

Digital and Human: Reshaping Skill Sets in Africa's Digital Age

Thursday, June 29th 2023

15:00 – 16:30 CET

Virtual Event: <https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZluc-2prDMuHtcH5bGNkU8YHTCAB-X-F6pv>

1. Background

Africa is at the dawn of a transformative digital era, powered by technological innovation and a growing proliferation of smartphones. In this dynamically evolving landscape, a significant question emerges: How can we nurture the symbiotic development of digital abilities and fundamental human and social skills, both in the societal context and within the world of business and employment?

The Covid-19 pandemic has fast-tracked the adoption of digital tools across Africa, placing a spotlight on the essential role of digital literacy within the society and the workplace. Various sectors, including education, healthcare, commerce, and governance, increasingly rely on digital platforms. According to a 2023 report from the Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA), Africa boasts over 590 million unique mobile phone subscribers, equating to approximately 45% penetration. By 2025, the number of smartphone connections is projected to surpass 65%, signifying immense potential for digital growth.

Concurrently, in this era of rapid digital transition, the critical importance of human and social skills, often referred to as 'soft skills,' remains steadfast. As outlined in a 2020 report by the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and Deloitte, these skills - including effective communication, emotional intelligence, empathy, adaptability, and teamwork - are indispensable to the future of work. They are highly valued by employers, playing a significant role in personal and professional growth. A 2021 LinkedIn report further validated this viewpoint, indicating that 57% of senior leaders deem soft skills more crucial than hard skills. Even as digital platforms take center stage in our communications, they offer an opportunity to redefine, not overshadow, these foundational skills. As we leverage digital tools for communication, the focus is on enhancing and evolving interpersonal relationships and communication skills within these digital spaces.

In his context, the aspiration is to cultivate an environment that excels in digital technology while enhancing the richness of human connections. The goal is to utilize technology as a facilitator to enhance these interactions, not only within the society but also in the workplace.

How, then, can Africa steer this intricate landscape to equip its population with the skills necessary to thrive in this digital era, both in society and the world of work? This question is at the heart of "Digital and Human: Reshaping Skill Sets in Africa's Digital Age". This dialogue calls for a critical discussion on incorporating these dual skill sets in the face of Africa's rapid digital evolution. The aim is to formulate strategies that ensure Africa's digital transformation is as focused on human-centric innovation as it is on technological advancements. As developments such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) become integral to this transformation, maintaining a balanced perspective becomes even more crucial to ensure that digital progress aligns seamlessly with human and social skill enhancement, nurturing a holistic and inclusive digital work environment.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this dialogue are to:

- **Promote Balanced Skill Development:** To facilitate conversations on the integration of digital proficiency and human social skills development in Africa's educational systems and professional training programs. The dialogue aims to strategize on preventing a decline in essential human and social skills due to increased digital engagement.
- **Foster Inclusive Digital Transformation:** To explore methods and initiatives to make the benefits of digital transformation in Africa inclusive and universally accessible. The dialogue will address the roles of various stakeholders - governments, educators, and private sectors - in promoting this balanced approach.
- **Do an assessment and Best Practice Sharing:** To deliberate on methodologies to measure the impact of digital transformation on the development of human and social skills, and to discuss potential challenges and opportunities in maintaining this balance. The dialogue seeks to identify and learn from best practices from other regions for fostering a harmonious integration of digital and human skills.

3. Target audience

Companies, Employer and Business Federations, Policy Makers, NGO's, and Government Officials.

AGENDA

Moderator: Amadou Sako, (IOE)

15:00-15:05	Welcoming remarks by Mr Jérôme Bellion-Jourdan, IOE's Deputy Secretary General
15:05 – 15:15	Keynote intervention by Ms Akustina Morni IOE's Directors for Skills Director for Employment, Skills and Diversity <i>"Why are soft skills important? The employers' Perspective"</i>
15:15 – 16:00	Interactive remarks by: Ms Winnie Karanu, Lead for Sub Saharian Africa, Microsoft Philanthropies <i>Given that Microsoft is a global leader in digital technology and has implemented various initiatives aimed at boosting digital skills, could you share some insights on how we can better integrate the development of digital skills with human and social skills, particularly for women and girls in Africa?</i>

	<p>Ms Maimouna Diakhaby, Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training Guinea, Republic of Guinea.</p> <p><i>As an advisor for digitalization and employment, you are at the intersection of technological advances and workforce development in Guinea. Could you share your insights on how digital skill development, combined with an emphasis on soft skills, can be leveraged to enhance employability and adaptability in the Guinean workforce? Furthermore, how is your ministry integrating this balanced approach into vocational training programs to better prepare individuals for the dynamics of the digital economy?</i></p> <p>Mr Georges Asamani, Managing Director, Sub-Saharan Africa, the PMI Institute</p> <p><i>The PMI Institute is recognized for its holistic approach in developing project management competencies, a blend of technical and soft skills. Could you elaborate on the unique strategies the PMI Institute uses to harmonize digital competencies and soft skills within its project management framework? In this context, how might businesses in Sub-Saharan Africa adapt these strategies to bolster digital competencies and soft skills among their workforce, while aligning with local contexts and business requirements?</i></p> <p>Prof Amany Elbanna, Professor (Full) in Information Systems and Digital Transformation, School of Business and Management, Royal Holloway University of London</p> <p><i>Prof Elbanna, with your profound expertise in Information Systems and Digital Transformation, you have an in-depth understanding of the unfolding impact of Artificial Intelligence on various sectors. In the African context, where we are striving to bridge the digital skills gap, AI presents both promising opportunities and significant challenges. Can you shed light on how Artificial Intelligence is reshaping the employment landscape in Africa? What potential risks or misuse should we be mindful of?</i></p> <p>Mr Youmani Lankoandé, CEO, Yulcom</p> <p><i>As the Managing Director of Yulcom, could you share insights on how aspiring entrepreneurs can leverage digitalisation to improve operational efficiency of their initiatives, while also fostering a greater emphasis on interpersonal skills?</i></p>
16:00-16:25	Q & A session and open discussion with the participants
15:25-15:30	<p align="center">Concluding remarks by Mr Jérôme Bellion-Jourdan, IOE's Deputy Secretary General</p>

