

TechPlomacy

Newsletter

January 2026



Amb. Philip Thigo, MBS

Office Of The Special Envoy on Technology

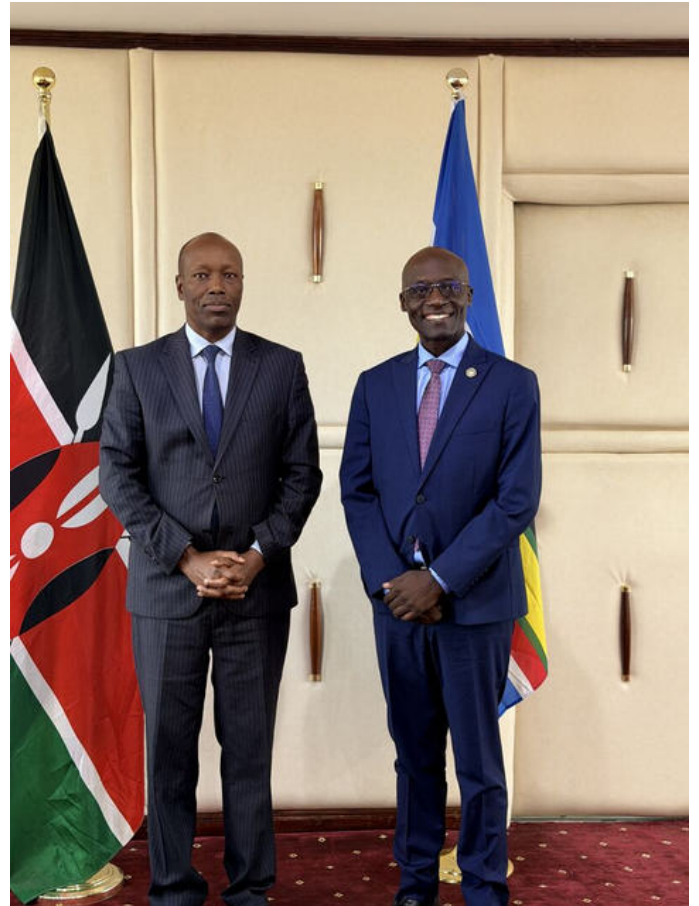


OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL
ENVOY ON TECHNOLOGY

**Leading in the Era of Intelligence
and Uncertainty**

Strengthening Kenya's Digital Trade and Technology Investment Ecosystem

The Office of the Special Envoy on Technology held a strategic discussion with Hon. Lee Kinyanjui, Cabinet Secretary for Investments, Trade and Industry, and Florence Kimata, Advisor to the Cabinet Secretary, on strengthening Kenya's digital trade and technology investment ecosystem. The engagement focused on supporting startups and innovators to improve commercialisation and scaling, mobilising domestic capital for the technology sector, and strengthening policy and institutional coordination to position Kenya as a leading destination for technology- and innovation-driven investment. The discussions emphasised the importance of coordinated public-private action to enhance Kenya's competitiveness in the global digital economy.



Leveraging Satellite Data and AI for Climate Intelligence



Kevin Murphy

Chief Science Data Officer, NASA's
Science Mission Directorate



Dr. Juan Bernabe Moreno

Director of IBM Research Europe IBM
Ireland and UK



Ambassador Philip Thigo

Special Envoy on Technology, for H.E the
President of the Republic of Kenya



Katherine Royse

Hartree Centre Director



Malcolm Gladwell

Bestselling Author and Podcaster,
Pushkin Industries



Ambassador Philip Thigo, Special Envoy on Technology, participated in a Smart Talks dialogue examining how satellite data and artificial intelligence are being transformed into actionable climate intelligence. The session convened leading global experts, including Mr. Malcolm Gladwell; Mr. Kevin Murphy, Chief Science Data Officer at NASA's Science Mission Directorate; Dr. Juan Bernabe Moreno, Director of IBM Research Europe (Ireland and the UK); and Ms. Katherine Royse, Director of the Hartree Centre. Discussions explored how advanced AI models convert large-scale Earth observation data into decision-ready insights for climate resilience, environmental monitoring, and emergency response, with practical applications such as tracking reforestation, detecting harmful algal blooms, and strengthening climate and environmental governance through real-time analytics. Ongoing deployments supporting Kenya's afforestation efforts and environmental monitoring in other regions were also highlighted. The dialogue underscored the importance of global collaboration in leveraging satellite data, AI, and scientific leadership to deliver public-interest outcomes and scalable climate solutions.



Leading in the Era of Intelligence and Uncertainty

Ambassador Philip Thigo, Special Envoy on Technology, delivered a keynote address to the senior leadership of the Kenya Defence Forces on leadership in an era shaped by artificial intelligence and rapid technological change. The engagement examined key trends transforming security and governance, including data-driven operations, autonomous systems, and the convergence of cyber, information, and physical domains.



The discussion also addressed emerging challenges associated with accelerated technological adoption, including risks of misuse, algorithmic bias, erosion of human judgment, and the need to safeguard sovereignty, accountability, and public trust. Participants further explored the opportunities presented by well-governed AI, particularly its potential to enhance situational awareness, decision-making, institutional resilience, and public service delivery.

The engagement underscored the importance of close coordination between civilian and military institutions in advancing the responsible use of AI, anchored in safety, transparency, accountability, and national resilience. Emphasis was placed on maintaining human-in-the-loop systems and ensuring that AI deployment aligns with human rights, international humanitarian law, and democratic oversight.

The session highlighted the need for sustained leadership development, institutional readiness, and skills transformation within defence and security institutions to adapt to AI-enabled environments. It reaffirmed Kenya's commitment to agile and responsible AI governance as it builds sovereign AI capabilities that strengthen national security while upholding democratic values.



Turning Planet-Scale Data into Public-Interest Innovation for Kenya

Ambassador Philip Thigo, Special Envoy on Technology, held a strategic engagement with Mr. Andrew Zolli, Chief Impact Officer at PLANET, and Dr. Amy Rosenthal, Senior Global Director for Conservation Initiatives, to explore concrete avenues for collaboration aimed at advancing public-interest innovation through the use of data, artificial intelligence, and science at scale.

The discussions examined how PLANET's platforms and global partner ecosystem could support priority national and regional use cases, including conservation and biodiversity protection, smart cities and urban innovation, disaster risk management and response, and the development of resilient food systems. The engagement highlighted opportunities to leverage PLANET's partnerships, including collaborations with Microsoft AI for Good and IBM, to deploy real-world AI solutions grounded in high-quality, planet-scale data.

The meeting underscored the potential for applying advanced data and AI capabilities to strengthen Kenya's innovation ecosystem and enhance evidence-based decision-making in service of people, ecosystems, and sustainable development outcomes. Both parties expressed interest in continued collaboration to translate these capabilities into practical applications within Kenya and the broader African context, supporting responsible, public-interest use of data and artificial intelligence.



Advancing Tech Diplomacy for AI, Frontier Infrastructure, and Global Prosperity

Ambassador Philip Thigo, Special Envoy on Technology, held a bilateral engagement with H.E. Anne Marie, Denmark's Tech Ambassador, to discuss strengthening technology diplomacy amid rapid technological change and global uncertainty. The discussions focused on practical pathways for collaboration across AI infrastructure and compute (including GPUs), research partnerships, talent development, quantum technologies, and engagement with global technology firms to build trusted, resilient, and accessible digital

importance of coordinated multilateral action as countries transition into the implementation phase of the Global Digital Compact, including the operationalisation of the Independent Scientific Panel on AI and the Global Dialogue Mechanism, to support inclusive and evidence-based global AI governance. Participants also highlighted the value of closer coordination across UN hubs in New York, Nairobi, Geneva, and Copenhagen as platforms for coherence, partnership, and delivery in advancing shared digital and economic outcomes.

