



**2024 ECOSOC Youth Forum**  
**"Youth shaping sustainable and innovative solutions:  
Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of crises"**

IDENTIFICATION	
<b>Session title</b>	African Youth Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Sustainable Development in Africa
<b>Session focus</b>	Africa
<b>Session leads</b>	United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, United Nations Development Programme, International Labour Organization, African Union Commission, - African Union Youth Envoy
BACKGROUND & KEY ISSUES	
<p>The world is significantly off track in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with only 15% of the SDG targets on track<sup>1</sup>. During the SDG Summit in September 2023, the United Nations Secretary-General said the SDGs need a global rescue plan. He stressed that urgent transformative action is needed on hunger, helping countries transform food systems, energy, a digital revolution to close the digital divide between countries, an end to the war on nature, quality education, decent work and social protection for all, whilst ensuring that gender equality is fundamental across the goals.</p> <p>The aforementioned priorities are echoed at the continental level in Africa, where the SDGs need a tailor-made rescue plan specific to the priorities and needs of Africa. It is, therefore, imperative that this plan should be inclusive, innovative, transformative, nimble and effective to achieve the SDGs by 2030.</p> <p>A pathway to achieving these priorities can be found in the Political Declaration of the 2023 SDG Summit<sup>2</sup> and the vision of the United Nations Secretary-General outlined in <a href="#">Our Common Agenda</a>, which aims to turbocharge action on SDG progress in ten priority areas, one of which is <b><i>"Harnessing Science, Technology and Innovation with a greater focus on digital transformation for Sustainable Development"</i></b>. Our Common Agenda also proposes a Summit of the Future with a technology track leading to a Global Digital Compact.</p>	

<sup>1</sup> United Nations. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023

<sup>2</sup> A/RES/78/1

According to a report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)<sup>3</sup>, Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies by 2030 could increase the global economy by \$15.7 trillion of which the share of Africa is estimated at \$1.3 trillion surpassing by far Africa's share of FDI and IFFs put together and representing a third of Africa's GDP, which stood at \$3.1 trillion in 2023. AI could undoubtedly be a significant boon for Africa, including through bridging the financial gap to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa.

AI technologies, including intelligent machines such as manufacturing robots, health care management, telemedicine, robotics in surgery, powered diagnostics and imaging, autonomous cars, smart assistants like Apple digital assistant Siri, finance-cash app, agricultural drones and smart grids, are increasingly becoming a significant part of the fourth industrial revolution and hence a leap in advancing Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) and digital transformation for sustainable development<sup>4</sup>.

The African population is expected to reach 2.5 billion<sup>5</sup> in 2050. This change in demographics will come with an equivalent increase in demand for food and basic social services with a huge impact on youth who will make up most of the population, more than 60%, hence youth solutions in terms of addressing food demands and an increase in the demand for basic social services is key.

It is therefore imperative that Africa capitalizes on AI and the significant opportunities it presents to meet these demands, to increase productivity, spur and sustain structural transformation, and bridge the digital divide, all of which are key to achieving sustainable development on the continent.

Africa is making strides towards anchoring AI in the sustainable development paradigm in the continent. The first Artificial Intelligence Research Centre in Africa has been established by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UN ECA) in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo<sup>6</sup> and universities across the continent are also exploring AI's possibilities.

The United Nations Secretary-General constituted a high-level Advisory Body to advise on globally coordinated AI governance to harness Artificial Intelligence for Humanity and at the same time mitigate its risks, challenges, and uncertainties<sup>7</sup>.

At the continental level, the African Union crafted in 2021 the AI for Africa blueprint in collaboration with SmartAfrica. The African Union Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights adopted Resolution 473 in 2021<sup>8</sup>, urging national governments, the AU and other forums to collaborate in developing legal and ethical frameworks for governing AI and emerging technologies.

At the regional level, the Economic Commission for West African States (ECOWAS) adopted 2010 supplementary Act on personal data protection<sup>9</sup> which is binding to Member States. Several Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have produced non-binding instruments related to AI such as the East

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<sup>3</sup> PwC Report, Sizing the Price, 2017

<sup>4</sup> Agenda 2063, the Africa we want (Continental developmental, blueprint) and Agenda 2030 for Sustainable development (Global development blueprint).

<sup>5</sup> McKinsey Global Institute: Reimagining economic growth in Africa: Turning diversity into opportunity. June 5, 2023 Report.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.uneca.org/fr/node/7975>,

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/ai-advisory-body> .

<sup>8</sup> ACHPR/Res. 473 (EXT.OS/ XXXI) 2021

<sup>9</sup> ECOWAS Supplementary Act A/SA.1/01/10 on Personal Data Protection, adopted on 16 February 2010

African Community<sup>10</sup> (EAC) draft EAC legal framework for cyber laws and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Model law on data protection in 2021<sup>11</sup>.

