1

DIGITALISATION FOR TRANSFORMATION

New Frontiers for Africa–Europe Cooperation

*Chux Daniels, Benedikt Erforth, and Chloe Teevan*

1.1 Digitalisation, Transformation, and Cooperation

Digital technologies are transforming the lives of people in societies across the world, shaping and reshaping policies at continental, regional, and national levels, and impacting politics in ways that were not imagined in the past. Digital technologies, viewed as a public good, are key to fostering economic and human development globally. As a cross-cutting theme, digitalisation, if appropriately directed by public policies, can help achieve the United Nations Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015). By “transformation” we mean three-dimensional change in relation to (a) economic, (b) social, and (c) environmental challenges, as articulated in the SDGs. Such transformations are not linear, nor are their outcomes guaranteed. In Africa, for example, we know that at the firm level the adoption of technology does not necessarily lead to increased productivity (economic gains), and therefore may not be transformational, in that sense (ACET, 2021). Despite fundamental technological changes, economies have not become more diverse, nor has total factor productivity increased. In this context, therefore, achieving economic gains without exacerbating inequality, exclusion, and gender gaps (social challenges) or increasing biodiversity loss and climate change (environmental challenges) requires additional policy guidance – that is, frameworks – that help establish standards whilst reflecting local contexts and needs.

However, the perspectives and narratives on digital technologies and the motives behind the quest for high rates of digitalisation differ across the globe and between stakeholders. In some cases, state actors adopt digital technologies as surveillance tools to exercise control over people, maintain power structures, or quash opposition (see, for example, Jili, this volume). At the same time, a small number of private sector actors have gained outsized influence through

DOI: 10.4324/9781003274322-1
their control of vast amounts of personal data, which is used to predict and influence individual and societal behaviour with potentially grave implications for personal choice and political outcomes (The Great Hack, 2019; Zuboff, 2019). These trends have serious implications for citizens’ digital rights and on efforts to achieve inclusive development. If not accompanied by corrective policy measures, digital technologies can increase economic exploitation and inequalities, or deepen digital divides globally and within societies.

The transformations across societies, and the envisaged potential of such transformations, coupled with the introduction of new policies and regulations on digital technologies, have led to new geopolitical tensions and rivalries on the one hand, and partnerships and cooperation on the other hand. For many African actors, China’s ever-growing presence in Africa’s digital infrastructure is a welcome diversification of their international partnerships, but for the European Union (EU) this growing presence is considered a geopolitical threat. The EU fears China’s growing influence on Africa’s development and governance models. Recent efforts, notably the announcement of the EU’s Global Gateway,¹ are testimony to the EU’s concerns and efforts to engage with this new form of power politics (see Fritzsche and Spioala, and Erforth and Shields, this volume). However, these policies and their potential to succeed need to be juxtaposed with the political realism of African leaders, who contrast proposals from the EU with Chinese technologies and interventions that are often considered to be more “lucrative”, cheaper, and, in some cases, better quality. The digital realm is no different from other policy realms insofar as we are in the middle of an era that can be best described with reference to the rise of a multipolar disorder, which in turn challenges long-established principles of cooperation and the functioning of the international system. These tendencies bring the status quo and emerging powers directly into opposition with one another. For Africa, global shifts have brought more options in terms of partners and more negotiating space and leverage vis-à-vis external actors, thereby potentially enhancing African agency, meaning the ability of African actors “to negotiate and bargain with external actors in a manner that benefits Africans themselves” (Chipaike and Knowledge, 2018). Yet, global shifts have also caused competition between democratic and autocratic systems that fuel distrust and open conflict.