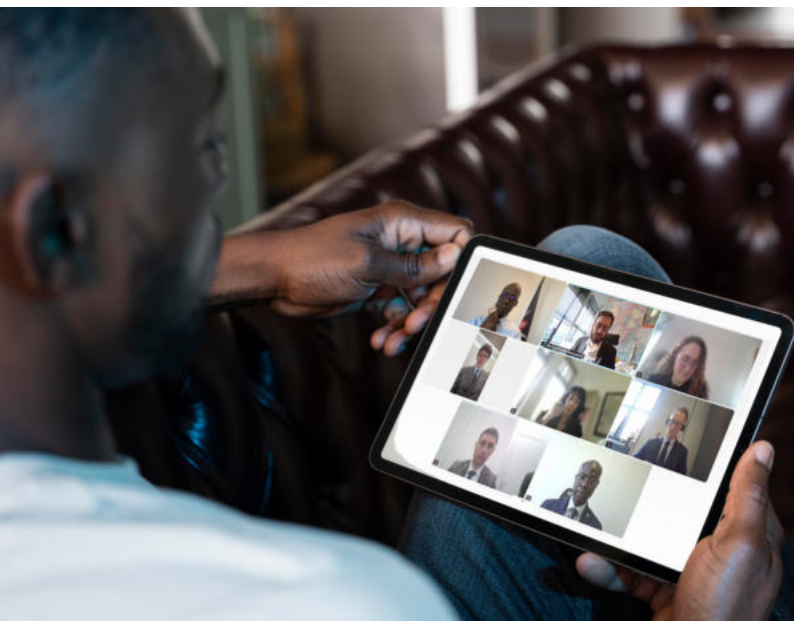


Africa Forward Summit | First Virtual Exchange on Industrialisation, Digital Economy, and AI

Ambassador Philip Thigo, Special Envoy on Technology, engaged with counterparts from the Government of France during the first virtual exchange of the Africa Forward Summit, focused on industrialisation, the digital economy, and artificial intelligence.

The exchange was anchored on a shared priority of moving from dialogue to delivery, with discussions examining how Africa can leverage digital infrastructure, AI capabilities, and human capital to drive sustainable industrialisation, job creation, and local value addition, while avoiding new forms of dependency.

Key themes included the central role of human capital in digital and AI transformation; financing and investment models that support scalable and sustainable infrastructure; enabling policy and regulatory environments, including data governance and digital public infrastructure; and private-sector collaboration based on co-investment, co-development, and regional scale. The exchange reaffirmed a common commitment to ensuring that Africa's digital and AI future is co-created, aligned with public interest, and grounded in sovereignty, interoperability, and long-term resilience.



Recognition in the Apolitical Government AI 100 – 2026

AI governance and regulation

Philip Thigo

Special Envoy on Technology,

KENYA

Known for: Advancing global AI governance discussions

Philip Thigo is Kenya's Special Envoy on Technology, playing a pivotal role in shaping the nation's digital policies and international technological engagements. In this capacity, he advises on data innovation and open government, influencing Kenya's approach to artificial intelligence (AI) and digital governance.

In October 2023, Thigo was appointed to the United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence, contributing to global AI governance discussions. As the Executive Director for Africa at the Thunderbird School of Global Management, he leads initiatives on the continent's participation in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Thigo's expertise spans digital governance, financial inclusion, and technological innovation, enabling him to shape AI policies across various sectors.



Ambassador Philip Thigo, Special Envoy on Technology, was recognised by Apolitical in the Government AI 100 – 2026, a global list highlighting public servants advancing the responsible adoption, regulation, and institutional use of artificial intelligence in government. The recognition reflects contributions to promoting ethical, human-centred, and equitable AI,

It also reflects broader efforts to strengthen public-sector capacity, governance frameworks, and inclusive digital transformation. It also underscores the collective work of public servants and partners committed to ensuring that AI supports effective public service delivery and inclusive development. Apolitical's Government AI 100 highlights the role of public leadership in shaping the future of AI in government and reinforcing trust, accountability, and societal benefit as AI capabilities continue to expand.

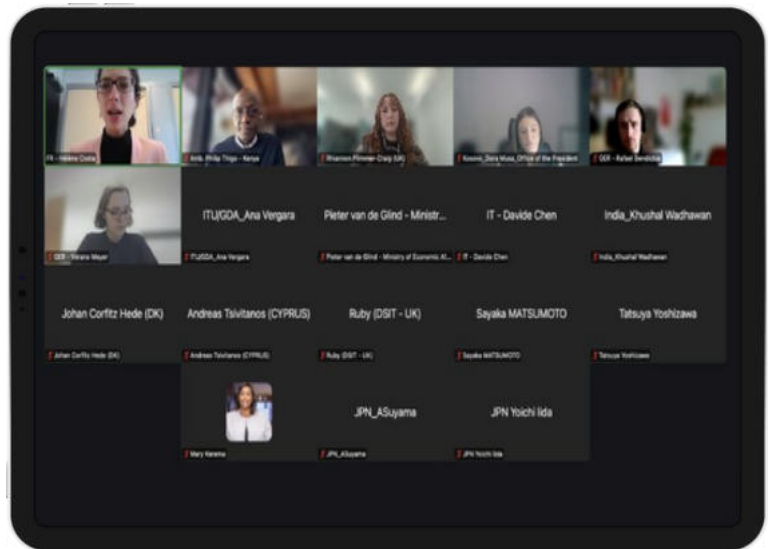


From Resolution to Action | Sustainable AI Coalition

Ambassador Philip Thigo, Special Envoy on Technology, participated in the first 2026 call of the Sustainable AI Coalition, which reviewed outcomes of the UNEA-7 Resolution on the Environmental Sustainability of Artificial Intelligence Systems. The resolution formally anchors AI within global environmental governance, recognising it as both an environmental risk and a critical tool for climate action, biodiversity protection, and resilience.

It also positions environmental data as digital public infrastructure and mandates UNEP to assess and report on the environmental impacts of AI systems to Member States. Discussions focused on the transition from policy adoption to implementation, with emphasis on partnerships, capacity building, and financing—particularly for developing countries.

The engagement underscored the Coalition's role in translating global commitments into practical action by aligning policy, technology, and delivery to achieve measurable environmental and societal impact.



Cabinet Governance in the Age of Intelligence



The Office of the Special Envoy on Technology facilitated a strategic session for senior leadership from Cabinet Affairs and Cabinet liaisons across government, focusing on the responsible use of artificial intelligence in executive decision-making, where choices carry significant constitutional, political, and national implications.

Discussions examined both the risks of undisciplined AI use—particularly to confidentiality, accountability, and executive sovereignty—and the opportunities, when properly governed, for AI to strengthen preparation, foresight, and decision clarity while keeping human judgment at the centre of governance. The session underscored the need for deliberate leadership as governments transition from digitisation to intelligent systems, in order to safeguard public trust and the integrity of executive governance.

