

## Outcome document

### *Future Africa-EU*

### *Changing narratives and fostering Africa- Europe partnership through Digital Skills Development and Technological Innovation.*

Online (Zoom), 12th August 2024

The Africa-Europe Foundation, in collaboration with the PLACE Network, convened an online webinar that brought together 20 young experts in the fields of digital and technology innovation, alongside esteemed senior policymakers, private sector representatives, and development agency officials to commemorate the UN international youth day of 2024.

This event sought to confront the disparities in technology access and adoption that exist between Africa and Europe. Participants engaged in identifying barriers and proposing actionable solutions aimed at fostering more equitable technological advancements. A significant portion of the discussions centred on enhancing partnerships between the two continents, leveraging their respective strengths to create a collaborative environment that promotes innovation and development in technology. The webinar underscored the importance of key areas, including internet connectivity, data, and the establishment of robust digital infrastructure, all of which are vital for ensuring a secure and efficient technological landscape that supports economic and social progress.

### **Key Recommendations Emerging from the conversation:**

#### **1- Addressing Internet Connectivity and Infrastructure:**

- Mitigate Internet Connectivity Blockages: Advocate against government-imposed internet shutdowns, which disrupt communication and access to information. Encourage internet service providers (ISPs) to resist unjustified shutdowns and promote policies that uphold digital rights.
- Invest in Infrastructure: Prioritise investments in infrastructure to enhance internet connectivity across Africa. This includes expanding broadband access and building resilient networks to support digital growth.
- Invest in redundancy to avoid connectivity interruption in case of disruption such as recent submarine cables issues

## 2- Enhancing Digital Identity and Address Systems:

- Standardise Identification Numbers: Implement a standardised system for identification numbers across Africa to improve data collection and integration, facilitating better governance and service delivery.
- Develop proper Digital Mapping Systems to provide accurate physical addresses for Africans, enhancing accessibility to services and economic opportunities.

## 3- Strengthening Partnerships and Data Sharing

- Actively cultivate and strengthen strategic alliances with key organizations and think tanks, such as the Africa Europe Foundation, the Place Network, tech incubators, and innovation and accelerator hubs, to drive collaborative growth and innovation
- Promote Cross-Sector Partnerships: Foster effective partnerships and data-sharing initiatives among private, public, and civil society sectors to drive innovation and address digital challenges collaboratively.
- Increase Access to Funding: Improve access to funding and financing for innovative digital solutions, enabling entrepreneurs and businesses to scale and succeed.

## 4- Building Digital Skills and Talent

- Tailored Digital Skills Training: Develop tailored digital skills training programs that address both general digital literacy and advanced job-ready skills, ensuring a workforce equipped for the digital economy specially for the underprivileged and marginalised communities.
- Facilitate peer-to-peer learning platforms like the Future Africa-EU dialogues to enable African and European young experts to exchange knowledge and experiences, fostering technological innovation.
- Create Enabling Environments: Establish accessible centres for skills development and create policies that support digital transformation at the national level.
- Retain Digital Talent: Address the challenge of talent migration by creating competitive environments and opportunities that encourage skilled individuals to remain in Africa.

## 5- Ensuring Inclusive Digital Transformation

- **Inclusive Policy Assessment:** Review existing policies and initiatives to ensure they are inclusive and address the needs of diverse populations, including youth, women, and people with disabilities.
- **Design Targeted Programs:** Develop digital skills programs specifically for underrepresented groups, considering language barriers and providing solutions in local languages.
- **Focus on African Context:** Direct research and development efforts towards creating digital services and solutions tailored to the African context.

## 6- Balancing Regulation and Innovation

- **Avoid Over-Regulation:** Ensure that regulations do not stifle innovation or private sector growth. Focus on developing policies that empower rather than constrain the digital ecosystem.
- **Regulatory Sandboxes:** Implement regulatory "sandboxes" to allow for experimentation and iterative policymaking, fostering an environment conducive to innovation.
- **Develop Bankable Business Models:** Prioritise the development of sustainable business models for African digital technologies, ensuring long-term viability and growth.

## Conclusion:

In conclusion, to achieve the goals outlined in this outcome document, it is essential to expedite the development of regulatory frameworks. The current timeline of approximately three years to approve national AI or data governance policies is excessively long and hinders progress. Accelerating this process is vital to align with the rapid pace of technological advancements and to ensure that Africa remains competitive in the global digital landscape.

Furthermore, raising awareness about the intricate coupling between technology and security is crucial. This understanding will enable stakeholders to make informed decisions and implement robust protection measures that safeguard both innovation and privacy.

Collaborative regulation across countries should be fostered to create a cohesive and unified approach to digital governance. By working together, nations can share best practices, harmonise standards, and address cross-border challenges more effectively.

Lastly, incentivizing start-ups that offer on-the-job training for youth is essential. This approach not only enhances skill development but also contributes to a vibrant and dynamic digital

economy. By investing in young talent, we can ensure a sustainable pipeline of skilled professionals who will drive Africa's digital transformation forward.

By addressing these priorities, we can create an agile, secure, and inclusive digital future that aligns with the recommendations of this outcome document, ultimately fostering a more connected and innovative African digital landscape.