The geopolitical tensions and rivalries, in turn, have implications on the ways that governance, structural arrangements, narratives, ideas, and interests held by actors (as agents) and institutions influence and shape digital technologies at regional and national levels (Chataway et al., 2019; Daniels et al., 2020a, 2021a). Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is an example of the fragility of the current global order. Partnerships, once taken for granted, are put into question and are ended altogether. The transatlantic alliance is experiencing new momentum that is likely to also affect future choices on digital partnerships, and by extension the global digital ecosystem. It is too early to tell what the outcome of these rapidly unfolding events will be.
To do justice to the different narratives, ideas, and interests held by actors, we discuss digital transformation as a so-called megatrend shaping large-scale developments in the world and in Africa in particular (Erforth and Gutheil, 2022) to which actors react and adapt. Futurologist John Naisbitt (1982), observing the change from an industrial to a knowledge society, characterised megatrends as “large social, economic, political, and technological changes [that are] slow to form, and once in place, influence us for some time”. Subsequently, further attributes were added to the definition leading to a list of characteristics that include longevity, ubiquity, global relevance, complexity, and irreversibility. While longevity is relative to the reference frame one assumes, it is fair to assume that digitalisation’s ubiquity and irreversibility will make it a lasting social structure. Structures, according to Anthony Giddens (1984), are not only the basis for but also the result of human practices. Building on the mutually constituting nature of structure and agency, as identified by Giddens, we understand digitalisation as a social force that reproduces our world order whilst simultaneously being shaped by human action (Erforth and Gutheil, 2022).

Put differently, digitalisation constitutes an enabling frame (in both the positive and the negative sense) that reproduces social action and is equally influenced by it. To fathom the complexity of this interaction, we advance a multi-level analytical approach, using people, policies, and politics as different layers and guiding threads to orient the reader on this agency-structure spectrum. The book covers discussions that cut across various sectors bringing human (individual and societal) development into conversation with macro-level policy discussion at the national, regional, continental, and bi-continental levels. The ongoing geopolitical rivalries around digital technologies coupled with debates on digital governance, privacy and protections, and citizens’ rights continue to influence international cooperation and, therefore, need to be brought into conversation with the literature on digital for development.

The conversation we propose here extends beyond academia and involves practitioners in the discussion – both as contributors and as readers we seek to reach. Contributions are thus arranged in a way that they allow for reflexivity and simultaneously offer concrete recommendations. The insights in the book are expected to help build an academic community around the nexus of digitalisation and international cooperation. By unpacking potential areas for digital cooperation between Africa and Europe, and covering academic and practitioners’ views, the book improves the prospects of a multidisciplinary conversation between communities that hitherto rarely speak to one another.

1.2 Two Regions, One Megatrend, Different Priorities

Digital transformation is causing major changes in both Africa and Europe, leading to new challenges. The two continents certainly share some of the challenges and opportunities, but their distinct levels of development mean that they each have different priorities. For example, in the EU and the Global North,
“corrective policies” may be what is needed to address digital rights or strengthen data and consumer protection. In Africa, however, it might not be primarily correction that matters most, but rather establishing minimum standards, policies, and regulatory frameworks that reflect local conditions and that are implementable. Therefore, understanding and responding to the distinct levels of developments, contexts, and local conditions is vital to realising the aspirations of digital transformation in the AU–EU digital cooperation.

In Africa, digitalisation is transforming productive sectors, creating solutions to social problems, and driving political mobilisation, for example, by influencing political participation in novel ways. In 2019, 25% of the African population had internet access. This figure is expected to rise (ITU, 2020; World Bank, 2019). Even at today’s much lower penetration rate, mobile technologies alone “have already generated 1.7 million jobs and contribute $144 billion to the continent’s economy, or roughly 8.5% of GDP” (Allen, 2021; GSMA, 2021). African countries have also become host to many innovation hubs, demonstrating the continent’s entrepreneurial potential, and funding to start-ups is on the rise (Azzioui and Sandri, 2021; Daniels et al., 2021b; Dosso et al., 2021; Martins et al., 2021). In a comprehensive mapping exercise, Afrilabs and Briter Bridges identified 643 tech hubs in Africa in 2019. The underlying trend becomes visible when comparing this number to the 442 tech hubs identified in 2018 and 324 in 2016 (Giuliani et al., 2019; see also AfricArena, 2021). Technologies such as mobile money have shown the potential for Africa to “leapfrog” (that is, skip technological steps in development processes), while COVID-19 demonstrated the essential role that electronic payments, e-commerce, and e-services (such as online banking and telemedicine) could play.

Despite the progress and the expectations regarding the positive impacts of digital technologies on Africa’s economic and social development, major investments in data, infrastructure, capabilities, and skills are needed for Africa to harness the benefits offered by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) – characterised by its scale, speed, and complexity and the fusion of a group of technologies that include Artificial Intelligence (AI), gene editing, and advanced robotics (UK Government, 2019).