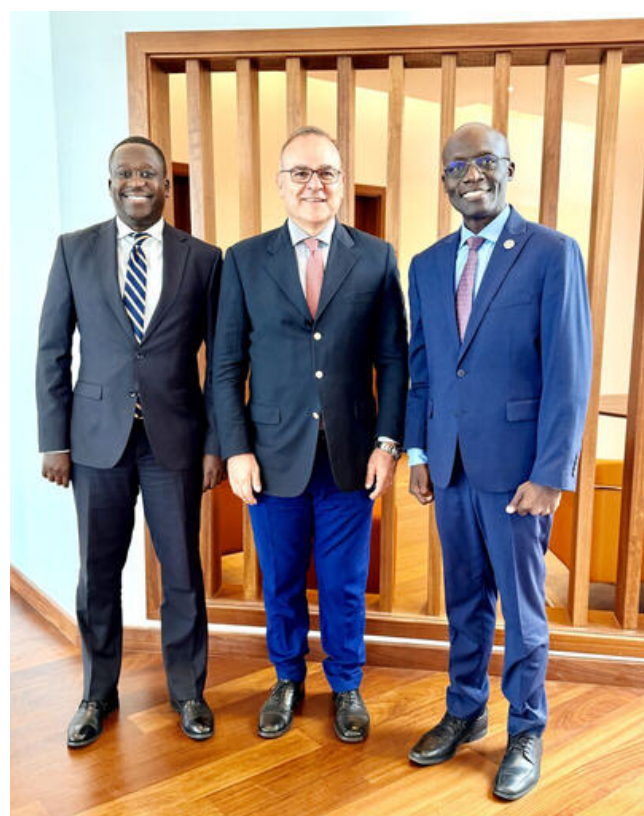
The engagement was supported by the leadership of the Secretary to the Cabinet, Mercy Wanjau, EGH, and the partnership of the Kenya School of Government, reinforcing Kenya's commitment to disciplined, constitutionally grounded AI adoption.

Reshaping India–Kenya Cooperation in the 21st Century

The Office of the Special Envoy on Technology participated in a symposium on Reshaping India–Kenya Cooperation in the 21st Century, contributing perspectives on strengthening bilateral cooperation in the age of artificial intelligence.

Discussions emphasised the transition from pilot initiatives to building scalable AI capabilities, systems, and real-world impact. The engagement highlighted opportunities to align India–Kenya collaboration around the full AI stack, including trusted data, sustainable compute, skilled talent, and high-impact use cases such as food systems innovation and multilingual AI.

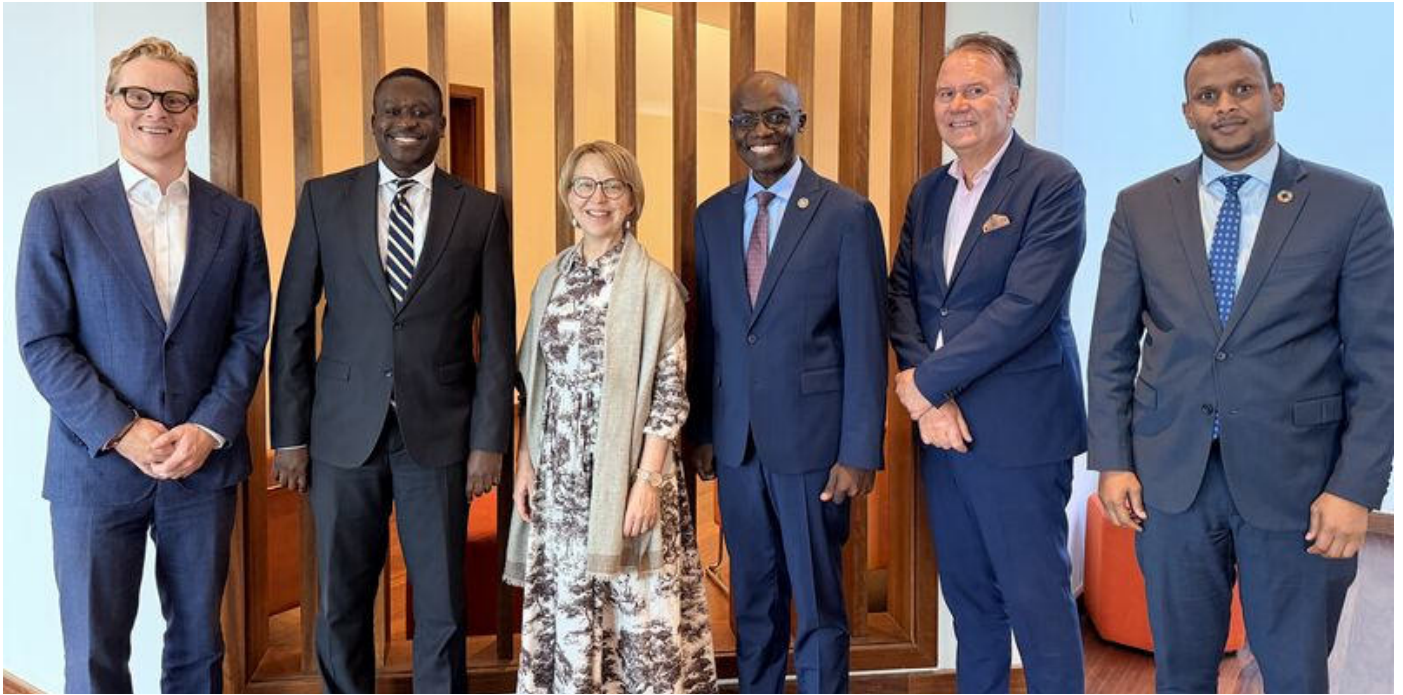
The dialogue also underscored the need for a renewed multilateral approach grounded in sovereignty, interoperability, and ethical, impact-driven AI systems that deliver tangible benefits for citizens.



Kenya–Italy Cooperation on Innovation, AI and the Mattei Plan

The Office of the Special Envoy on Technology engaged with H.E. Ambassador Vincenzo Del Monaco, Italy's Ambassador to Kenya, to review progress and next steps in strengthening Kenya–Italy cooperation on innovation, AI, research, venture capital, and the AI Hub for Sustainable Development under the Mattei Plan. Discussions focused on advancing shared priorities for innovation-driven, inclusive growth across Africa and preparations for an upcoming high-level Italian government and business delegation visit to Kenya for an AI Summit, aimed at translating strategic intent into concrete partnerships and investments. The engagement also highlighted the role of the Nairobi International Financial Centre (NIFC) in positioning Kenya as a leading destination for technology-driven investment, innovation finance, and global capital.

Strengthening Kenya–Finland Technology Cooperation



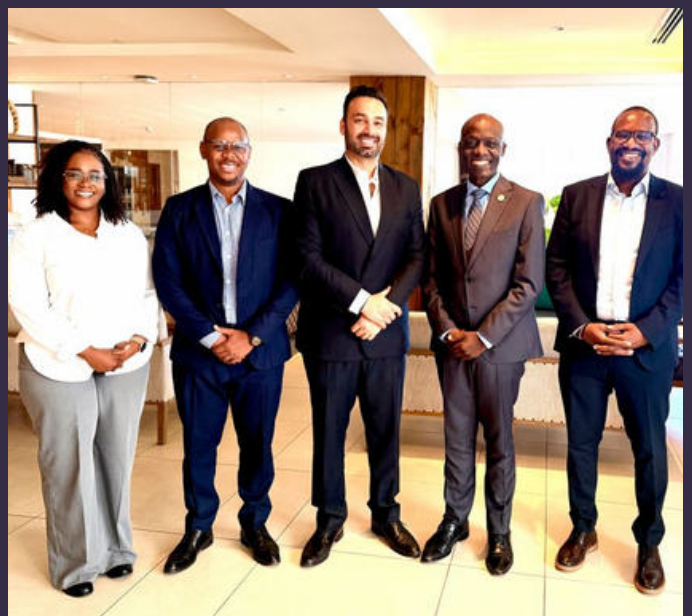
The Office of the Special Envoy on Technology hosted a follow-up engagement with H.E. Riina-Riikka Heikka, Ambassador of Finland to Kenya, Mr. Leo Svahnback, Deputy Head of Mission, and their delegation, building on outcomes from the recent State Visit of H.E. President Alexander Stubb of Finland to Kenya.

