



## Follow-up to the International Forum of UNESCO Chairs and Partners

### Transforming Knowledge for Africa's Future

Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> February 2025, 14:00-15:30 (Paris time)

**Priority Africa Flagship Programme 4: Harnessing new and emerging technologies for sustainable development in Africa, including through the implementation of the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence**

### Online working session

#### Background

The rapid rise of new and emerging technologies is creating numerous opportunities worldwide, from facilitating health diagnostics, transforming education, enabling human interaction via social networks, to creating efficiencies in the workplace by automating tasks. For one, artificial intelligence (AI) is expected to play a transformative role in Africa's social and economic development, driving progress towards the attainment of the aspirations of the African Union's Agenda 2063 "The Africa We Want" and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. With the potential to contribute up to \$1.5 trillion (or 6% of the continent's GDP), AI presents a significant opportunity for growth. The return on investment in AI is high, making it an attractive area for development efforts. Digital technologies are not only tools for economic growth but also catalysts for innovation, employment, and cultural preservation. They have the potential to transform critical sectors, including healthcare, agriculture, finance and public health delivery, making Africa more resilient and prosperous while addressing Africa's complex development challenges.

While these rapidly evolving technologies present significant opportunities, their adoption also introduces serious ethical challenges that must be addressed. To guide the responsible and just uptake of AI globally, UNESCO's General Conference adopted the Recommendation on the Ethics of AI in November 2021, which stands as the only global standard-setting instrument on the ethical guardrails of AI. Strong data governance is a foundation for ethical AI in Africa. To this end, UNESCO's Readiness Assessment Methodology, currently deployed in 22 African Member States, is a valuable tool for helping nations understand their strengths, identify gaps, and take informed steps toward responsible AI adoption. This tool has provided insights into AI adoption across African contexts, covering infrastructure, connectivity, skills, and regulations.

Additionally, expanding broadband infrastructure in underserved areas is essential, alongside improving digital literacy, combating misinformation, and enhancing media capacity with digital tools. Aligning these efforts with frameworks like the AU Agenda 2063 ensures cohesive progress. Moreover, the African Union Continental Strategy on AI, developed in collaboration with UNESCO specialists, provides a roadmap for responsible AI adoption in Africa. By addressing risks, investing in skills, and fostering cooperation, it aims to create an AI-driven future that benefits all Africans equitably.

### **Current Actions and Future Outlook**

Under Flagship Programme 4 of UNESCO's Operational Strategy for Priority Africa (2022-2029), UNESCO supports Africa in harnessing emerging technologies for sustainable development, including through the implementation of its Recommendation on the Ethics of AI. This is achieved through actions to strengthen the capacities of Member States to leverage digital innovation for achieving Sustainable Development Goals. Through initiatives such as African Women in AI, AI and the Rule of Law, and Youth Coding, UNESCO is fostering inclusive AI development and digital literacy. By fostering AI expert networks and policy dialogue platforms, UNESCO is helping African nations develop sustainable, inclusive, and forward-looking AI policies. UNESCO is also leading global efforts to develop an ethical framework for neurotechnology, deploy cutting-edge technologies for disaster risk reduction, and drive the 2025 International Year of Quantum Science and Technology.

UNESCO plans to continue to provide policy support and strengthen key actors' capacities for inclusive digital transformation, drawing from assessments such as the "Africa AI needs and priorities" and the Digital Transformation Competency Framework. A key focus will be on aligning digital ecosystems, including AI, with ROAM principles (Rights, Openness, Accessibility, and Multi-stakeholder participation). UNESCO intends to continue assisting the 15 African countries that have completed their AI Readiness Assessments (RAM) in implementing their findings, while intensifying efforts to mobilize additional resources for the additional 9 African countries interested in the exercise, with a view to cover all 54 African Member States. In line with the implementation of the Declaration of the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022, new and emerging technologies will be sought to promote the cultural and creative industries.

Furthermore, the rapid advancement of generative AI presents both opportunities and challenges for freedom of expression and media development and - particularly for the viability of media. The opacity and unpredictability of foundation models make it difficult to assess and mitigate risks. This is why UNESCO has strongly advocated for technology companies to align with international human rights standards and implement governance mechanisms that ensure transparency, accountability and due diligence. Additionally, recognizing that many information disruptions stem from human behavior, UNESCO is strengthening Media and Information Literacy (MIL) initiatives to foster critical thinking and empower users to navigate the digital landscape responsibly.

The Flagship Programme 4 is continually driven forward through the convening of UNESCO Chairs, partners and experts. These gatherings foster intellectual exchange and collaboration, allowing for the refinement of concepts, the distillation of ideas, and the establishment of meaningful partnerships. Such engagements are instrumental for advancing programme implementation. Among other things, this entails producing knowledge and innovative ideas.

### **Objectives and format**

Building on the discussions held in the context of the International Forum of UNESCO Chairs and Partners: Transforming Knowledge for Africa's Future in Addis Ababa (30 September – 2 October 2024), this online working session aims to:

- foster collective reflection on the opportunities and challenges to further producing knowledge on the new and emerging technologies for sustainable development in Africa, including through the implementation of the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence;
- identify concrete and relevant actions through which UNESCO Chairs and partners can support the implementation of Flagship Programme 4 ;
- explore possibilities for regional and international collaboration.

The Working Session will take the form of an open discussion focused on the Flagship Programme 4. To guide the conversation, each segment will be introduced with a brief presentation by the moderator, followed by targeted questions posed to all participants. Participants are requested to prepare responses to one or more of the discussion points outlined in the programme below.

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14:00 – 14:10	<p><b>Opening: (UNESCO)</b>  <b>ADG/PAX 's participation?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction of OSPA, the Event and its objectives</li> <li>- Introduction of the Flagship Programme, its definition and scope, as well as progress made thus far</li> </ul>
14:10 – 14:45	<p><b>New and Emerging Technologies for Sustainable Development in Africa</b>  <b>Moderator: TBC</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges and opportunities in AI governance, data sovereignty, digital ethics</li> <li>• Technology-driven solutions for the advancement of education, sciences, culture and communication and information, including the 2025 International Year of Quantum Science and Technology</li> <li>• Implementing UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of AI in African contexts</li> <li>• Unlocking existing synergies in the framework of the implementation of the AU Continental Strategy on AI</li> <li>• Strengthening public-private partnerships for responsible technological innovation in Africa</li> </ul>
14:45 – 15:20	<p><b>Strengthening Digital Skills and Research Networks for Africa</b>  <b>Moderator: TBC</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies for scaling up digital skills training initiatives for learners, youth, educators and civil servants</li> <li>• The role of UNESCO Chairs in building AI research hubs and fostering intra- and inter-regional collaboration thereof.</li> <li>• Establishment of an Observatory facility to track technological and policy developments and support the development of national strategies, policies, and laws, in support of the Global South, leveraging UNESCO's <b>Global AI Ethics and Governance Observatory</b></li> <li>• Bridging the digital divide: ensuring equitable access to technology and education</li> <li>• Innovative funding and partnerships for the implementation of the flagship programme</li> </ul>
15 :20 – 15 :30	<p><b>Wrap-up</b>  <a href="#">CI Programme specialist from FO ?</a>  <b>Closing remarks and next steps</b>  <b>PAX</b>  <a href="#">UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme?</a></p>