The African Union’s (AU) Digital Transformation Strategy (DTS) for Africa (2020–2030) articulates Africa’s vision, objectives, and priority areas of digital policy (African Union Commission (AUC), 2020). The DTS points to the ways that digitalisation can contribute to the achievement of the AU’s Agenda 2063, while emphasising alignment with the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024 (STISA-2024) (AUC, 2014). The approach adopted by the AU emphasises the vital linkage between digital technologies, science, and innovation, and their potential to play a role in the continent’s industrialisation and in the roll-out of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). In addition, the AU approach recognises the potential for digital technologies, if effectively deployed, to contribute to addressing pressing development challenges
such as poverty and unemployment, reducing inequality, enhancing inclusion, and boosting the production of goods and services (AUC, 2020).

Inadequate governance of digital technologies and lack of harmonised regulatory regimes across borders pose barriers to businesses and leave citizens’ data open to exploitation and abuse by a variety of actors. Further, there is the risk of Africa becoming a battleground in the growing US–China rivalry. Adding to this is the fear of so-called “algorithmic colonialism” or “digital colonialism”, signifying that Africa might become dependent on Western–developed AI, unsuited to the needs of local markets, while local tech ecosystems are impoverished (Birhane, 2020). Similar fears persist around algorithms embedded in Chinese digital infrastructure and systems installed in Africa, for example, along the digital Silk Road (see Chapter 2, this book). Schelenz and Schopp (2018) describe such parallel trends as the duality of digitalisation, where technological innovation constitutes both an opportunity and a challenge – a line of reasoning that this book subscribes to as well.

The European Union (EU) is engaged in a race to catch up with the leaders of the digital revolution – namely, China and the United States – and hopes to strengthen its own digital economy with an increasingly active industrial policy, including a growing number of planned projects and investments focused on digital technologies. Several nascent EU projects and programmes aim to advance the EU’s digital economy and improve its competitiveness by pooling resources and investments, in areas such as cloud computing (Gaia-X) and semiconductor manufacturing (Gaia-X, n.d., EC, 2022a). The EU also hopes to become a global leader in digital governance by fact of developing the world’s most advanced regulatory frameworks, with a model centred on data protection and democratic values. The recent adoption of the Digital Markets Act by the European Parliament and the Council is the latest example of the EU’s twofold strategy that consists of strengthening the consumer’s choice and focussing on individual rights whilst ensuring more competition (European Commission (EC), 2022b). Given that the EU regulation mainly targets the Big Five (Google, Amazon, Meta, Apple, and Microsoft), it not only improves consumers’ choice and safeguards competition but also constitutes by extension a means of tackling US digital hegemony. The new post-Ukraine invasion realignment and the strengthening of the transatlantic alliance might shift this discourse again and put a stronger emphasis on shared interests in the area of technology, data, and governance.

Just like the AU, the EU too is aware of, and wishes to harness, the huge transformative potential that digital technology offers. To this end, the EU’s Digital Strategy lays out four goals: a digitally skilled population and highly skilled digital professionals; secure and sustainable digital infrastructures; digital transformation of businesses; digitisation of public services (EC, 2021a). The European Commission has put a strong focus on digital rights also, proposing a Declaration on Digital Rights in January 2022 (EC, 2022c). The EU’s goal is to ensure that digital transformation works for European society at large, balancing the needs of citizens (people), businesses, and governments.
In line with the above vision, in its foreign and development policy the EU hopes to promote a European model of digital governance, to support sustainable development and to develop new markets outside of the EU for what is hoped will be a growing European digital sector. The EU seeks to establish itself as a major player in the digital economy in Africa, taking advantage of the pace and scope of Africa’s digital transformation. As Africa works towards creating its own Digital Single Market (DSM), the EU hopes to proactively share its experiences and expertise in building a DSM and to influence Africa’s digital governance model in the process (Daniels et al., 2020b, Teevan, 2021). The EU seeks to secure its commercial interests – including easy access for its own companies to the African market, to further its development agenda, and to promote values such as freedom of expression and data protection. These aspirations are reflected in the EU Digital For Development (D4D) Hub, which was launched by the European Commission and five EU member states (Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, and Luxembourg) in December 2020. The majority of the D4D Hub’s initial flagship projects focus on Africa (AU–EU D4D Hub) and seek to build on the work of the AU–EU Digital Economy Task Force (DETF) (DETF, 2020). These goals also fed into the EU’s Global Gateway, a strategy focused on developing a global vision for infrastructure development, which has been framed as a counteroffer to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (EC, 2021b). Much of the success or failure of the EU’s new digital global policy will depend on how well the Union can translate strategic promises into tangible policies producing visible results. Coherence across policy areas is at least as important as thorough impact monitoring, both of which should be at the heart of European efforts during the current budget cycle (2021-2027).