Discussions focused on advancing Kenya–Finland collaboration in technology diplomacy, private-sector engagement, and research and innovation, anchored in shared principles of inclusion, sustainability, trust, openness, and responsible innovation. The parties agreed to increase the cadence of engagement, deepen thought leadership collaboration, and pursue more structured partnerships—particularly between Kenyan and Finnish companies, startups, researchers, and innovation ecosystems—to translate strategic alignment into concrete cooperation and impact.

The Office of the Special Envoy on Technology engaged with Imran Manji, Head of East Africa at Uber, and Fortune Sibande to discuss the role of ride-sharing platforms in advancing green mobility, platform innovation, and economic inclusion in Kenya.

Discussions focused on how digital mobility platforms can deepen their economic contribution—currently exceeding KES 14 billion annually—while strengthening employment outcomes, expanding driver and partner opportunities, and scaling technology-enabled services. The engagement underscored the importance of sustainable urban mobility, local innovation, and responsible platform governance in supporting Kenya’s economic transformation and climate ambitions.

Advancing Green Mobility and Platform Innovation in Kenya



AI, Skills, and Sovereignty in the Age of Intelligence

The Office of the Special Envoy on Technology contributed to discussions on AI in business and digital skilling at the UK–Kenya Business Forum, focusing on how Kenya and the wider African region can build inclusive, future-ready, and sovereign AI capabilities. The engagement highlighted key priorities including foundational infrastructure (compute, connectivity, and devices); progression from basic AI skills to sector-wide AI fluency; institutional transformation through curriculum reform, standardisation, and large-scale teacher upskilling; and the adoption of flexible, modular skilling models responsive to rapid technological change.

The discussion underscored that AI skilling extends beyond employability, serving as a core pillar of long-term national capability, resilience, and strategic autonomy in the age of intelligence.



KenyaSTACK–India Stack Engagement on Payments, DPI, and Digital Sovereignty

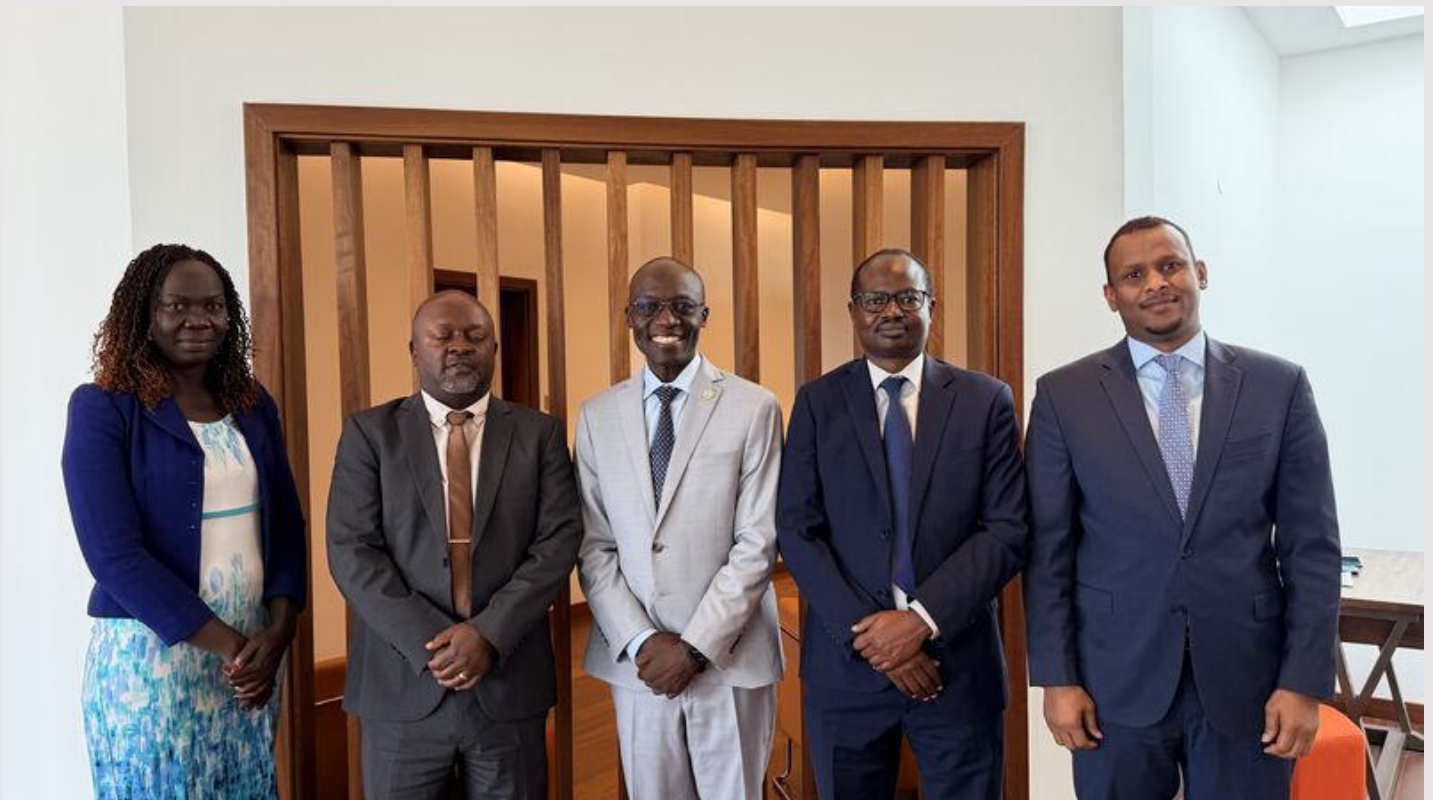
The Action Lab engaged with Mr. Ritesh Shukla, MD and CEO of NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL), to exchange perspectives on Kenya’s fintech and payments ecosystem and the development of a KenyaSTACK grounded in sovereign, context-specific digital public infrastructure. The discussion drew lessons from India’s experience with the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), highlighting the role of population-scale digital public rails in driving financial inclusion, innovation, competition, and trust while reducing transaction costs. The engagement underscored the value of deepening Kenya–India collaboration to co-create interoperable, citizen-centric, and sovereign digital payment systems aligned with Kenya’s payments modernisation and DPI agenda.

Designing Kenya's AI Missions for Q1

The Action Lab and the Emerging Technologies Institute convened a strategic planning session to define Q1 priorities and translate Kenya's AI strategy into executable missions. From an initial pipeline of 40 use cases, 17 high-impact AI missions were prioritised based on public value, deployment readiness, and scalability, spanning climate and conservation, public sector service delivery, trust and safety, and inclusive digital public infrastructure. The session reaffirmed a disciplined execution approach focused on scaling effective solutions, transitioning mature initiatives into national programmes and public-private partnerships, and formally sunsetting stalled initiatives with full documentation of lessons learned. This execution framework supports the development of sovereign AI capabilities across data, compute, talent, governance, and use cases, and aligns with the national agenda of leveraging AI to drive competitiveness, resilience, and inclusive economic transformation.



