



Africa Innovation Policy Manifesto

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0. We, innovation community leaders and entrepreneurs across Africa, come united in diversity to articulate and share our views and recommendations for policies that we believe will accelerate digital transformation and contribute to a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable development of our economies and societies.¹ Youth, creatives, entrepreneurs and innovation communities are central to solution building, policymaking and lasting change. And, we are ready and willing to strategically engage with policymakers to further this agenda.

I. VISION, VALUES & PRINCIPLES

- 1.0 Our vision** is to realize an *equitable, inclusive and sustainable Africa* by co-creating policies that can translate to tangible actions and meaningful impact. This vision will be realized by embracing a strong cultural identity, ethics, and **shared values**.
- 1.1 Ubuntu: Interconnectedness & Collaboration** - We believe in our collective responsibility and our collective force to influence global innovation. Shared resources have the potential to create different kinds of value rooted in collective intelligence.
- 1.2 Kwaniso: Inclusive Innovation** - We value an inclusive and diversified representation of communities and cultures from the continent while leveraging innovation as a tool for sustainable economic development:
- 1.3 Obala: Transparency** - We prioritize respect and transparency in fostering trust, unity, constructive reforms, and safe spaces of expression on the continent.
- 1.4 Mandenka: Commitment and Dedication** - We are committed to our societies and dedicated to being models of civic engagement to build a sustainable economy.
- 1.5 Harambee: Unity** - We value empathy and coming together to understand community challenges, choices, and culture.
- 1.6 Umlando: Responsibility and Accountability** - We believe development and innovation are only valuable when they are driven by social and environmental sustainability.
- 1.7 Agaciro: Self-Reliance** - We value initiatives and policies for African communities by African communities through bottom-up approaches.
- 1.8** These values when applied to public policy lead to a generalizable set of best-practice public **policy principles**. Good public policy is:
- 1.9 Inclusive & People-Centric**
- 1.9.1.** Engages the people who are affected by the respective policies in all steps of policy making through inclusive and deliberative stakeholder engagement processes;
 - 1.9.2.** Is based on a consensual agenda setting;
 - 1.9.3.** Is open, transparent, accessible, and devoid of all forms of institutional and individual corruption;
 - 1.9.4.** Establishes partnerships between the public and the national private sector in its consultation phase to ensure that the policy is addressing a relevant need.

¹ This is following consideration of the 2063 African Union Agenda rooted in Pan Africanism and African Renaissance.



- 1.9.5. Adopts conflict management strategies to best resolve disputes between varying interests;
- 1.9.6. Takes into consideration the resources and infrastructure available in the countries, communities and societies of its intended implementation.

1.10. Understandable & Measurable

- 1.10.1. Recognizes the need for people to understand how public policies affect them and therefore is simple, and accompanied by user manuals
- 1.10.2. Supports the capacity for bottom-up participation through education and knowledge transfer around the content of the policy.
- 1.10.3. Translates with ease across cultural and linguistic differences, and links concepts with tangible outcomes and measurable impacts;
- 1.10.4. Leverages open innovation processes and technology to aggregate concepts and ideas in its formulation;

1.11. Relevant & Revisable

- 1.11.1. Consistently maps the ecosystem that it exists to serve to be continuously relevant;
- 1.11.2. Is revisable and defines the need for evaluation, continuous improvement and reform of existing policies, therefore, it will have the ability to survive in complex systems and contexts.

1.12. We, innovation community leaders, stand ready to work together with governments, regional bodies, civil society, our peers in the i4policy alliance and other partners to implement the following recommendations.

II. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

2. INFRASTRUCTURE

2.0 Robust Infrastructure is critical for flourishing innovation ecosystems, access to basic services, and global competitiveness to drive entrepreneurship and catalyze the African digital society of



tomorrow. We believe that access to the internet is a human right, and encourage governments to achieve universal access to broadband internet by 2025.

