FUTURE OF GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

EXPLORING THE NEXUS BETWEEN GOVERNANCE AND TECHNOLOGY:
Assessing the Impact of Rapid Technological Advancements on Governance in Africa

CONCEPT NOTE
BACKGROUND

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is a voluntary self-monitoring instrument that fosters the adoption of policies, standards, and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development, and accelerated regional and continental economic integration. The APRM has evolved from simply reviewing member countries to supporting knowledge-intensive and innovative activities targeted at shaping the global digital governance frameworks and enhancing cooperation between global, regional, and national institutions. The significance of technology to the peer review process necessitated assigning the highest priority to mainstreaming technology in the mechanism’s core activities. This has augmented the need for new forms of policies to respond effectively to the challenges facing its member states and accord greater significance to the exchange of information and sharing of best practices in the areas of digital and data governance, artificial intelligence (AI), cybercrime, fintech, anti-corruption and illicit financial flow, counterterrorism, etc.

There are growing concerns about the potential disruptive changes that rapid advancements in technology may bring to governance, and, inversely, the impact that developments in global governance may have on technology. The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI), coupled with the emergence of complementary technologies such as nanotechnology and modern biotechnology, is swiftly reshaping the global landscape and steering humanity’s future trajectory, ushering in a host of intricate issues at the nexus of technical, ethical, political, legal, and economic domains. Concurrently, these technologies are blurring conventional boundaries between the physical, digital, and biological realms, resulting in profound impacts across various disciplines, economies, and industries. Moreover, they challenge established notions of human existence.

Technology has had a transformative impact on governance across the globe, from the ways in which governments communicate with citizens to the development of socio-technical constructs such as smart cities. However, this impact is not always positive, there are associated challenges and risks that are significant and must be addressed.

The recent global health crisis (Covid-19) and ever-changing realities, have profound ramifications for Africa’s developmental landscape and its interaction with the digital transformation. Simultaneously, the digital revolution has ushered in pivotal shifts in governance methodologies across the African continent. The impact of digitalization on Africa’s political systems and economies remains uneven, though new technologies offer compelling opportunities for social and economic growth. For most countries in Africa, the realities of inadequate infrastructure, low digital literacy skills, and other socioeconomic challenges make the adoption of digital technologies difficult.

Digital technologies in Africa have the dual potential of exacerbating existing inequalities while also offering opportunities for inclusive development. The complexity of African inequality spans various dimensions including gender, race, geography, and socio-economic background, extending beyond income to encompass disparities in education, healthcare, employment, and living conditions. These inequalities are further compounded by digital divides, which amplify existing disparities and hinder access for marginalized groups. Marginalized communities, particularly those in informal settlements and informal employment, face invisibility in national data systems, leading to their exclusion from policymaking and relief efforts. Gender disaggregated data is lacking, particularly concerning female informal workers, further exacerbating their invisibility in policy formulation. Additionally, African
youth, comprising a significant portion of the population, face high rates of unemployment and vulnerable employment, posing significant challenges, especially in the context of an increasingly digitized economy.

Amidst this rapid technological progress, numerous nations are strategically positioning themselves to harness the transformative potential of AI and other innovations for their national development objectives. Conversely, some countries face the risk of falling behind or even experiencing marginalization and penalties due to their passive role as consumers in the management and governance of big data, lacking the capacity to exert influence or participate in decision-making processes that affect them.

The APRM workshop on the nexus between governance and technology presents a distinctive opportunity for deliberation among African Member States to explore how they can harness synergies and collaboratively shape a unified agenda for utilizing technology for the collective benefit, underpinned by robust ethical principles and a commitment to human rights. Given the continent's vulnerability to data exploitation, limited public awareness of associated risks, and insufficient capacity to influence both technical advancements and global legal frameworks, this workshop will concentrate on assessing the political, social, cultural, economic, and ethical implications of technology within the region. Through this approach, experts, policymakers, civil societies, media, academia and financial partners will cultivate a shared understanding of the advantages, opportunities, and risks posed by technologies in Africa, emphasizing principles of inclusion, equality, ownership, and sustainability.

OBJECTIVES

This workshop aims to tackle the challenges posed by frontier technology on governance by developing strategies to leverage its benefits while mitigating associated risks. These objectives will be accomplished by leveraging insights gained from various activities.

The main aim of this workshop is for APRM to:

- Establish a multistakeholder platform to explore the different dimensions of the applications of technology on governance in Africa with a view of fostering cooperation and partnership for advocating ethical, equitable, inclusive, and transparent use of emerging technologies.
- Examine the intricate complexities surrounding technology utilization in critical sectors across Africa.
- Strengthen capacity among public officials, youth, women, and other marginalised groups at all levels of the system to combat the shortage of expertise in Africa.
- Deliberate on a cohesive approach for Africa’s policies, strategies, and capacity-building initiatives.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Establish a platform for networking and knowledge-sharing among policymakers, civil society, academics, and other identified key stakeholders to enable the development of a vibrant ecosystem for digital governance in Africa.
- Increase awareness and understanding of the impacts of new and emerging digital technology on governance in Africa.
• Strengthen coordination among APRM Member States in developing necessary frameworks to manage the challenges and opportunities in digital technology adoption.
• Enhance cooperation between global, regional, and national institutions in shaping the global digital governance frameworks.

ACTIVITIES

• Workshop on the Future of Governance in Africa in the Digital Era in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

OUTPUTS

The findings from these activities will be used to create the following reports, which will provide insights for policymakers and other stakeholders to improve governance in the digital age.

• A report summarizing the key insights and recommendations from the workshops, Expert and Validation meetings attended, with a focus on the impact of digital technology on governance. The report will include policy and regulatory recommendations aimed at promoting the adoption of digital technologies while mitigating risks to governance.
• A policy brief outlining specific recommendations for policymakers and other stakeholders on how to promote responsible and effective governance in the digital age.
• Podcasts / videocasts, and TV interviews, including appearances on prominent media channels with wide coverage to advocate for and raise awareness of the impacts of new and emerging digital technologies on governance in Africa.

THEMES

Under the theme “FUTURE OF GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA - EXPLORING THE NEXUS BETWEEN GOVERNANCE AND TECHNOLOGY: Assessing the Impact of Rapid Technological Advancements on Governance”, the workshop is designed to facilitate forward-looking deliberations, knowledge sharing, strategy planning, networking, and partnership incubation with a particular focus on Africa. These activities will take place along the following areas:

• Policy interventions and strategies for leveraging digital technology for growth and development in Africa.
• Strengthening coordination among APRM Member States in developing necessary frameworks to mitigate the risks and challenges posed by digitalization on the APRM’s Core and Expanded Mandate.
• Strategic partnerships and cooperation between global, regional, and national institutions in shaping the global digital governance frameworks.

DATE AND VENUE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop on the Future of Governance in the Digital Era</td>
<td>10 – 15 December 2024</td>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>Riyadh, Saudi Arabia</td>
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CONCLUSION
The Workshops will provide a unique opportunity to gain insights and deepen our understanding of the impact of technology on governance. By synthesizing these insights and developing recommendations for policymakers and other stakeholders, the APRM will be able to contribute to the development of responsible and effective governance in the digital age. This will provide APRM and its stakeholders an opportunity to explore the challenges and opportunities presented by digital technologies to governance in Africa. The meeting will produce a report that highlights policy and regulatory recommendations for promoting the adoption of digital technology while mitigating risks to governance. It will also provide a platform for networking and knowledge-sharing among stakeholders, contributing to the development of a vibrant ecosystem for digital governance in Africa.