Reimagining Kenya's Foreign Service for the Age of Intelligence



We welcomed Henry Wanyonyi Kituyi, ICT Director at the State Department of Foreign Affairs, and his team to advance Kenya's digital transformation agenda for the Foreign Service. We aligned on Q1 2026 priorities spanning cybersecurity and resilience, digital skilling, strengthening the online presence of missions and consulates, and reimagining citizen and diplomatic services through data- and AI-driven efficiency. As diplomacy enters the Age of Intelligence, the focus is on building a foreign service that is secure, agile, data-informed, and citizen-centric—enhancing service delivery, operational effectiveness, and Kenya's global engagement. Grateful for the continued leadership of Mr. Mohamed Elyas in driving this agenda forward.

Building Digital Fluency for 21st Century Diplomacy

A privilege to collaborate with the Foreign Service Academy in preparing the next generation of diplomats for their postings. I engaged trade, immigration, and education attachés on how new media, social platforms, and AI are reshaping modern foreign service—covering emerging trends, risks, and opportunities for daily operations, strategic communication, and public engagement.

As diplomacy increasingly unfolds in real time and across digital platforms, foreign services must be digitally fluent, strategically agile, and values-driven—using technology to strengthen representation, citizen engagement, service delivery, and the national interest. Encouraged by the depth of discussion and shared commitment to modernising Kenya’s diplomatic practice for the Age of Intelligence.



GULF FOODS: FROM GLOBAL FOOD TRADE TO INTELLIGENT FOOD SYSTEMS

Why Gulfood360 Africa/Kenya Matters for Africa's Future



The launch of Gulfood360 Africa/Kenya, set to debut in Nairobi from 4–6 May 2027, represents a defining moment for Kenya's role in global trade and Africa's transition toward intelligent, technology-enabled food systems. More than the expansion of the world's most influential food and beverage sourcing platform into Africa, this milestone signals a structural shift in how African economies will integrate into global supply chains — not as raw commodity exporters, but as value-adding, innovation-driven partners in the global food economy.

Announced during Gulfood 2026 in Dubai, the platform formally positions Kenya as the continental gateway connecting African agrifood production to international markets. It reinforces Kenya's growing reputation as a trusted convening hub for trade, technology, and investment diplomacy, and reflects the country's long-term strategy of leveraging global partnerships to unlock industrial growth, market access, and technology transfer.

The successful positioning of Gulfood360 Africa/Kenya reflects coordinated national leadership led by the Ministry of Investments, Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, and the Office of the Special Envoy on Technology (OSET), working alongside the Agriculture and Food Authority and international partners under the Kenya–UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. This whole-of-government approach ensures that trade expansion is matched with production transformation, industrial capability, and technology adoption across the agrifood value chain.

The platform directly advances His Excellency President William Ruto's vision of transforming Kenya into a first-world economy under the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda. Agriculture, manufacturing, trade, logistics, and technology remain central pillars of this transformation. Gulfood360 Africa/Kenya is expected to accelerate agricultural value addition, agro-industrialisation, SME participation in export value chains, and large-scale investment into processing, logistics, and cold-chain ecosystems. In practical terms, this is about moving Africa from exporting raw commodities toward exporting high-value, technology-enabled products and services.



Kenya's selection as host is built on deliberate long-term investments in infrastructure, logistics, and energy. The expansion of Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, modernisation of the Port of Mombasa, upgrades to regional airports, and the development of multimodal trade corridors are creating one of Africa's most integrated trade and logistics ecosystems. These investments are supported by the President's Infrastructure Fund, which is mobilising long-term capital into logistics networks, industrial parks, and export-oriented manufacturing systems critical to global competitiveness. Equally important is Kenya's leadership in clean energy.

With more than 90 percent of electricity generated from renewable sources, Kenya offers global agribusiness and manufacturing investors access to reliable, low-cost, and low-carbon energy. In an era where sustainability and ESG standards are reshaping global supply chains, this positions Kenya as a uniquely competitive destination for green industrial growth.

Africa's agrifood opportunity remains one of the most significant untapped economic frontiers globally. Sub-Saharan Africa holds more than 60 percent of the world's uncultivated arable land, while the continent's food economy is projected to reach approximately 567 billion dollars by 2032. Kenya's strategic location within the African Continental Free Trade Area — a single market of more than 1.4 billion people — makes it a natural entry point for global firms seeking scale, supply chain resilience, and market diversification across the continent.

Through the combined leadership of the Agriculture and Trade ministries, supported by OSET's technology and innovation diplomacy agenda, Gulfood360 Africa/Kenya is designed to transform Nairobi into a transaction and execution hub where contracts are signed, capital is deployed, and continental supply chains are activated. The platform will serve as a bridge between African production ecosystems and global demand markets, unlocking new growth pathways for farmers, processors, exporters, and technology providers.



A defining feature of Gulfood360 Africa/Kenya is its strong integration of technology across the agrifood value chain. Kenya's position as Africa's Silicon Savannah allows the platform to showcase artificial intelligence-driven agritech, digital trade platforms, traceability systems, smart logistics, and climate intelligence solutions. These technologies are already transforming food systems by reducing loss, improving productivity, strengthening supply chain transparency, and increasing farmer incomes.

This approach aligns with Kenya's broader sovereign digital development strategy — building across the full AI stack of data, compute, talent, and use-cases — ensuring that Africa shapes, rather than simply adopts, the intelligent food systems of the future. The announcement also comes alongside preparations for AI Everything x GITEX Kenya 2026, reinforcing Kenya's deliberate strategy of leveraging global convenings to drive investment, partnerships, and industrial upgrading. Together, these platforms position Kenya as a global meeting point for trade and technology diplomacy, a launchpad for investment into African value chains, and a trusted execution hub connecting global capital with African opportunity.

The Office of the Special Envoy on Technology continues to play a strategic convening and partnership-building role in this journey. Working in close coordination with the Ministry of Investments, Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, OSET supports the integration of digital trade, artificial intelligence, and future supply-chain technologies into major national platforms such as Gulfood360 Africa/Kenya. This reflects Kenya's broader technology diplomacy approach — ensuring that global partnerships translate into long-term industrial capability, skills development, and inclusive economic growth across Kenya and the African continent.

Ultimately, Gulfood360 Africa/Kenya is not simply an event. It is an economic instrument and a long-term structural gateway into Africa's food economy. It reflects Kenya's commitment to food security, green industrialisation, and inclusive growth through technology. As we look toward 2027, the focus remains clear: ensuring that from Nairobi, global demand translates into jobs, industries, innovation, and shared prosperity across Africa



World Bank Innovation Workshop



The Office of the Special Envoy on Technology (OSET) participated in a World Bank–convened innovation workshop focused on the application of geospatial data and artificial intelligence to public-value challenges. The team presented ongoing and completed workstreams leveraging Earth observation and AI, contributing to a substantive exchange on implementation approaches, emerging best practices, and opportunities for future collaboration with the World Bank and partner institutions.



KENYA AI AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES POLICY – RECURRING TECHNICAL WORKING SESSIONS (ONGOING)

The Action Lab convened a recurring technical working session in support of the development of Kenya's AI and Emerging Technologies Policy, working closely with the Policy Technical Committee, KICTANet, and the Ministry responsible for ICT and the Digital Economy. The sessions focused on preparing for forthcoming stakeholder engagements, including developing concepts across policy tracks, refining presentation materials, and aligning stakeholder engagement tools such as forms and guiding questions. The next steps include finalising templates, content, and presentation materials for the initial stakeholder consultation sessions.