In Africa and Europe, countries and continental institutions seek to harness the potential of digital transformation whilst dealing with its challenges. For Africa, digitalisation and its transformative potential offer huge opportunities as the continent seeks to achieve its development agenda as laid out in Agenda 2063. Yet, the continent is also uniquely vulnerable to the growing inequalities of the digital age, and the exploitative practices, such as digital and data extraction, and commercialisation, that have accompanied digital technologies (Iyer et al., 2021). The EU, despite its much stronger economy and industrial fabric, has ultimately fallen behind other global powers in some aspects of digital development. And as mentioned in the previous section, the EU is making efforts to catch up in the development of key digital technologies, cloud computing, for example whilst also protecting and promoting its vision of digital governance and regulatory frameworks that is human- and citizen-centric. It sees cooperation with Africa as a development imperative, but also as an economic opportunity and an avenue to greater global influence through the promotion of its human-centric governance model.

On both continents, we see a strong emphasis being put on advancing the potential of digital technologies to achieve development goals and foster strategic interests. For closer cooperation between Africa and Europe to become
fruitful and add mutual value in a highly competitive field, both complementary goals and diverging objectives need to be identified and addressed. In this book, we examine the potential for cooperation on three levels: politics, policies, and people.

1.3 AU–EU Digital Cooperation: A New Frontier

In official declarations and public statements, the AU and EU have identified digital cooperation as a new priority area between both continents. In the joint statement following the AU–EU Summit in February 2022, digital transformation was highlighted as a priority to “[support] trusted connectivity through investments in infrastructures and an affordable and enhanced access to the digital and data economy while boosting digital entrepreneurship and skills” (AU–EU, 2022). Although this joint statement remains a vague list of priorities, it encompasses and reinforces different focus areas of the digital partnership laid out in the 2019 AU–EU DETF Report, which highlighted four priority areas: broadband connectivity, skills, support to improving the business environment and e-services. The DETF brought together multiple actors from Africa and Europe, including private sector actors, international organisations, donors, and civil society organisations (CSOs), and provided an avenue for the development of a shared vision based on mutually agreed principles. This growing interest from the AU and EU in working together to advance digital development also makes us examine cooperation between the AU, EU, and their Member States in this book.

There is undoubtedly ample room for digital cooperation between the AU, the EU, and their Member States, but there remain key differences in the ways that they approach the politics of the current geopolitical climate. It has become increasingly clear that the choice of digital governance models and even of partners for digital infrastructure investments has wider political connotations that are not entirely neutral (see Fritzsche & Spoiala, Chapter 2, this book). While the EU takes a less hard line than the United States vis-à-vis Huawei and Chinese technologies more widely, it is still focused on building a stronger and more sovereign digital economy at home and offering an alternative to Chinese (and American) technologies abroad that strongly caters to individual rights and the right to privacy. This is evident in the focus on trusted connectivity in the EU’s announcements to date related to the digital element of the Global Gateway Initiative (EC, 2022d).

On their part, African countries have tried to steer clear of these geopolitical struggles or even to leverage them where possible to support their own development agendas. Gagliardone (2019) examines how Chinese digital actors have gained ground in this sector by working closely with governments to roll out major expansions in internet and mobile phone access. He contrasts this with what he considers a Western model that continues to struggle with the dilemma of providing basic services, whilst wishing to guarantee human rights
and freedom of expression. It is unclear how long it may be possible for African governments to adopt a “neutral” position in the face of growing divergences around the governance of digital and bilateral cooperation (see Jili, this volume).