We recommend :

- 2.1.** Establishing decisive national fiscal spending targets through a Pan-African agreement to invest in integrated ICT infrastructure to provide universal access to broadband access by 2025;
- 2.2.** Endorsing the African Declaration of Internet Rights and Freedoms and its use to develop a continental definition of human rights applied to the internet;
- 2.3.** Accelerating roll-out of affordable broadband internet for government agencies, local governments, universities and public multidisciplinary spaces, such as innovation hubs;
- 2.4.** Developing and adopting a regional pact on digital citizenship;
- 2.5.** Mapping existing regulations, laws, and institutions to identify barriers to the development of ICT infrastructure and Africa's digital transformation;
- 2.6.** Adopting a "dig once" approach, requiring fibre cables to be laid alongside any public civil engineering project;
- 2.7.** Establishing an Advisory Council on PPPs for African digital transformation to foster better-tailored policies;
- 2.8.** Establishing a pan-African cooperation to promote and eventually mandate infrastructure sharing, as a strategic mechanism to produce economies of scale to reduce the overall cost of infrastructure development and ensure rural communities can be reached;
- 2.9.** Promoting competition between mobile network operators by:
 - 2.9.1.** Encouraging the creation of mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs): Unlike MNOs, virtual operators do not own any physical infrastructure as they share the unused/excess capacity of traditional network operators. As firms compete for market share, the cost of the internet can fall, diversity in service provision increases for the consumer and results in improved access;
 - 2.9.2.** Introducing number portability to increase market competition;
- 2.10.** Creating a Pan-African Cybersecurity Council to influence policies on African digital defense, data protection, etc;
- 2.11.** Promoting the creation of local infrastructure to reduce the cost of access: hosting content locally significantly reduces the time and cost of content delivery, in turn making it more accessible for the local community. The lack of local infrastructure in African countries, such as data centers, routers, servers, content delivery networks (CDNs) and Internet Exchange Points is one of the key challenges the Internet Society identifies as crucial to drive wider and deeper internet usage. This will allow optimizing the usage of international broadband resources by maintaining the traffic locally;
- 2.12.** Developing local infrastructures to attain digital sovereignty: at the core of digital sovereignty is users' authority over personal data. The rule of law that applies to data is that of the country where data is stored (e.g. the General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR, of the European Union, which states that data should not leave the EU). With the rapid development of AI, data holds growing economic value, and we are running the risk of being at the mercy of external powers and losing our sovereignty if we do not build infrastructures to locally store and share our data;
- 2.13.** Implementing policies and regulations to promote open access to landing stations and international capacity: open access to landing stations and international capacity can reduce prices. Huge differences among countries in the price per unit of bandwidth are often

explained by variations in the wholesale market competition and bottlenecks in the supply of international bandwidth, especially in landlocked countries. To address these problems, governments need to promote open access to international gateways and greater competition in the supply of international bandwidth, with targeted interventions to stimulate the market as necessary.

3. EDUCATION AND R&D

3.0 *We believe that education is the most critical factor to accelerating innovation and inclusive socio-economic and digital transformation. Africa can and should lead the world by developing education materials fit for the 21st century, emphasizing leadership, emotional intelligence and resilience, communication, collaboration, experimentation, digital and financial literacy, software skills and critical thinking through do-it-yourself, hands-on learning approaches and e-learning tools.*

We recommend:

3.1. Digital citizenship skills

- 3.1.1.** Developing curricula on accessing and synthesizing diverse information from the internet, and forming opinions;
- 3.1.2.** Educating internet users about the influence of algorithms to make personalization choices, and the positive and negative ways that other internet users and information can influence their emotions and perspectives;
- 3.1.3.** Informing citizens about decisions related to personal data collection and storage, and their associated rights and choices;

3.2. Investments in education and R&D

- 3.2.1.** Apportioning a percentage of national fiscal budgets to various R&D and Innovation education, such as our national commitments to invest 1% of GDP in R&D;
- 3.2.2.** Establishing Innovation Funds, for example, by allocating a percentage of Universal Services Funds towards indigenous curriculum design and R&D;

3.3. Collaboration & partnerships

- 3.3.1.** Establishing partnerships between government labs, universities, regulatory bodies, innovation bodies and the private sector;
- 3.3.2.** Supporting multidisciplinary research;
- 3.3.3.** Supporting knowledge transfer through i) exchange programs between hubs and research centres (for example) establishing pan-african talent visa for highly skilled researchers, innovators, and startups.); ii) incentivising diaspora to set up research labs locally and iii) incentivising mentorship/role model programs (for example entrepreneurs participating in the program could benefit from some advantages related to tax);