Action Lab – Centre of AI Security and Access (CASA) Engagement

The Action Lab engaged the Centre of AI Security and Access (CASA) to explore potential collaboration regarding the upcoming AI Safety Prize Challenge. The discussion focused on identifying partnership areas that could strengthen challenge design, evaluation criteria, safety frameworks, and implementation support for participating innovators. OSET will develop and share proposed areas of collaboration with CASA as a next step.



Advancing Kenya's Sovereign Cloud Ambition

The Office of the Special Envoy on Technology engaged with David Bunei (Oracle) and Sneha Shah (iXAfrica) to mark a key milestone in the delivery of H.E. President William Ruto's commitment to establish Kenya as a sovereign cloud region. The milestone highlights the importance of public-private collaboration in building trusted digital infrastructure that underpins Kenya's priorities in artificial intelligence, digital public infrastructure, data sovereignty, cybersecurity, and inclusive innovation. The engagement acknowledged the leadership and support of H.E. Dr. Musalia Mudavadi, Prime Cabinet Secretary, in advancing this strategic national objective. While further work is required to develop sovereign compute, data ecosystems, AI-ready infrastructure, skills, and locally anchored innovation, this achievement represents a significant step toward strengthening Kenya's digital and economic sovereignty.

Shaping the Africa Forward – France–Africa Technology and AI Partnership

As momentum builds toward the upcoming Africa Forward – France–Africa Summit and the February global AI convenings, a high-level coordination dialogue held in Nairobi on 15 January 2026 marked an important step in shaping what could become a new model of technology and industrial cooperation between Africa and France.

Bringing together representatives from the Government of Kenya, the Government of France, Agence Française de Développement (AFD), and summit coordination teams, the dialogue focused on a central question: how to move from declarations to delivery. The shared view was clear — the credibility of modern technology partnerships will be measured not by the number of panels or announcements, but by the ability to mobilize investment, deliver projects, and create measurable economic and social outcomes. The Nairobi engagement is therefore being designed as a delivery-oriented platform — one that catalyzes concrete investment, accelerates policy reform linked to real projects, and builds long-term partnerships between African and French public and private sector actors. Importantly, the engagement is positioned as a continuation of global momentum from the Paris Action Summit, United Nations discussions on AI governance, and ongoing work under initiatives such as the Current AI Foundation and the Coalition on Sustainable AI.

Why This Moment Matters

Participants converged on a shared assessment: Africa is at a decisive technological and economic inflection point. The rapid convergence of digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence capabilities, and human capital development presents an opportunity to drive sustainable industrialization, create high-quality jobs, and build resilient value chains.

At the same time, there is recognition that if this moment is not approached strategically, it risks reinforcing dependency, externalizing value creation, and fragmenting capacity across the continent. The Nairobi engagement is therefore being framed around a different model of cooperation — one anchored in sovereignty, interoperability, sustainability, and regional scale.

This framing reflects a growing global consensus that Africa must participate not only as a market or deployment environment, but as a co-creator of digital and AI systems aligned with African development priorities and societal needs.

Human Capital as the Foundation of Technology Partnerships

Across all discussions, human capital emerged as the most critical enabler of long-term success.

Participants emphasized that AI and digital transformation cannot be reduced to infrastructure or technology deployment alone. Instead, human capital must be understood as a full-stack challenge — spanning education systems, research ecosystems, public-sector capability, entrepreneurship, and private-sector leadership readiness.

Particular attention was placed on closing the often-overlooked leadership capability gap. African CEOs, CIOs, and industrial leaders are being asked to navigate rapid technological change, yet often lack structured access to advanced AI and digital transformation expertise. Addressing this gap is essential if African firms are to absorb, adapt, and scale new technologies competitively.

The dialogue also highlighted the importance of scientific mobility and talent circulation between Africa and France — including joint research programs, scholar exchanges, AI engineering mobility, and partnerships between universities, research labs, and innovation hubs.

The French experience of distributed AI innovation clusters — linking academia, startups, research institutions, and investors — offers a potential model for structured cooperation with African innovation ecosystems.

Financing as the Credibility Test

Participants were unequivocal: technology and AI cooperation without clear financing pathways risks being perceived as aspirational rather than actionable.

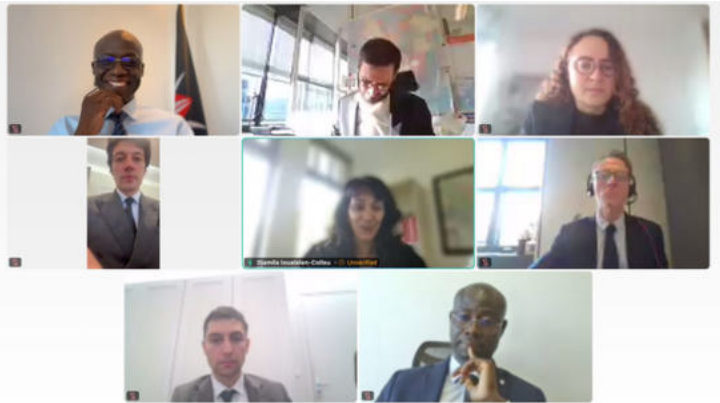
The Nairobi engagement is therefore expected to demonstrate practical financing approaches, including blended finance models, concessional instruments, risk-sharing mechanisms, and stronger alignment between development finance and private capital. The objective is not only to mobilize capital, but to reduce the cost of capital, de-risk viable projects, and accelerate investments already ready for deployment. Importantly, financing was discussed as part of an integrated system linking infrastructure, skills development, policy reform, and private-sector participation. Priority will be given to regionally scalable projects that reinforce African ownership and long-term sustainability.

Policy, Data, and the Enabling Environment

Another consistent theme was the central role of the enabling environment in unlocking investment and innovation.

Macroeconomic stability, predictable regulatory frameworks, connectivity, and digital public infrastructure were identified as foundational to private-sector confidence. Data governance and data sovereignty featured prominently, particularly as countries increasingly focus on where data is stored, processed, and monetized.

Participants emphasized that policy reform discussions must be directly linked to real projects — demonstrating how regulatory clarity or institutional coordination enabled specific investments to proceed. This project-linked policy approach was seen as significantly more compelling to political and business leadership than broad policy declarations alone.



From Convening to Catalyzing Innovation

The Nairobi engagement is designed not simply as a summit, but as a catalyst.

Africa already hosts numerous collaborations with French and global companies, but these are often fragmented. The summit aims to accelerate existing partnerships, pair African and French companies around shared projects, and enable firms to operate at regional scale. Particular attention will be given to SMEs and startups as key drivers of innovation, job creation, and economic resilience.

A defining ambition is to move beyond transactional or donor-driven models toward co-investment, co-development, and shared value creation.

Artificial Intelligence: Political Signals and Concrete Outcomes

Three core political messages are expected to define the AI dimension of the engagement. First, Africa is entering a decisive phase in AI — not as a passive adopter, but as a co-creator of AI systems aligned with African languages, data ecosystems, and development priorities.

Second, the engagement reinforces political alignment between African partners and France around public-interest AI, digital sovereignty, resilience, and sustainability, building on global processes and multilateral discussions.

Third, the summit is expected to announce concrete AI outcomes, including expanded cooperation on training, research, and innovation; partnerships between African and French AI clusters; scholarship and mobility programs; African language and open data initiatives; and operationalization of sustainable AI cooperation platforms.

