AUDA-NEPAD KNOWLEDGE SERIES: POST-COVID-19

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN AFRICA IN THE POST COVID-19 ERA: HOW TO ACCELERATE APPLICATION OF PRACTICAL DIGITAL SOLUTIONS AT SCALE WITH IMPACT ON JOBS AND LIVELIHOODS

ON THE MARGINS OF 75TH UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2020

8TH OCTOBER 2020, 1:00 – 2:45 PM (GMT) (15H00 - 16H45 SOUTH AFRICAN TIME)

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Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought and continues to bring about unprecedented disruptions to the global economy and threatens to undo socio-economic gains achieved by the African continent over the past two decades.

While emergency measures to curb the spread of the disease were required, they also triggered unintended impacts on trade, including on global and regional supply chains for essential goods such as medical supplies and food products. Restrictive border measures have aggravated intra-African trade and created multiple ripple effects to already strained food and agriculture systems.

In the global race for solutions, many countries are pushing the frontiers of scientific research and technologies of the 4th Industrial Revolution for prevention, control and management of COVID-19. From generating low-cost COVID-19 testing kits and 3D-printed ventilators to mobile tech banking to support small- and medium scale entrepreneurs, a whole new wave of African scientists, businesses and governments are leveraging innovation and technology to solve problems around access to healthcare, food, education and finance. In this way, the continent could capitalize on the opportunities presented by the 4th Industrial Revolution and usher in a decade for renewal after the Covid-19 pandemic.

African Member States have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, due to their high economic dependence on hospitality services, commodities trading, etc., which have virtually collapsed as a result of border closures and restrictions. The COVID-19 pandemic has created the perfect storm of overlapping, inter-alia, health, climate, food security, trade, education.

African countries are devising scenario planning with individual and collective actions, and, where necessary, with the international development community to reach a rapid and sustainable exit from the pandemic. To mitigate the collateral damages inflicted to the economic and to some extent to the social fabric of the continent, a selection of priorities that have enough commonalities across African member states have been identified. They are clustered in three categories: i) Intra-African Trade & Food Systems; ii) Health System; and iii} Education. Digital transformation will be useful transmission belt to linking the three priority-clusters. COVID-19 has indeed laid bare how prepared African member states should be for the digital post pandemic era.

4IR presents vast opportunities for African countries with digital transformation programmes underway. However, although new online tools have become available in the context of the pandemic, most government-to-individual transactions are still carried out in person. Furthermore, the pandemic has increased the digital divide for low income households, persons in remote and rural areas, and marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities.

As part of its contribution to address the challenges and opportunities in the post-COVID-19, the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD is convening a multi-stakeholder knowledge series to provide valuable insights and share scalable solutions on How Africa could capitalize from Digital Transformation to accelerate its recovery from COVID-19, leveraging the 4th Industrial Revolution.

This knowledge series is organized by AUDA-NEPAD in collaboration with the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), VODACOM Africa, the Universities of Stellenbosch and Cheikh Anta Diop, and the United Nations. It will be held on the margins of the 75th United Nations General Assembly.

Objectives

The objective of the Knowledge series is to discuss the challenges, opportunities and share lessons learned on how African member states are addressing COVID-19 and what governance capacities are needed to confront the crisis. In particular, the Knowledge series will address the critical role of 4IR in the post COVID-19 era and how technology partnerships (including public-public, public-private and the private to private sector) can be mobilized in Africa in the fight against the pandemic.

While COVID-19 has exposed weaknesses in Africa's ICT infrastructure, bringing services in some countries to near standstill, it has also galvanized renewed interest in the digital transformation agenda. 4IR presents vast opportunities for African countries with digital transformation programmes underway. However, although new online tools have become available in the context of the pandemic, most government-to-individual transactions are still carried out in person. Furthermore, the pandemic has increased the digital divide for low income households, persons in remote and rural areas, and marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities.

The knowledge series aims to draw on cross-cutting technologies and business model innovation to strengthen African member states' capabilities to benefit from digital transformation and address socio-economic development challenges and leverage opportunities spurred by COVID-19.