3.4. Curriculum co-creation and redesign

- 3.4.1.** Developing strategic partnerships with different ecosystem players to co-create curricula at all levels of learning by i) redefining learning techniques in our schools at primary, secondary and tertiary levels promoting collaboration and co-creation; ii) embedding a culture of creativity in schools through specific programs to develop soft skills and creative mindsets (e.g. through community service); iii) embedding entrepreneurship in higher education curricula; iv) introducing civic education from primary school level;
- 3.4.2.** Continuing to emphasize Arts, Culture and Humanities, which remain just as important to empowering citizens to drive the continent's digital transformation, as the current emphasis on STEM;
- 3.4.3.** Establishing and supporting internship programs within start-ups to close the industry skills gap;
- 3.4.4.** Involving the private sector to establish curricula and certification schemes;
- 3.4.5.** Encouraging the private sector to put in place adequate certifying trainings available to skilled workers to meet their needs and make the unemployed youth fit for purpose;

3.5. Diversity and inclusion

- 3.5.1.** Encouraging diversity and inclusion in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) education, particularly supporting women, people living with disabilities, rural communities, migrants, refugees, internally displaced people, and marginalized groups;

3.6. Access to technology platforms and tools

- 3.6.1.** Promoting a Pan-African digital platform for government transparency, accountability and sharing of best practice;
- 3.6.2.** Promoting, through partnerships, the creation and adoption of pan-African virtual and open learning platforms (e.g MOOCs) for ease of access, affordability and increased reach, whereby Africans are encouraged to share their knowledge and in-house built content;
- 3.6.3.** Promote digital and business skills training programs targeting policymakers as well as start-ups and SMEs through innovation hubs;

3.7. Infrastructure development and sharing

- 3.7.1.** Incentivizing the private sector to develop digital infrastructure, such as internet, hardware and digital facilities for social development;
- 3.7.2.** Maximizing the use of limited resources through strategic investments and sharing of educational resources between innovation hubs, schools and universities;

3.8. Standards

- 3.8.1.** Establishing research assessment frameworks and allocate funds according to the quality of research output.

4. MULTIDISCIPLINARY PUBLIC SPACES

4.0 *Multidisciplinary public spaces embody the values of the internet in physical, offline space. These spaces host diverse communities, provide educational and matchmaking services, facilitate knowledge sharing and the exchange of ideas and perspectives, and act as catalysts for social, economic and technological innovation. Multidisciplinary public spaces include, but are not limited to, libraries, parks, museums, performing arts venues, sports arenas, coworking spaces and business incubators.*

We recommend:

- 4.1.** Partnering with credible and trusted, local, grassroots and community-based groups and organizations, such as hubs and labs, in the management and curation of activities of multidisciplinary spaces;
- 4.2.** Involving partners in the design, redesign or co-design of multidisciplinary public spaces from conceptualization;
- 4.3.** Investing in public spaces, and removing restrictions for diverse citizens to gather and discuss socially and commercially relevant issues and to co-design solutions;
- 4.4.** Promoting public spaces as a way to attract more individuals or groups willing to engage in inclusive and sustainable social and economic development; and,
- 4.5.** Creating an online, public and easily accessible registry of all state-owned spaces, including spaces that are under-utilized and unutilized, and should make these spaces available for community-based groups.

5. EASE OF DOING BUSINESS

5.0 *We believe that Governments should make it easier to set up, operate, grow and exit a business in order to unlock the potential of innovators to contribute to Africa's sustainable development*

We recommend:

- 5.1.** Eliminating minimum capital requirements to register a business;
- 5.2.** Reducing registration fees, administrative requirements and processing times;
- 5.3.** Building digitized platforms and processes for business registration, operations and closure, prioritizing innovative startups and small businesses to legally register and operate immediately;
- 5.4.** Providing business with temporary licenses for the testing phase, depending on the sector's regulations they operate in;
- 5.5.** Licensing businesses based on their operational capacity, while ensuring that licenses can be easily upgraded;
- 5.6.** Defining clear sectoral operating requirements for businesses;
- 5.7.** Easing insolvency for early-stage businesses by providing clear and up-front information during the registration phase;
- 5.8.** Encouraging voluntary insolvency by minimizing penalties and by providing options based on the stage and operational size of the business;
- 5.9.** Providing early-stage businesses with legal advice to support compliance;
- 5.10.** Providing clear information on taxation options and establishing smart taxation mechanisms; and,



- 5.11.** Establishing new public-private dialogue forums with high-growth entrepreneurs and innovation hubs.