It is imperative to link the potential of AI to support the attainment of the SDGs with emphasis on the SDGs under review during the 2024 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and the ECOSOC Youth Forum - **SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17**.

#### AI 4 SDGs in Africa

**SDG 1- No Poverty, SDG17- Partnerships:** Artificial Intelligence could support ending poverty by boosting innovation, enhancing partnerships and technology transfer, promoting Intellectual Property Rights in Africa, generating employment and fostering wealth creation. AI in Africa will be anchored in the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) which represents a 1.3 billion consumer market<sup>12</sup>, an estimated \$450 billion income increase by 2035 due to the expected growth of intra-African trade and partnerships amongst Africans by 40% and could lift 50 million people out of extreme poverty<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, pairing AI and the AfCFTA could be the winning formula and the cornerstone to structural transformation and accelerated sustainable development on the continent. This winning combination could improve the innovation ecosystem, boosting industrialization, employment, wealth creation, economic growth, human development, ending poverty and achieving sustainable development.

**SDG 2 Zero Hunger:** AI could support the attainment of ending hunger by boosting and increasing agricultural yield and productivity. Agriculture represents 32% of Africa's GDP, and employs 70% of its labour force<sup>14</sup>. However, farmers encounter numerous challenges such as pests, diseases, drought, and inadequate scientific information about crop types, planting, and harvesting which in turn stymies agricultural growth, output and productivity resulting in low harvests and food insecurity. This resulted in an estimated 140 million people in Africa facing acute food insecurity<sup>15</sup> in 2022. This is worsened by biological disasters in Africa, such as locust infestations causing losses to crops and livelihoods amounting to \$30 billion<sup>16</sup>, and throwing 13 million more people into hunger<sup>17</sup>. These disasters have been most prominent in the Horn of Africa where 46 million<sup>18</sup> people are acutely food insecure and 11.6 million internally displaced. AI, such as climate smart technologies in the Agricultural sector could significantly mitigate challenges in the agricultural sector including biological disasters by AI powered early warning systems that predict crop and livestock diseases and alert farmers on time as well as provide affordable, accessible and effective solutions. Predicting weather patterns that support planting and harvesting decisions could also result in higher yield and increased productivity. A sterling example of the benefits of AI intervention in the agricultural sector to increase productivity, cut losses, increase income and achieve sustainable development is "Nuru", an AI powered app that helps diagnose cassava plant disease

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<sup>10</sup> <http://repository.eac.int:8080/bitstream/handle/11671/1815/EAC%20Framework%20for%20Cyberlaws.pdf?seq>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Projects/ITU-EC-ACP/HIPSSA/Documents/FINAL%20DOCUMENTS/FINAL%20DOCS%20ENGLISH/sadc\\_model\\_law\\_data\\_protection.pdf](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Projects/ITU-EC-ACP/HIPSSA/Documents/FINAL%20DOCUMENTS/FINAL%20DOCS%20ENGLISH/sadc_model_law_data_protection.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> World Bank: African Continental Free Trade Area, July 27,2020

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group

<sup>14</sup> UN OSAA Report 2023, Solving paradoxes of Africa's development. White and Case LLP, July 2023.

<sup>15</sup> 2022 Global report on Food Crises.

<sup>16</sup> World Bank Group and the locust crisis

<sup>17</sup> The World Bank Group and the locust crisis.

<sup>18</sup> WHO situation report: 4, July 2023

which is a staple in rural Tanzania and a source of food for an estimated 500 million people. “Nuru” is accessible because it can be used by farmers on their mobile devices without internet connection and keeps farmers informed by identifying, managing and providing solutions to cassava diseases (<https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/Nuru-becomes-African-farmers-newest-ally-against-Fall-Armymorm/en>). In this regard, AI could support the attainment of ending hunger by boosting and increasing agricultural yield and productivity, with a particular focus on engaging and empowering youth. Youth-led initiatives leveraging AI technologies, such as climate-smart solutions in agriculture, hold great potential to address these challenges. By involving youth in agricultural innovation and technology, Africa can not only address immediate food security challenges but also foster sustainable development and empower the next generation of African farmers and entrepreneurs.

**SDG 3 Health:** The Sustainable Development Goal 3 on health and well-being remains significantly off-track on the continent. The World Health Organization benchmark recommendation of 23 healthcare workers per 10,000 people has been met by only two countries on the continent<sup>19</sup>, leaving behind millions in need of basic healthcare services. Artificial Intelligence solutions<sup>20</sup> including telemedicine could be an answer to the crippling health care shortage on the continent with mobile phone applications providing remote diagnoses, information processing, decision making and treatment recommendations. These apps can also shorten the waiting time, reduce the travel costs and speed up the treatment time, especially for populations in remote areas. Potentially, AI could save millions of lives. Young people could play a vital role in leveraging AI technologies to address healthcare gaps in Africa, thus demonstrating strong youth participation and leadership in healthcare innovation.