Institutional Leadership and Technology Diplomacy

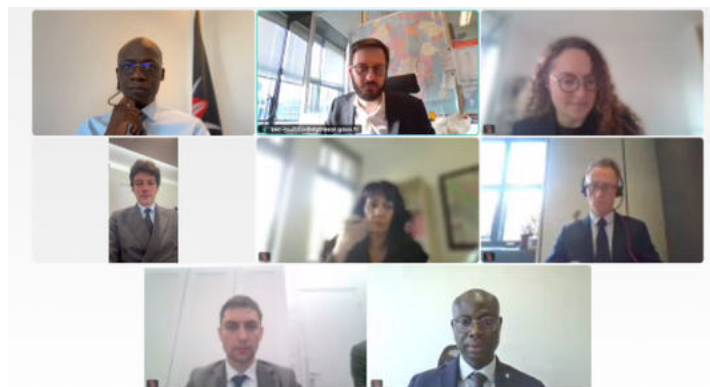
The Office of the Special Envoy on Technology continues to play a strategic convening and partnership-building role in shaping this engagement. Working closely with Kenyan ministries, French counterparts, and development finance partners, OSET is supporting the integration of digital economy priorities, AI cooperation frameworks, and technology-enabled industrial partnerships into the summit architecture.

This reflects Kenya's broader technology diplomacy approach — ensuring that global partnerships translate into long-term industrial capability, skills development, and inclusive economic transformation across Kenya and the African continent.

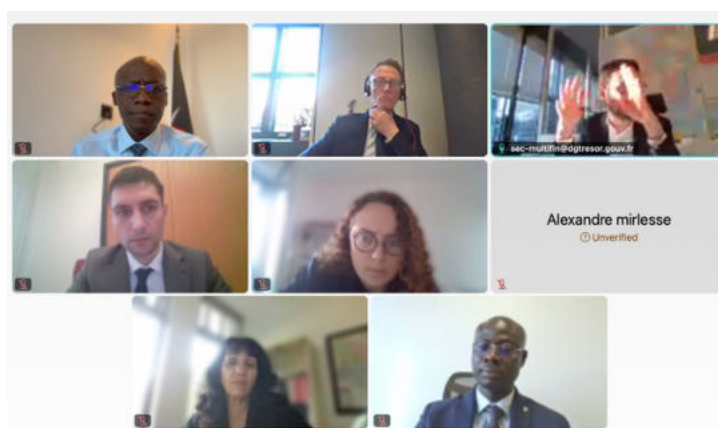
Looking Ahead

The success of the Africa Forward – France–Africa engagement will ultimately be measured not by its declarations, but by its delivery — by the investments mobilized, projects accelerated, and partnerships sustained long after the summit concludes.

If executed with discipline and strategic focus, the Nairobi engagement has the potential to set a new benchmark for France–Africa cooperation — grounded in delivery, shared value, and long-term resilience in the age of intelligent systems.



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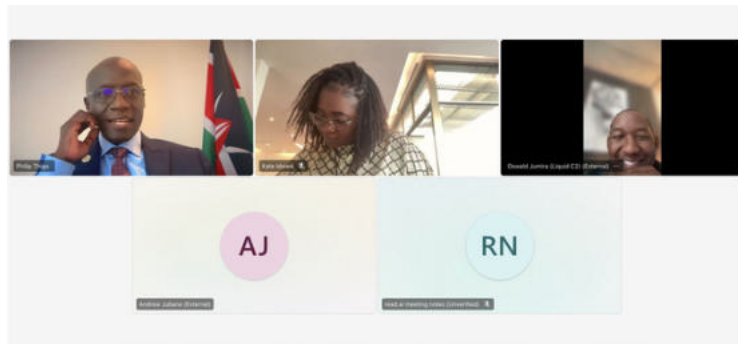
Casava TECH — Advancing Kenya’s Sovereign AI Capacity with Cassava Technologies

Over the past month, the Office of the Special Envoy on Technology engaged in strategic discussions with Chairman Strive Masiyiwa, Oswald Jumira, CEO of Liquid C2, and the Cassava Technologies leadership team to advance the deployment of AI Factories infrastructure in Kenya. Central to the engagement is the planned deployment of 3,000 NVIDIA H200 GPUs, a significant step toward strengthening Africa’s access to high-performance compute for artificial intelligence development.

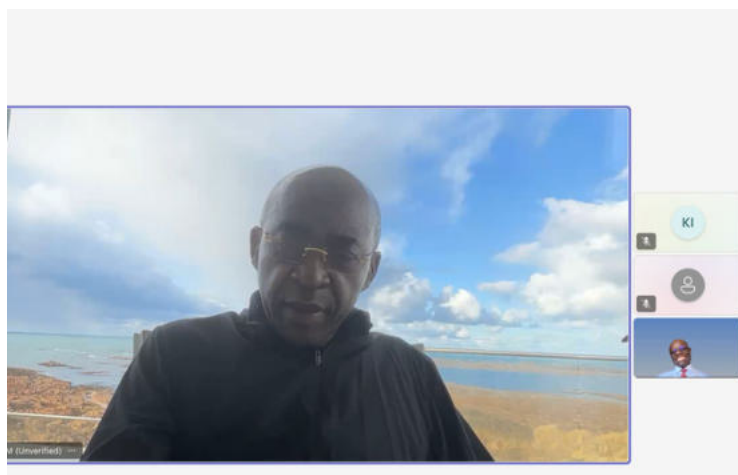
The initiative goes beyond hardware deployment to address access constraints that have historically limited the region’s transition from AI consumption to AI creation. The AI Factories model is designed to provide shared, high-capacity compute infrastructure accessible to startups, SMEs, universities, research institutions, and enterprises, enabling local development, training, and deployment of AI solutions across priority sectors including health, agriculture, climate, manufacturing, financial services, and the public sector.

Discussions also focused on the full-stack requirements for operationalising AI factories, including power reliability and sustainability, cooling and physical infrastructure, data pipelines, workload orchestration, and secure multi-tenant access models. Through the Action Lab, national priority use cases are being mapped to anchor early workloads, ensuring that infrastructure deployment is directly linked to measurable economic and societal value from the outset.

Beyond infrastructure, the collaboration contributes to Kenya’s broader efforts to build a sovereign AI stack spanning data, compute, talent, and use cases.



AI factories serve as ecosystem enablers—supporting local innovation, reducing reliance on external compute markets, and reinforcing Kenya’s position as a regional hub for responsible and inclusive AI development. With continued political leadership and alignment to national development priorities, the focus remains on building AI infrastructure that is accessible, trusted, sustainable, and strategically positioned to ensure Kenya plays a shaping role in the global AI economy.



AI Global South Forum

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On 30 January, Microsoft — together with the High Commission of India to Kenya, the Office of the Special Envoy on Technology, Wadhvani AI, Qhala, UNDP, and PATH — convened the AI for Impact – Global South Forum in Nairobi, a high-level prelude to the India AI Impact Summit 2026. It was a privilege to co-host this dialogue alongside partners deeply committed to shaping an AI future that reflects the realities, opportunities, and ambitions of the Global South. The convening was intentionally designed not as a traditional conference, but as a high-trust, peer-level exchange — a space for policymakers, technologists, development practitioners, and private sector leaders to speak candidly about what is working, what is not, and what we must build together. At its core was a simple but powerful idea: countries of the Global South must move from being consumers of AI to co-architects of how AI is designed, deployed, and governed. The Nairobi dialogue served as an important East African anchor to the broader Global South conversation shaping priorities ahead of the AI Impact Summit. The objective was clear — to ensure that the next phase of global AI cooperation is grounded in real deployment realities, not theoretical adoption models.

