

**HIGH-LEVEL FORUM ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
A LEVER FOR DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA**

3-5 June 2024

Ai movement-UM6P in partnership with UNESCO

Rabat, Morocco

Opening Remarks to the Closing Session

Lightning Talk: AI in Africa: the necessity of a paradigm shift

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great honor that I am taking part in this high-level Forum on Artificial Intelligence (AI) as lever for development in Africa, held under the High Patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, may God Glorify Him, organized by Ai Movement, under UM6P, in Partnership with UNESCO.

First of all, I would like to underscore, specifically for Morocco's guests, that IRES is a Think Tank created in 2007 by His Majesty King Mohammed VI, with the aim of strengthening Morocco's capacities in terms of analysis, anticipation and adaptation. Its vocation is to contribute to the illumination of strategic decision making.

IRES, as a key partner of this high-level Forum, takes a keen interest in technological issues, particularly AI. This interest dates back to 2008 with the establishment of IRES Foresight Intelligence System, in accordance with the High Royal Directives, urging the Institute to proactively identify and assess global trends and mutations, among them technological disruptions, and to examine their direct and indirect implications on the Kingdom.

The theme, subject of this Forum, is in line with IRES' concerns, since the launch in 2008 of its study program on global competitiveness and in 2014 of that relating to intangible capital. The Institute devoted, mostly, an entire chapter to the digital revolution in its 2015 strategic report, entitled: "Morocco's Panorama in the world: major transitions".

In 2016, the Institute identified, as part of its first edition of the International Panel of Futurists, a series of major transitions, including Artificial Intelligence that had been considered one of the twelve crucial issues facing humanity.

This international meeting on Artificial Intelligence in Africa follows the international conferences already organized by IRES, in this case the 2021 meeting on the development of disruptive technologies, considered as breakthrough and a strong catalyst for socio-economic development and the 2022 strategic dialogue with international and national actors on the future of digital.

On a different note, the question of Artificial Intelligence fits perfectly into the new reading grid of the world, adopted by IRES in 2021, in particular under the "Exponentiality" pillar, which deals with all the structural phenomena knowing an exponential acceleration, such as communication technologies, digitalization, etc, under the "Human-centric" pillar providing information on all the developments and aspirations which contribute to reshaping Humanity, in its uniqueness and its sociability, in its relationships with the machine, with work and with its living environment.

Moreover, in 2023, the IRES Foresight Intelligence output "Annual Survey Paper", dedicated to emerging trends, painstaking AI as one of the structural transformations underway globally and as the liminality between our actual world and tomorrow's world.

Recently, in March 2024, IRES organized in partnership with Ai Movement Center, an international conference on Trustworthy AI as a lever for change towards accelerated development in Morocco. This meeting was crowned by the elaboration of a Policy Brief available on IRES website¹.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Artificial Intelligence is today asserting itself as a major episode in the evolution of disruptive technologies, like the appearance of the printing press, the computer, the Internet and even the mobile telephone. Perceived as one of the drivers of structural changes taking place in the world, AI will lastingly shape the political, security, economic, social, societal and environmental contexts.

The future of globalization, whatever its form, will be strongly influenced by the accelerated development of this field, the use of which would globally transform populations' ways of living, working and moving and, above all, accelerate the emergence of a new generation of business models.

Thus, African countries must spare no effort to use and even develop this disruptive technology, which opens access to the world of tomorrow, which will certainly be increasingly digital and artificial.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Africa is on the move. It is aware of the importance of AI. The continent has been leading numerous AI projects, held by African organizations (Smart Africa Alliance, The New Partnership for Africa's Development Agency, which recently initiated a dialogue to encourage countries to adopt principles of an AI development strategy, the Francophone Agency for AI, Ai movement, etc.).

Africa is implementing initiatives to promote its development. But the state of this development remains uncertain in a huge part of the continent: according to the Global AI index, a few African countries (Morocco, Egypt, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa) are ranked among those investing, implementing and using innovation in the field of AI.² Furthermore, a small number of African countries prioritize the strategic importance of AI in their public policies³.

¹ <https://ires.ma/fr/publications/actes-des-seminaires/intelligence-artificielle-de-confiance-levier-de-changement-en-faveur-dun-developpement-accelere-du-Royaume>

² <https://www.tortoisemedia.com/intelligence/global-ai/>. Consulted online on June 3, 2024

³ <https://oxfordinsights.com/ai-readiness/ai-readiness-index/>

This being said, Africa is on the right path of making good use of Artificial Intelligence, provided that it quickly overcomes the structural obstacles that slow down its development.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

AI should be considered as a solution to Africa's future challenges, as a lever for its strategic sovereignty and for its structural transformations, namely:

- Economic transition: it is time for Africa to embrace the Industry X.0⁴. In this sense, AI is considered by 90% of world leaders as a growth factor for the global economy⁵.
- Rural transformation: taking into account the dangerous alteration of natural resources and the modernization of African agriculture considering Africa's food imperatives. AI plays a vital role in creating sustainable and resilient agriculture systems⁶.
- Transition towards inclusive development in all sectors of life. According to a study published in Nature⁷, 79% of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can rely on innovative, operational, resilient, and ethical solutions based on AI.
- Energy transition: Without energy, Africa's development cannot take place. In this regard, IA could be used to drive forward the energy transition and to ensure security of the energy supply⁸ in Africa.
- Digital transition: on one hand, some African operators have already embarked on the digital battlefield, often more quickly than their international competitors. But on the other hand, many African countries missed the global race to dominate this new technological frontier bearing in mind a situation of relative AI dependence. Therefore, Africa is currently perceived as a territory to conquer in the context of a "new digital colonization".