6. FINANCE FOR INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

6.0 *A wide range of stakeholders have an important role to play in addressing financial challenges impeding innovation. It is critical that governments collaborate with entrepreneurs, corporates, multinationals, financial institutions, investors, and innovation hubs to reduce uncertainty and risks associated with financing innovators and entrepreneurs.*

We recommend:

- 6.1.** Establishing incentives for angel investors, private equity, venture capital, corporates, and traditional financial institutions to expand working capital and investment capital for startups;
- 6.2.** Creating a fund-of-funds targeting startups and small businesses, supported by sovereign wealth funds and pension funds, to invest in startups locally;
- 6.3.** Establish funding mechanisms for community innovation hubs;
- 6.4.** Incentivizing financial institutions to provide products for startups and SMEs that take into account maintenance fees, credit accessibility thought finding new forms of credit and viability scoring;
- 6.5.** Supporting organizations and institutions that provide financial training and mentoring to entrepreneurs, such as community innovation hubs.
- 6.6.** Designing, through multi-stakeholder collaboration, certified trainings (licenses) to provide entrepreneurs with clear guidance on accessing grants, venture capital, private equity funds, loans, and government innovation and SME funds;
- 6.7.** Investing in early-stage enterprise acceleration through open innovation;
- 6.8.** Providing lower interest rates for high-growth potential entrepreneurs in priority job-creating sectors;
- 6.9.** Providing incentives, training, and additional support for angel investors to unlock funding for seed-stage and pre-seed stage startups in the product development phase;
- 6.10.** Broadening M&E metrics to assess and prioritize social and environmental impact;
- 6.11.** Creating shorter and simpler exit strategies, as compared to the existing ones;
- 6.12.** Governments, supporters and entrepreneurs to track and report innovation and entrepreneurship fundraising to encourage the sharing of success stories and best practices; and,
- 6.13.** Creating national platforms acting as one-stop-shops for information on i) news on administration and legislation (governments), ii) training and mentorship opportunities (supporters, governments), iii) grants and finance opportunities (supporters, governments), iv) application for Entrepreneurship Risk Licence (governments, supporters);

7. LOCAL AND PAN-AFRICAN CULTURES, PRODUCTS AND MARKETS

7.0 *We believe that our local cultures, products, and markets deserve to be promoted, protected and empowered. Moreover, small and medium-sized enterprises represent the vast majority of the private companies and therefore are a paramount source of employment. They are also*

crucial to the development of national locally-owned economies in Africa. It is, therefore, critical that public policies ensure the promotion, protection, and empowerment of local cultures, products, markets, and SMEs.

We recommend:

7.1. Forming a unified African market

- 7.1.1. Adopting, ratifying and implementing the African Continental Free Trade Agreement to facilitate free mobility of people, goods, and services;
- 7.1.2. Creating a single digital market, facilitating digital integration by removing roaming charges and any other barrier to digital trade and financial transactions;
- 7.1.3. Increasing access to relevant information, such as national and cross-border regulatory compliance by, for instance, making it available online. Removing non-tariff barriers on intra-African trade;
- 7.1.4. Easing the mobility of people through the creation of an African Passport;
- 7.1.5. Co-creating a standard set of guidelines for the branding of African products with high standards of ethics applied in the whole product lifecycle;
- 7.1.6. Establishing and enforcing clear cross-border investment laws.