The discussion repeatedly returned to the need to design what many participants described as “AI for our realities”: context-led, problem-driven AI rooted in public systems, local data, governance, and long-term institutional capacity, rather than one-size-fits-all solutions. Across health, agriculture, education, livelihoods, and public service delivery, leaders emphasised that AI in the Global South must ultimately be measured by outcomes — better services, faster delivery, stronger resilience, and expanded opportunity.

In his keynote, H.E. Dr. Adarsh Swaika, High Commissioner of India to Kenya, outlined India’s AI vision anchored in the three Sutras — People, Progress, and Purpose — alongside the seven thematic working areas that will help shape the India AI Impact Summit 2026. The message resonated strongly across the room: AI must serve people first, drive development outcomes, and be anchored in responsible governance and scientific advancement. I was also honoured to highlight that the India AI Impact Summit is expected to convene over 40 African countries, underscoring its role as a truly global platform that meaningfully includes the Global South — and especially Africa — in shaping the future of AI.

What stood out most from the Nairobi discussions was the shared recognition that conversations on AI in the Global South must continue to evolve — away from being predominantly risk-centric, and toward real-world impact, inclusion, and implementation. Across regions, the focus was less on abstract adoption models and more on practical delivery questions: how do we move from pilots to public systems, how do we design AI that works within real infrastructure constraints, and how do we ensure AI strengthens human capability rather than replacing it.





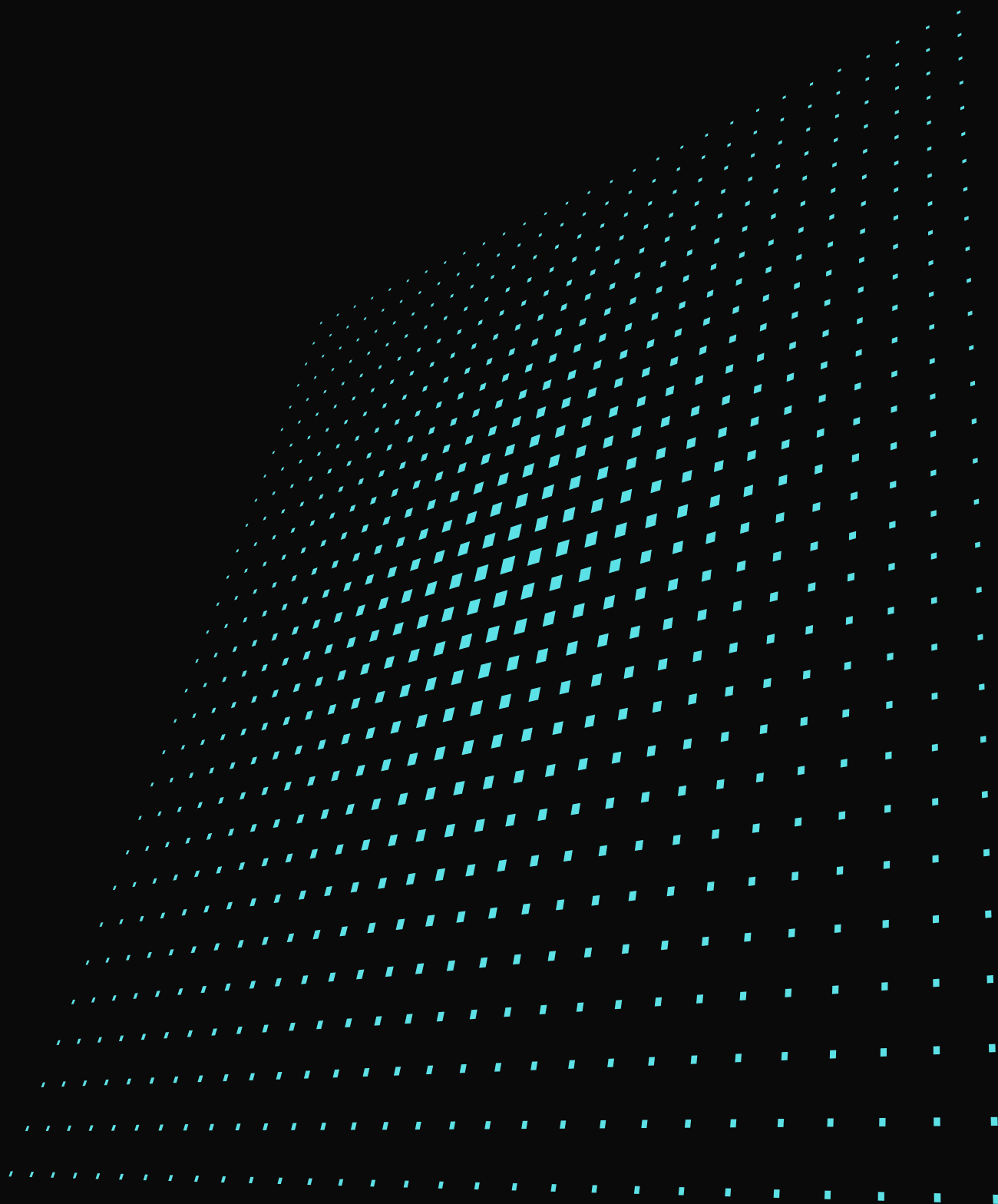
There was strong consensus that Africa must accelerate AI adoption to tackle structural development challenges across sectors. Importantly, the framing was not about automation replacing labour, but about AI acting as a capability multiplier — helping governments, institutions, and communities leapfrog capacity constraints and expand the reach and quality of services. In this sense, AI becomes an enabler of state capability and societal resilience.

A recurring theme was the need to move decisively beyond pilot thinking. Solutions cannot be designed for demonstration and only later adapted for scale. They must be built for scale from inception — embedded within national delivery systems, supported by strong government leadership, and backed by sustained investment in foundational enablers such as reliable energy, compute infrastructure, cloud platforms, trusted data ecosystems, and local language capability. Without these foundations, even the most promising AI innovations struggle to move from proof of concept to public value.

The dialogue was also refreshingly honest about constraints. Energy limitations continue to affect local model training. Digital skills gaps slow institutional adoption. Fragmented data ecosystems increase deployment complexity. Yet the dominant tone was pragmatic optimism. With coordinated public–private collaboration, long-term infrastructure investment, and policy alignment, many of these constraints are solvable. The challenge is less about technology readiness and more about systems readiness.

Hosting this conversation in Nairobi was significant. Kenya increasingly sits at the intersection of digital public service innovation, startup-led technology deployment, and multilateral development collaboration. The region offers a real-world environment for designing context-aware AI solutions that can scale across similar markets globally. Just as importantly, this conversation reinforced that the Global South is not waiting to be included in the AI future — it is actively shaping it.

The insights from Nairobi will help inform the Global South’s collective engagement as we look ahead to the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi in February 2026. More broadly, they reinforce a deeper global shift — from conversations about AI principles to collaboration on AI delivery. For Kenya, and for many countries across Africa and the wider Global South, the central question is no longer whether AI will shape our future. It is how we ensure AI is built, governed, and deployed in ways that expand opportunity, strengthen public systems, and deliver shared prosperity. The Nairobi dialogue made one thing clear: the Global South is not on the margins of the AI future — it is helping to define it.



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