Success in this new frontier of AU–EU digital cooperation demands that these key differences are resolved in ways that foster mutual benefits and transformative change for both partners. Both Africa and Europe are keen to harness digitalisation and innovation in addressing their strategic and development targets and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Doing so will require the right policies. Given the EU’s own experience of building a Digital Single Market (DSM), there are clear opportunities for deepened cooperation around the roll-out of the AfCFTA and a future African DSM. These developments have the potential to transform Africa’s economy and speed up industrialisation, particularly if they fully integrate the transformative potential of digital technologies in line with the ambitions of the African Digital Transformation Strategy (see Fafunwa and Odufuwa, Banga, and El Aynaoui et al., this volume). Yet attaining these goals will require huge steps forward in terms of regulatory harmonisation across Africa, together with associated investments. The EU, with its long-standing expertise on regulatory harmonisation and its own evolving approach to digital governance, has potentially important experiences to share with African partners. Beyond offering new forms of cooperation, the EU also follows an interest-driven strategy in digital governance. By this we mean that in fashioning out its digital partnerships in Africa (and elsewhere), the EU primarily seeks to advance its interests.

Studies that examine the EU’s regulatory power highlight digital regulation as one of the areas where the EU has shown leadership, and this is an area where EU actors express the hope of having an influence on African partners. In “The Brussels Effect”, Bradford (2020) notes the important global implications of the EU’s 2016 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and that legislation in South Africa and Senegal was influenced by (earlier) European data protection standards. Bradford encourages future research to include Africa, a hitherto under-researched region. However, this body of literature is still sparse and requires more research to understand the scope for regulatory alignment between Africa and Europe, but also the challenges. The question of regulatory alignment, norms externalisation, and the impact of new data protection frameworks are examined in this book drawing on case studies from Kenya and South Africa (see Erforth and Shields, and Gastrow and Adams, this volume).

The undeniable linkage between digital technologies and the norms and values that are inherent to their algorithmic design brings to the fore a long-standing debate on the EU as a normative power (Manners, 2002). We engage with this debate in this book.

Ultimately, the main goal of digital development should be to lead to real improvements in the lives of people, acting as a lever allowing greater access to education, training, employment, and health. The AU’s Digital Transformation Strategy outlines a clear vision for the roles that digital technologies can play
in human development in Africa. COVID-19 led to important technological innovations in e-healthcare, e-learning, and social protection using digital payments in Africa, but huge gaps remain in terms of the ability of citizens across countries and even within counties to access these technologies. Achieving the full potential of digital transformation will require major investments in digital skills to allow all citizens to access digital technologies and make use of the emerging services, but even doing this will require a shared understanding of digital skills (see Bashir & Daniels, this volume). Similarly, ensuring that women and girls are not left behind will require that the specific needs of women and girls are integrated into the design and roll-out of digital technologies and digital for development projects (see Sladkova & Bashir, this volume).

1.4 Organisation of the Book

To do justice to the complexity and multiple layers of the digital transformation and its impact on societies and economies in Africa and Europe, the book adopts multiple perspectives on the topic of digital cooperation. Chapters 2–4 in the first part of the book deal with power politics in the broader sense with a consideration of the geopolitics of digital cooperation. They elaborate on what politics and geopolitics may mean for different models of digital development and governance. Following an introduction to the topic, we engage with one dominant actor and one new frontier in the digital field in order to showcase the underlying power dynamics.

In Chapter 2, Kerstin Fritzsche and Daniel Spoiala examine digital development cooperation between the EU and the AU and argue that the EU employs both its Digital4Development policy and its recent infrastructure strategy, Global Gateway, to strengthen the bloc’s strategic autonomy. The authors continue to assess the impact of such an interest-driven approach on Africa’s digital sovereignty and advance a set of conditions that are necessary for the partnership to become beneficial to both the EU and the AU. The discussion is particularly relevant considering the EU’s Global Gateway strategy, which was published in late 2021, at least in part as a response to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative.

The latter is also the subject of Chapter 3. In his contribution, Bulelani Jili examines the introduction of Chinese surveillance technologies in Kenya and Ethiopia. Unlike most studies that focus on supply factors, the chapter explores the quality of local and global features in the spread of Chinese surveillance tools. It analyses surveillance technologies as a dynamic social process. Drawing attention to the often-neglected Chinese operations in Kenya and Ethiopia helps to deepen our understanding of how China’s growing geopolitical footprint in Africa is mediated by local conditions and actors. The discussion also reveals the potential of an alternative form of cooperation that takes a human- and citizen-centric approach with potentials for enhancing local ownership.