**SDG 7 -Affordable and Clean Energy and SDG 13- Climate Action:** Africa suffers considerable and acute energy shortage and an often-unreliable power supply. An estimated number of 600 million or 43% of the African population lack access to electricity<sup>21</sup>. Africa therefore experiences the most acute form of energy poverty in the world. This disrupts businesses and economic activity paralyzing entire sectors including manufacturing and fisheries which depend on reliable electricity to keep fisheries products frozen for export and to move them to markets. Unreliable energy supply may destroy entire stocks of fish and fisheries products, as well as most agricultural produce that require refrigeration. Unreliable energy supply also have life threatening and detrimental effects on the health care sector. Integrating Artificial Intelligence in smart energy solutions will solve some of the energy shortages by incorporating smart grids, AI-powered renewable energy sources to generate affordable, accessible and climate smart energy sources and electricity to Africans.

**SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions:** AI is being used by judicial administrations to analyze massive amounts of legal data to identify precedents, support judicial administrations streamline judicial processes, support inclusive peace processes by analyzing and providing relevant data. AI technologies can facilitate peacebuilding efforts by analyzing conflict related data identifying patterns and supporting dialogue and reconciliation process. AI technologies may strengthen institutional capacity by improving governance structures, enhancing efficiency and promoting accountability within public institutions as well as support data-driven decision-making and improve public service delivery.

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<sup>19</sup> South Africa and Mauritius

<sup>20</sup> IBM has pioneered a machine learning system to automate and shorten the processing and reporting time of cancer diagnosis from four to two years, providing valuable information for the South African government to make decisions in a timely and informed manner and formulate lifesaving health policies.

<sup>21</sup> Africa Energy Outlook 2022

**Challenges:** AI is human-made, and human trained, and inherits the interests, objectives and biases of its creators. Governments should be very mindful that decision making is made by humans and that AI does not violate the rights and freedoms of people and does not discriminate and further challenge the resilience of already vulnerable populations. Africa needs to regulate the use of AI in tandem with its legal instruments and developmental aspirations in such a manner that AI will be used as a tool and not as a weapon to harm and attack a person or groups of people.

## OBJECTIVES OF SESSION

Overarchingly, the ECOSOC Youth Forum, Africa Session will provide an inclusive and interactive platform to deepen discussions among Africa's Youth, policy and decision makers on the utilization of AI technologies to acceleration of SDG implementation in Africa, addressing the SDGs under review by the 2024 HLPF and the ECOSOC Youth Forum. It will examine closely how AI can work for African Priorities articulated in the Agenda 2063 and the SDGs including on poverty and hunger, health, clean and affordable energy, climate action, peace, justice and strong institutions, and partnerships for the Goals. It will highlight forward looking, practical, innovative, transformative, actionable commitments and policy recommendations. These policy recommendations will inform the statement of the President of ECOSOC at the closing of the 2024 ECOSOC Youth Forum, the 2024 HLPF, the 2024 Summit of the Future and the 2024 UNGA and beyond.

The specific objectives are to:

- Facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration among stakeholders to explore the potential of AI in addressing key challenges and promoting sustainable development in Africa, with a specific focus on engaging youth-led initiatives and fostering youth participation in AI innovation hubs and research networks.
- Provide a timely opportunity for the forum to raise regional and global awareness on the benefits and challenges of AI for Africa's sustainable development, ensuring that youth perspectives and voices are prominently featured in discussions and presentations and that youth-led initiatives are showcased as examples of AI innovation in Africa.
- Provide policy recommendations on the use of AI in the agriculture, health and energy sectors, climate action, SDG 16 and resilient partnerships to end poverty and attain the SDGs, emphasizing the importance of involving youth in the policymaking process and ensuring that policies reflect the needs and aspirations of young people in Africa.
- Increase awareness about the urgent need to regulate the use of AI globally and in Africa to ensure that its usage is people-centred and human rights-based and that the continent plays an active role in the negotiations towards the establishment of the global frameworks being built around the responsible usage of AI.
- Deepen the understanding of developing and deploying responsible AI solutions for Africa's agriculture and food systems to end hunger and achieve the SDGs.

## OVERALL FORMAT/STRUCTURE

The 2024 ECOSOC Youth Forum Africa Session will be organized as an in-person event along a virtual platform on **17 April 2024 from 11:00am to 12:45pm New York Time**. It will be organized by UN-OSAA, UNECA, ILO and UNDP, in partnership with the African Union Commission. To ensure the participation of youth from Africa, there will be a virtual component.