7.2. Promoting and protecting cultures, products, and technical know-how

- 7.2.1. Encouraging the consumption of local products at the national and continental level through awareness campaigns or control over non-african products competing with local production;
- 7.2.2. Prioritizing national and continental products and services in public procurement;
- 7.2.3. Providing certification and legal protection for Made in Africa products;

7.3. Empowering and supporting local produce

- 7.3.1. Promoting and supporting the transformation and manufacturing of local products;
- 7.3.2. Promoting the exchange of knowledge amongst stakeholders at a regional and continental level, e.g. by promoting the creation of different clusters of expertise in different regions of the continent to encourage collaboration.
- 7.3.3. Increase the competitiveness of local companies with international brands and products through subsidies, protection or incentives;
- 7.3.4. Establishing innovation-for-procurement mechanisms and easing access for entrepreneurs and innovation hubs to public tenders;
- 7.3.5. Promoting research on economic diversification to support local markets in the identification of new opportunities; and,
- 7.3.6. Supporting innovation by making the government a first customer through competitions to address challenges in public institutions/bodies.

8. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

8.0 *Intellectual Property Rights processes are costly and time-consuming, lacking readability and enforcement. Registration of brands, trademarks, and inventions - from both the industrial and creative-sector - takes up to a year or more for some countries, whilst government*



enforcement agencies are lax on counterfeiters and infringers of Intellectual Property Rights. We believe open source standards built on the principles of openness, transparency, and consensus lay the grounds for innovation, growth and fair competition

We recommend:

- 8.1.** The African Union to adopt a joint IP policy that drives innovation with high standards of ethics and fairness in competition, in particular, to protect indigenous innovators and their products;
- 8.2.** All African governments to have a roadmap to improve, adopt and enforce a unified IP regime, African Organization of Intellectual Property (OAPI);
- 8.3.** Implementing IP regimes that simplify and reduce the cost of registration;
- 8.4.** Spending public funds from African governments only on public code (Open source software) or indigenous code (software developed by African developers), taking into consideration the long-term maintenance costs of investment;
- 8.5.** Enabling tech-based businesses to have access to relevant open data;
- 8.6.** Making available public data for research purposes and for validating systems and products;
- 8.7.** Creating continent-wide database clusters to allow fast way to register a trademark, copyright and patenting a product;
- 8.8.** Ease the structuring of patenting processes for local entrepreneurs and cost reduction. As it stands we have really tough processes and cost for patenting in many countries;
- 8.9.** Adopting a uniform data privacy legislation to enforce security of Personal Data and engaging both the public and private sector in applying the highest standards of ethics in terms of transparency in personal data collection;
- 8.10.** Supporting the digital transformation and related change-management capacity within Governments with the recruitment of innovation professionals and the mandatory training of all public servants with the highest standards of ethics and service; and,
- 8.11.** Building capacity within the government to make the best use of open source solutions, and the open recruitment of technology professionals into government in order to establish skills and cultures for a more open challenge to suppliers about technology solutions.

9. TAXATION SYSTEM

- 9.0** *Recognizing that current tax regimes and administration are not conducive to innovation and business growth across the continent, we recommend a simplified digital tax registration and filing system under a government one-stop shop through e-filing and e-tax procedures. We believe that it is important to levy taxes based on the stage of the business, ranging from ideation to growth stage. This will stimulate innovation, the emergence of new industries, and R&D to increase socio-economic development.*

We recommend:

- 9.1.** Providing tax incentives, rebates, holidays and other forms of relief for investments, imports, hiring and capital gains tax to innovative companies, impact-focused firms, and for impactful Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives;
- 9.2.** Implementing proactive tax information campaigns to ensure adequate awareness and compliance amongst taxpayers;
- 9.3.** Designing penalties and fines that encourage and incentivize compliance rather than hampering business growth with overwhelming compliance costs;



- 9.3.1.** Penalizing new enterprises and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) less;
- 9.3.2.** Exploring alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, such as amnesty from penalties, staggered payment options for defaulters and rapid access facilities for arbitration to improve sustainability of businesses, re-startup and persistent innovation;
- 9.4.** Providing tax incentives for employing youth, such as providing tax exemptions for student internships and offering payroll tax subsidies for companies hiring first-time employees and other disadvantaged groups;
- 9.5.** Enacting stronger laws, regulations and oversight to stop illicit financial flows out of local markets and eradicate tax evasion; and,
- 9.6.** Treating all African-headquartered startups as indigenous startups in all African countries.