One potential area of forward-looking EU-Africa cooperation is discussed in Chapter 4. Eleonore Pauwels and Klaus Tilmes examine the nexus between
AI, bioinformatics, and genomics as a field of increased geopolitical competition. In the authors’ view, the main point is the need to align long-term support (financial, knowledge) in key strategic areas with the gradual build-up of an Africa-wide strategy and network that can now stand on its own and is open for partnering on equal terms. According to the authors, Africa’s vibrant bioecosystem can provide new impulses for innovation that Europe would be well advised to support and draw on. With normative leadership, strategic funding commitments, and capacity-building partnerships with the private sector, the EU is well positioned to connect its genomic strategy with the growing bioeconomy potential across Africa.

Following the classification of the digital realm as a part of global geopolitics and the assessment of the implications, the book then moves on to consider the potential for Africa–Europe digital cooperation in different policy areas – Chapters 5–12. The first of these areas focuses on economic development and explores the potential of digital technologies to transform African economies. In Chapter 5 Tunde Fafunwa and Fola Odufuwa examine the potential benefits African micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) can expect from the AfCFTA. The chapter explores why digitalising their businesses is necessary for MSMEs to participate and benefit from the reduced trade barriers that the AfCFTA will offer.

Looking beyond MSMEs as an aggregate, it is useful to consider specific sectors individually. In Chapter 6, Karishma Banga examines the scope of AU–EU digital cooperation for productive job creation in agriculture, manufacturing, and the service sector. The author argues that although digital agricultural platforms can boost productivity and access to formal work, the uptake is low in African countries with large-scale employment gains limited. As for manufacturing and the service sector, the chapter’s findings suggest that increasing cross-sector productivity is possible by shifting labour towards more productive sectors of manufacturing and services. One way to address the diverse challenges, according to Banga, is for the AU–EU digital cooperation to focus on facilitating digital infrastructure development in rural areas, coordinate and scale up capacity and awareness building programmes, and foster women’s access to technology.

The sector-related focus is further narrowed down in Chapter 7. Karim El Aynaoui, Larabi Jaidi, and Akram Zaoui focus on how Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia are trying to safeguard and expand their manufacturing sectors. The authors observe how decision-makers in the three countries seek to strengthen their country’s respective position in global and regional value chains. The three case studies also provide evidence for a net positive impact of digitalisation on manufacturing and highlight the financial and technological benefits of closer cooperation with the EU.

With Chapters 6 and 7 unveiling sector-specific challenges and opportunities of digitalisation and digital cooperation, the next chapter turns to the topic of Water that is sometimes referred to either as a common good, a human
right, or a commodity. In Chapter 8, Tamanna Ashraf takes a closer look at water and the infrastructure and policies that govern it. *Digital water* – or the digitalisation of water – is considered a means to improve climate resilience and human development in the world’s most water stressed regions. Making the case for the effectiveness of digital water, the author then discusses how the European Union Water Initiative (EUWI) is aiming to coordinate EU and member states’ funding in the field of water development to elaborate on the benefits of additional EU support to deploy digital technologies that help improve water quality.

EU cooperation and support is needed beyond sectors such as water. Digitalisation, similar to the related fields of science and innovation, requires finance, which is often scarce in the African context as governments strive to address competing development priorities with available and sometimes meagre resources. Andrew Agyei-Holmes, Bernardin Senadza, and Felix Ankomah Asante, in Chapter 9, focus on tax and resource mobilisation. The authors show how the introduction of digital tools in tax collection systems is driving improvements in revenue collection, helping to address existing challenges, and the importance of stakeholder engagement. These and other challenges that remain in the finance, tax and resource mobilisation systems provide opportunities for AU–EU digital cooperation.

Addressing development challenges, by harnessing opportunities that digitalisation presents, requires attention to rights and local ownership. Human-centric regulatory frameworks and trust in existing digital ecosystems are quintessential to this objective. In Chapter 10, Benedikt Erforth and Charles-Martin Shields analyse the EU’s promotion of interests through the so-called “human-centric” model of digital governance. Using Kenya as an illustrative case study, the authors argue that the EU’s desire to use regulatory externalisation to achieve the concept of human-centric digitalisation assumes that African partners’ social and political notions of privacy align with the EU’s. The authors conclude that the EU’s externalisation of regulatory frameworks on digital transformation creates new opportunities for commercial cooperation with Africa. However, these prospects must be balanced with the political and social aspects of regulation to achieve the wider governance and human rights goals of EU cooperation.