In collaboration with the African Union, Africa is strengthening its response to the COVID-19 pandemic through a "coordinated approach" to provide a resilient response to the next phase of the virus, including through leveraging digital government to increase access to public services and using technology partnerships to increase access to information and communication technologies (ICTs). Mitigating institutional disruptions while maintaining progress towards the Agenda 2063 and ensuring an effective response will require strong governance capacities, innovation, coherent policies, and a "robust digital architecture" to encourage digital transformation.

EXPECTED RESULTS

The knowledge series aims to strengthen governance capacity by enhancing integration, collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches as well as national to local coordination to fight against COVID-19, with a focus on digital transformation. The Knowledge series will result in a) capacity development follow-up activities based on the expressed needs by Member States attending the knowledge series; b) possible digital solutions portfolio; c) a mechanism for intra- and inter-national collective learning and peer support; and d) information sharing through the AUDA-NEPAD Africa Knowledge for Development Hub and other means.

KEY QUESTIONS DURING THE KNOWLEDGE SERIES

i. How can 4IR be prioritized in Africa and leveraged in the African context to better address COVID-19 and other similar pandemics/disasters? What tools can be used and how?
ii. What are some of the (new) drivers in the region for digital service delivery?
iii. What mechanisms are being used to engage local entrepreneurs and start-ups?
iv. What policies would be required to stimulate local solutions, rather than dependency on big multinational solutions?
v. How can African governments' capacities for digital transformation be harnessed, leveraging 4IR?
vi. What are some of the effective approaches or modalities for public-private partnerships in the area of digital transformation that are emerging prior to and during the COVID-19 outbreak?
vii. How can technology partnerships best be used to support and enhance the efficiency, usage and resilience of government services in Africa?
viii. What are some of the effective approaches or modalities for public-private partnerships in the area of digital transformation that are emerging prior to and during the COVID-19 outbreak?
ix. What could be government incentives, for instance tax reduction/waivers to drive local digital solutions?
x. How can technology partnerships best be used to support and enhance the efficiency, usage and resilience of government services in Africa? How can we upscale and replicate the success stories from Africa on innovation and transformative uses of 4IR technologies?
xi. What short-term and medium-term actions are needed for Africa achieve affordable access with the existing infrastructure base?
xii. What strategies and actions are needed for rapid upscaling of Africa's ICT infrastructure?

FORMAT OF THE KNOWLEDGE SERIES

The knowledge series will run for 2-1/2 hours. It will be conducted in English using video conferencing tools such as Zoom, Cisco WebEx and Live Facebook.

The recordings will be posted on the AUDA-NEPAD website after the conclusion of the knowledge series. The follow-up actions, including key recommendations and knowledge products, will be disseminated through the AUDA-NEPAD Africa knowledge for Development Hub and eLearning portal in the format of learning modules.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience of the Knowledge series includes government officials who are in charge of coordinating and leading the national efforts to fight the COVID-19, and government officials from the digital government and technology sectors, disaster management and health agencies, local government officials at the frontline, and fiscal and financial officers. The Knowledge series also intends to involve civil society organizations, the private sector, academia, health and quarantine experts, and regional/international organizations that are addressing digital transformation and the COVID-19 crisis in Africa.

AGENDA

Time (GMT)	
1:00-1:25 pm (approx. 25 mins)	Keynote: • Dr Ibrahim Mayaki, CEO AUDA-NEPAD • Cristina Duarte, Under-Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Africa to the United Nations Secretary-General
1:35-2:30 pm (approx. 60 mins) (7 mins. each)	The Critical Role of Digital Transformation in Africa in the Post COVID-19 Era: How to accelerate application of practical digital solutions at scale with impact on jobs and livelihoods Members of the panel: • Prof Yaye Kène-Gassama, Vice-Chancellor Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar and Chair of AU High-Level Panel on Emerging Technologies • Prof Edward K Kirumira, Director, Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) • Prof Fulufhelo Nelwamondo, Executive Cluster Manager of the CSIR's Next Generation Enterprises and Institutions • Derek O'Halloran, Member of the Executive Committee and Head of Shaping the Future of Digital Economy and New Value Creation, World Economic Forum • Jacques de Vos, CEO Mezzanine, Vodacom Africa • Brandon Paschal, Director of Innovation at LaunchLab, Stellenbosch
2:30-3:10 pm (45 mins)	Open Discussion/ Q&A • Panelists
3:10-3:15 pm (5 mins)	Closing Remarks • Wrap up by moderator