A Trustworthy AI proves to be particularly suited to Africa's needs as it is a source of innovative solutions for key sectors of sustainable development: health, education, agriculture, etc. The continent is already considered by digital giants as a market of the future in this field.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Taking into account the previous development and the emerging innovative AI solutions, **a paradigm shift should be undertaken by elevating the development of trustworthy AI to a strategic priority in Africa.**

The continent should leapfrog and quickly seize the AI lever for change, by setting up a foresight vision that is pan-African (by Africans), for the development of trustworthy AI, human-centric and in line with African values.

This vision should serve as a guide and inspiration for an inclusive and an efficient development of AI in Africa, in the quest for a balance between technological progress and the preservation of human values. It may consider some game changers, highlighted below:

⁴ <https://ires.ma/fr/publications/rapports-thematiques/lindustrie-du-futur-ou-x0>

⁵ Price Waterhouse Coopers (Pwc).

⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2772375524000212>

⁷ Vinuesa, R., Azizpour, H., Leite, I. et al. The role of AI in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Nat Commun 11, 233 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-019-14108-y>

⁸ German Energy Agency (dena). <https://www.bmwk-energiewende.de/EWD/Redaktion/EN/Newsletter/2019/10/Meldung/topthema.html>

❖ **Establish an innovative African governance of AI by:**

- adopting an African Union AI "Act" to regulate the use of AI.
- considering creating, within the African Union, a Permanent Commission for trustworthy AI.
- creating an African Agency for AI Development. Morocco could host the headquarters of this body, given its capacity to establish itself as an African hub in this disruptive field.
- launching, on an African scale, preventive systems against the undesirable effects of AI (manipulation of public opinion, security breaches, etc.).
- gradually integrating AI into the conception of public policies in Africa.

❖ **Put AI at the center of the African economy by taking the following actions:**

- Encourage the private sector to make AI a vector of transformation and innovation for African enterprises.
- Promote AI as a lever for industrial transformation in Africa.
- Stimulate the banking system to support companies and startups engaged in the development of AI in Africa.

Considering that a total sovereignty in AI does not exist even for tech giants, the most pragmatic path in Africa would be to allocate budgets and efforts on three major assets: **Human capital, Digital infrastructures and Cybersecurity.**

❖ **Place humans at the center of the African vision of AI and promote their full participation in the construction of a trustworthy African AI:**

- Nurture Research & Development by creating chairs in the field of AI within African universities and establishing specialized fields in social sciences, political sciences, legal sciences, etc., applied to AI.
- Pool research & development resources in the field of AI in Africa.
- Foster a strong AI culture by introducing education in this future field from preschool, to enable new generations to understand its foundations and become familiar with its applications, benefiting from its advantages while being aware of its negative effects.
- Engage the African scientific community abroad and encourage joint ventures with international leading companies.

❖ **Invest massively in digital infrastructures:**

- Develop telecommunications infrastructure for high-speed broadband. Digital infrastructures are nowadays as important for socio-economic development as roads and other means of physical communication had been in the past.
- Involve territorial authorities in the development of digital infrastructures to democratize stable and high-quality access to digital networks in the whole continent.
- Create sovereign African Data centers, aimed at collecting and storing data from public and private actors as well as citizens, for the creation of digital economic wealth, guaranteeing a relative Africa's digital sovereignty. Alongside the creation of Data center, Africa should promote the availability of reliable massive data, which is fundamental for the development of AI solutions.

❖ **Make cybersecurity a center of excellence, expertise, and know-how in Africa to preserve digital sovereignty:**

- Encourage the emergence of a new generation of engineers and technicians in cybersecurity.
- Promote research & development in cybersecurity enhanced by AI.
- Train African legal skills and regulations in line with the best international standards in cybersecurity.

Alongside addressing the reglementary, strategic and technological factors, a particular attention should be paid to **broaden the social acceptability of AI (Society 5.0)** by:

- centering the development of AI on essential human needs in Africa.
- encouraging civil society actors and citizens to engage in consultations and reflection processes on AI, desirable and in relation to the ethical and moral values of Africa.
- disseminating digital education within families and in the education system from preschool.

Lastly, Africa would benefit from **making AI as a tool of Soft Power by promoting an AI Diplomacy**. The following paths may be considered:

- Integrate AI among the global issues addressed by African diplomacy at the international level.
- Appoint a "Special Envoy of the African Union on AI" to better defend the continent's strategic interests in this field.
- Develop African diplomatic skills capable of protecting African interests in debates and international decisions related to AI.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

These are some opening remarks for the closing session of this High-Level African Forum. Thank you for your kind attention.