The EU’s regulatory cooperation, influence, and power in Africa goes beyond Kenya; it includes countries such as Senegal, Nigeria, and South Africa. In Chapter 11, Michael Gastrow and Rachel Adams, deepen the discussions on this theme. Central to the discussions in this chapter is an investigation of how South Africa has engaged with the EU in its pursuit of strengthened local capabilities, and alignment with international changes in the regulation of data and digital technologies. In this context, Michael Gastrow and Rachel Adams juxtapose the emergence of data privacy and data protection regulation in both jurisdictions. A clear lesson from the discussion in this chapter is that the regulation of the digital environment needs to be rapid and responsive – or risks falling behind changes in the technological and political spheres.
In continuing the discussions on privacy, policy, and people, Joe Abah, Krista Baptista, Connor MacKenzie, and Anand Varghese, in Chapter 12, examine the development process for national-level digital policies, regulations, and bills that seek to maximise the benefits of digital technology and mitigate its risks, such as threats to privacy. With Nigeria as the focus, they present a detailed analysis of how policymakers engage with key stakeholders on technology-related policies, regulations, and bills. Their insights help deepen the readers’ understanding of how actors and institutions, including the recently formed AU–EU D4D Hub, can assist African countries in developing citizen-centric and inclusive digital policymaking processes.

As the entirety of this book has argued, digital transformations have a significant impact on human development. To this end, Chapters 13–16 examine the impact of digital governance on people by assessing its implications for economic development and social progress.

In Chapter 13, Sajitha Bashir and Chux Daniels analyse the EU’s Comprehensive Strategy with Africa, which prioritises digital skills in three of its five thematic areas. Despite the existence of such formal declarations, the analysis indicate that the conditions do not yet exist for a meaningful cooperation between the AU and EU in the area of digital skills due to lack of conceptual clarity and agreed consensus on what is meant by digital skills. Further, the authors stress the need to develop the entire ecosystem for digital skills training, including infrastructure, connectivity, training of teachers, and local digital content, in the education and training sectors. Progressive AU–EU collaboration in building digital skills must focus on these areas.

Learning is an essential aspect of capacity building and inclusion, as Niyanta Shetye et al., discuss in Chapter 14. By focusing on new and emerging trends in the cooperation between the AU and the EU, this chapter highlights low-cost and effective digital learning solutions and argues that in addition to digital technology transfer, innovation and investments are needed in building a learning-centred support for green transitioning and digital cooperation. In response to ICTs becoming a catalyst for transformative learning, the authors provide insights on how constructive AU–EU cooperation and co-learning can pave ways for societal transformations, particularly in rural communities.

Despite many efforts, education systems, especially in STEM, continue to leave some segments of the society behind – especially women and marginalised communities. In Chapter 15, Zuzana Sladkova and Sumbal Bashir explore ideas around Feminist Digital Development. The authors echo the point made in various chapters of this book that Africa and Europe are embracing a new era of development cooperation that is digital. However, questions remain about the ability of the EU to effectively deliver on the promise of a value-based digital partnership, as well as the willingness of African partners to overcome the trust deficit from the past and to work with the EU towards a common vision for digital transformation. Still on the concept of female inclusion, Francine Beleyi, in Chapter 16, focusses on the importance of African female entrepreneurs,
showing that dedicated digital networks are vital for supporting thriving businesses and job creation. According to the author, digital networks can facilitate access to peer support, mentorship, and business training, which help to boost women’s confidence and capabilities to run more successful businesses.

In summary, the book opens with ideas on global politics and the implications on digital transformation, shifts to policies and regulations on digitalisation as they relate to economic development, and ends with discussion on the important roles that digitalisation plays in human development, that is, the impact of digital revolution on people. Overall, the rich insights presented in the book point to three key messages: (1) the necessity for a deeper AU–EU digital cooperation, (2) the prospects for mutual benefits that could result from the strategic partnership between the two regions, and (3) new frontiers for AU–EU cooperation in digitalisation that can open further opportunities for increased competitiveness and development outcomes for both continents. Increased digital cooperation between the AU and EU can lead to transformative change in Africa and Europe – jobs, better health and well-being, reduced inequality and environmental degradation, greater inclusion, and social progress.

Note

1 Global Gateway is an EU initiative that seeks to foster a sustainable connectivity, with the aim to invest EUR 300 billion between 2021 and 2027 in both physical and digital infrastructure.

References


