visibility in the Digital Age

"If our cultures and values are not digitally visible, AI will not remember us. Building African datasets is a technological imperative."



The Power of Access

"AI is too powerful to be controlled by a privileged few. Every African deserves access to the tools that will shape the future."



Innovate as We Build

"We can't wait for perfect infrastructure. Africa must build AI algorithms while building the systems that will power them."



Catalytic National Leadership

"We are not a vertical sector—we are a catalytic force driving digital transformation across agriculture, finance, and education."



Policy for Prosperity

"Effective AI governance requires strong policies and frameworks that empower innovators to build infrastructure and algorithms."





Data Sovereignty

"A system trained on narrow global datasets cannot serve Africa. Policy must ensure our voices, languages, and cultures shape the AI revolution."



No More Receiving End

"Africa won't repeat the past. Policy must ensure we are creators— not recipients— of the next industrial revolution."





Strategic Investment

"Building AI capacity takes strategy, institutions, and investment. Funding 55+ startups is only the beginning of Africa's AI infrastructure."



AI Productivity

"AI offers a 10x leap in productivity and efficiency—imagine what that means for Africa's agriculture, finance, and education sectors."





Data & Representation

"A system trained on narrow datasets cannot serve a diverse continent; Africa's cultures and values must be digitally visible for AI to remember us."



Build, Don't Import

"This technology cannot be built elsewhere and imported. Africa must develop its own AI systems rooted in our realities."





Talent & Infrastructure

"The future of African AI depends on two pillars: infrastructure and talent—and we must build both simultaneously."



Shaping the Revolution

"AI is unlike any industrial revolution before it; those who build and control it will shape the global future."





Inclusive Access

"To drive shared prosperity, every African must have access to the power of AI—not just a privileged few."



Governance & Frameworks

"Effective policies and frameworks must empower people to build both the AI infrastructure and the algorithms that will define Africa's future."





Catalytic Role of Technology Agencies: the case of NITDA

"We don't see ourselves as a vertical sector but as a catalytic force that permeates agriculture, finance, education, and every part of national development."



The African AI Mandate

"Africa cannot afford to be a passive participant in the AI revolution—we must build, govern, and own our AI future."