The session will be moderated by a young African. The session participants will include United Nations System representatives, government officials, African Youth leaders, representatives from the African Union Commission, African regional institutions, bilateral and multilateral partners, Think Tanks, women associations, members of the civil society, the private sector, academia, and the media. The moderator will ensure that the session is interactive and inclusive and leads to practical, innovative, transformative, actionable commitments and policy recommendations. These policy recommendations will inform the statement of the President of ECOSOC at the conclusion of the ECOSOC Youth Forum, the 2024HLPF, the 2024 Summit of the Future and the 2024 UNGA and beyond.

The moderator will start the session off with an introductory statement and state its objectives. This will be followed by introductory statements from the President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council and the Special Adviser of the United Nations Secretary-General on Africa, a prominent world leader and prominent Youth Leader. The moderator will then invite panellists and participants to respond to prepared questions. This will be followed by an interactive session. The session will conclude with practical action points to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs under review, with a focus on the roles of and benefits for African young people. There will be simultaneous interpretation in English and French. Registration will be required.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- Building on the experience of Africa's Youth innovation during Covid 19, what are some of the concrete actions that African Youth can take to enrich and capitalize on the AI and Innovation ecosystem in Africa?
- How can responsible AI be developed and deployed in a manner which reinforces the agency of African Youth and decision makers in key sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, education, and governance?
- How can African Youth and decision makers use AI to address African priorities and reverse the negative and devastating effects of climate change, promote agricultural productivity, food security, health care, energy and create jobs for sustainable development?
- Within the context of the AfCFTA, how can AI be enabled to enhance a free trade area to accelerate intra-African trade, boost Africa's global trading and support ending poverty?
- How can lawmakers regulate the use of AI to limit or eliminate biases, respect human rights and enable the safe and responsible use of AI for sustainable development?
- How can AI technologies be leveraged to enhance peace and security efforts in Africa, including conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and preventing violent extremism, while ensuring respect for human rights?
- How can AI technologies be deployed to address SDG 17 on partnerships?

### **NAMES AND TITLES OF SESSION SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR(S)**

1. Opening Remarks, Ms. Cristina Duarte, Under Secretary General, United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, UN OSAA and Special Adviser on Africa.
2. Introductory remarks by H.E. Ms. Paula Narvaez, Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations and President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council

3. Mr. Youssou N'Dour, International, world-renowned musician and Super star and Former Minister of Tourism and Culture of the Republic Senegal. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youssou\\_N%27Dour](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youssou_N%27Dour).
4. Mr. Sadio Mané, International Football player and World-Renowned Soccer Player English premier league winner, European Champions League winner, African Cup of Nations winner,) . [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadio\\_Man%C3%A9](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadio_Man%C3%A9).
5. African Youth leader- From the Youth Consultation on SDGs in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
6. Moderator: Ms. Chido Mpemba, African union Youth Envoy.
7. Ms. Alice Mukashyaka, co-founder starlight, Rwandan ED-Tech Social Enterprise.
8. Claude Mbuyi Kabamba, Executive Secretary of the National Youth Council of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

## OVERVIEW OF PREPARATORY EVENT/CONSULTATION

In the lead up to the 2024 ECOSOC Youth Forum, Africa Session, a preparatory youth consultation on the SDGs under review has been organized as a building block leading up to the 2024 ECOSOC Youth Forum, Africa session. The report and key messages, conclusions and resolutions from the preparatory consultation will feed into the ECOSOC Youth Forum, Africa session and the ECOSOC Youth Forum. A youth leader will provide a summary of the report during the Africa session. The preparatory youth consultation will take place virtually on **Thursday 28 March at 2:30 PM Addis Ababa time** with the participation of more than a **100 individuals/young people**, in addition to youth specialists from other regional UN agency offices.

The youth consultation was conducted in collaboration with UNDP Youth Community of Practice consisting of the youth focal points in the 46 UNDP Country Offices in Africa, the 46 UNDP Youth Focal Points Regional Bureau for Africa, African Union Commission, African Youth Parliament, Youth leaders, Youth entrepreneurs and other youth stakeholders. Additionally, UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa youth focal points appointed two participants from each of the 46 African countries. One participant represented an active youth-led or youth-focused organization, and the other a young participant, ensuring inclusivity including gender balance, rural/urban balance, indigenous young people, as well as young people with disabilities. This inclusive approach will ensure diverse perspectives and that the consultation reflects the needs and priorities of youth from across Africa.

The African Youth consultation meeting addressed simultaneously the Theme of the 2024 ECOSOC Youth Forum: **“Youth shaping sustainable and innovative solutions: Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of crises”**, the theme for the 2024 ECOSOC Youth Forum Africa Session **“African Youth Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Sustainable Development in Africa”** and the SDGs under review by the High-Level Political Forum 2024 (1, 2,13,16,17).