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**ECONOMIC
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**SAT. 24TH
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THEME

DIGITAL GOVERNANCE: SAFEGUARDING AFRICA'S
DATA, KNOWLEDGE & WISDOM IN THE AI ERA

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culture for peace

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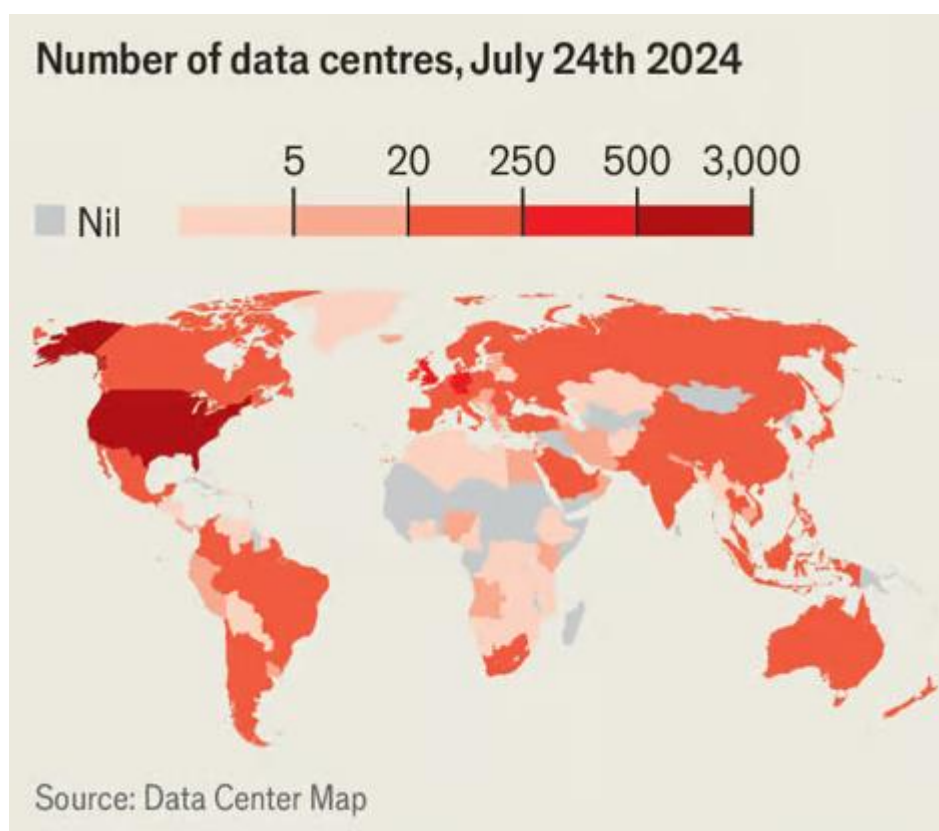
Digital sovereignty for Africa?

Africa today is at yet another pivotal moment in its history (in series of many in its pre-modern and modern times). If the continent fails to navigate the AI transition correctly, the technological gap between Africa and the rest of the world may (irreversibly) widen. Therefore, the collaborative Programs like this one (Certified Economic Diplomat, developed by the Ghana's IEF Institute together with its European think-tank, academic, media and inter-cultural partners) matters so much. Spotifying the challenge is a half way to its solution.

The current situation is not promising. Africa's data is stored abroad. For example, the whole continent has fewer data farms than the Netherlands. Knowledge about Africa is also shaped beyond the continent, with, for example, less than 2% of Wikipedia editors coming from the continent. The modern AI system must reflect Africa's wisdom gathered over centuries. The continent needs urgent action to safeguard and promote its data, knowledge, and wisdom for the AI era as part of the common cultural and knowledge heritage.

Data dilemma

Africa's data infrastructure needs to be more developed. The entire continent has fewer data farms than the Netherlands, a stark indicator of the digital divide. This lack of infrastructure forces African countries to store their data abroad, traditionally in Europe and North America, and increasingly in China. This practice raises significant security and privacy concerns and limits Africa's ability to leverage its data for economic growth and innovation.



Data localisation, [the practice of managing data on a national level](#), is gaining traction globally. African countries can use data to foster local innovation and economic growth by investing in local data centres and data localisation policies.

Knowledge gap

The digital knowledge divide is another critical issue. Less than [2% of Wikipedia editors](#) are from Africa, significantly underrepresenting African perspectives and knowledge. This

disparity not only skews the global narrative but also deprives future generations of a comprehensive understanding of Africa's rich history and culture.

African governments and institutions must actively encourage and support local content creation to bridge this knowledge gap. Initiatives like training programs for Wikipedia editors, grants for digital content creators, and partnerships with global tech companies can help amplify African voices in the digital space. Additionally, integrating digital literacy into the education system will empower the next generation to contribute to and shape the global knowledge economy.

Africa's wisdom

Africa's wisdom, deeply rooted in oral traditions and cultural practices, is at risk of being overlooked in the AI era. AI systems, predominantly developed in the West, often fail to reflect African cultures and values. This oversight can lead to biased and culturally insensitive AI applications, further marginalizing the African continent.

By incorporating traditional values such as Ubuntu into AI developments, Africa can ensure that AI platforms and systems reflect the continent's cultural values, including the high relevance of communal values.

Actionable steps for Africa

Invest in data infrastructure: African governments must prioritize the development of local data centres and cloud services. Public-private partnerships can be crucial in mobilizing the necessary resources and expertise.

Enact data localisation policies: Implementing data localisation laws can ensure that sensitive data remains within national borders, enhancing security and fostering local innovation.

Promote local content creation: Governments and institutions should support initiatives encouraging local content creation, such as training programs, grants, and partnerships with global tech companies.

Integrate AI and digital literacy into education: By incorporating digital literacy into the education system, Africa can empower the next generation to contribute to the global knowledge economy.

Incorporate traditional wisdom such as Ubuntu ethics into AI Governance: African nations should actively participate in global AI governance forums and advocate for including [Ubuntu ethics in AI development](#).

Future developments

Africa stands at a crossroads in the digital age. The continent's young population and significant potential for digital and societal development hold a promising digital future. Africa can secure its digital interests and preserve its rich cultural heritage for future generations by taking proactive steps to safeguard its data, knowledge, and wisdom.

The time to act is now. Africa must invest in data infrastructure, promote local content creation, and incorporate its unique cultural values into AI governance. Only then can it truly harness the power of the digital revolution and shape its own digital destiny.



About author

Jovan Kurbalija is the Founding Director of the [DiploFoundation](#) and Head of [the Geneva Internet Platform](#). He previously served as Executive Director of the [UN High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation](#) (2018-2019). Kurbalija has been lecturing at many universities worldwide, including the College of Europe, where he is a visiting professor.

Kurbalija has been a leading expert on the impact of AI and digitalisation on diplomacy and modern society. His book '[Introduction to Internet Governance](#)', translated into 11 languages, is a textbook at many universities worldwide.

Kurbalija has led digital capacity development for Africa over the last 3 decades involving thousands of tech experts, diplomats, and business people. In 2022, he co-authored the landmark study on Africa's digital diplomacy: '[Stronger digital voices from Africa: Building African digital foreign policy and diplomacy](#)'.