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The Oxford Report

Shaping Africa's Intelligence Future



Pax Technologica

Shaping Africa's Intelligence Future

Reflections from the Oxford Africa Symposium 2026 :

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Pax Technologica Africa

Africa lies at the heart of Pax Technologica's vision of a future where humanity and technology coexist in harmony. We stand on the brink of an African century, in which the continent's rapid transformation will not only reshape Africa but also have a profound impact on the world. With demographic forecasts predicting that by 2050, one in three young people globally will be African, it is crucial to ensure that Africa's demographic dividend is accompanied by a technology dividend. This presents a unique opportunity to adopt exponential technologies in ways that empower individuals and communities, while also contributing to the development of new governance structures and infrastructures that support the well-being of the continent and its natural ecosystems.

Pax Technologica Africa is committed to supporting this transformation by partnering with local leaders, innovators, and institutions that are already doing remarkable work across the continent, particularly in policy, venture, and public education. Our goal is to support local growth and facilitate international scaling, contributing to a new dynamic in which Africa becomes a leading exporter of technological innovation and problem solving.



Introduction

How can Africa become an architect of its intelligence future rather than a consumer of systems built elsewhere?

This was the central question explored at the Oxford Africa Symposium, which took place at the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, on 22 and 23 June 2026. Convened by Pax Technologica and the AI Centre for Excellence Africa (AICE Africa), the symposium brought together fifty seven participants from twenty-three countries, including leaders, founders, policymakers, researchers, investors, and practitioners. Over two days, the symposium combined keynote presentations, panel discussions, workshops, and informal conversations to examine the opportunities and challenges presented by artificial intelligence, as well as the institutional choices that will shape Africa's technological future.

The symposium was convened at a moment of growing urgency. Across Africa and around the world, governments, businesses, and civil society organisations are grappling with the implications of increasingly capable AI systems. Questions of data governance, compute infrastructure, talent development, enterprise adoption, investment, and regulation are no longer abstract matters for the future; they are becoming immediate strategic concerns for governments, businesses, and institutions across the continent. The Oxford gathering was designed to create a space where leaders from different sectors, disciplines, and geographies could reflect on these developments together, challenge assumptions, test ideas, and explore what they mean specifically for Africa. The ambition was not simply to discuss technological change, but to identify practical pathways through which African institutions can shape and benefit from it.

Responsible

Oxford

The intellectual framework for the symposium was provided by *Architects of the Possible: Who Will Build Africa's Intelligence Economy?*, the first paper in the Intelligence Economy Paper Series, developed by Irene Phoebe Kiwia and John Kamara of AICE Africa together with Thomas Ermacora and Paul Hughes of Pax Technologica. The paper argues that Africa possesses many of the assets required to succeed in the age of AI, including a young population, growing digital infrastructure, abundant natural resources, entrepreneurial talent, and a rapidly expanding market. The central challenge, it suggests, is not capability but coordination. The decisions made over the coming years regarding infrastructure, governance, capital formation, and institutional cooperation will have long-lasting consequences for how value is created and captured across the continent.



A recurring theme throughout the symposium was the changing global landscape in which these decisions are being made. Participants reflected on the emergence of four broad centres of gravity in the intelligence economy. The United States continues to dominate frontier AI development and capital formation; China is pursuing an alternative model built on large-scale deployment and state-backed investment; Europe is increasingly focused on technological sovereignty and strategic autonomy; and Africa is seeking to define its own position within this rapidly evolving environment. Against this backdrop, *Architects of the Possible* proposes three possible futures for the continent: the **Extractive Colony**, in which African data and resources generate value elsewhere; the **Fragmented Bazaar**, in which individual countries and institutions pursue disconnected strategies and the **Interoperable Commonwealth**,

in which coordinated action enables the development of shared infrastructure, sovereign capability, and continental scale. These futures provided a common reference point for many of the discussions that followed.

The choice of Oxford as a venue was deliberate. As one of the world's leading centres for scholarship, leadership development, and public policy, the Blavatnik School of Government provided an appropriate setting for a conversation that sat at the intersection of technology, governance economics, and society. The symposium sought to combine intellectual reflection with practical action, bringing together established leaders and emerging voices in an environment that encouraged dialogue rather than advocacy and exchange rather than presentation alone. In this sense, Oxford was not simply a location for the event; it was part of the method. Conversations that began in formal sessions continued over meals, walks through the city, and informal gatherings, reinforcing the symposium's broader ambition to build relationships, strengthen networks, and contribute to a growing community of leaders shaping Africa's intelligence future.



“There is driving power in a dream, because a dream is imagination infrastructure, and it takes, as Margaret Mead reminded us, only a small committed group to change the world. Africa holds what this century most needs: the youngest people, the freshest ground, and technologies that reward those free of legacy, when met with vision, strategy and orchestration. The world order is being set but not yet entirely designed, shaped so far by two main players in the geopolitical race. There is room in the design for a keel; the continent can be it, steadying the ship of humanity.”

Thomas Ermacora

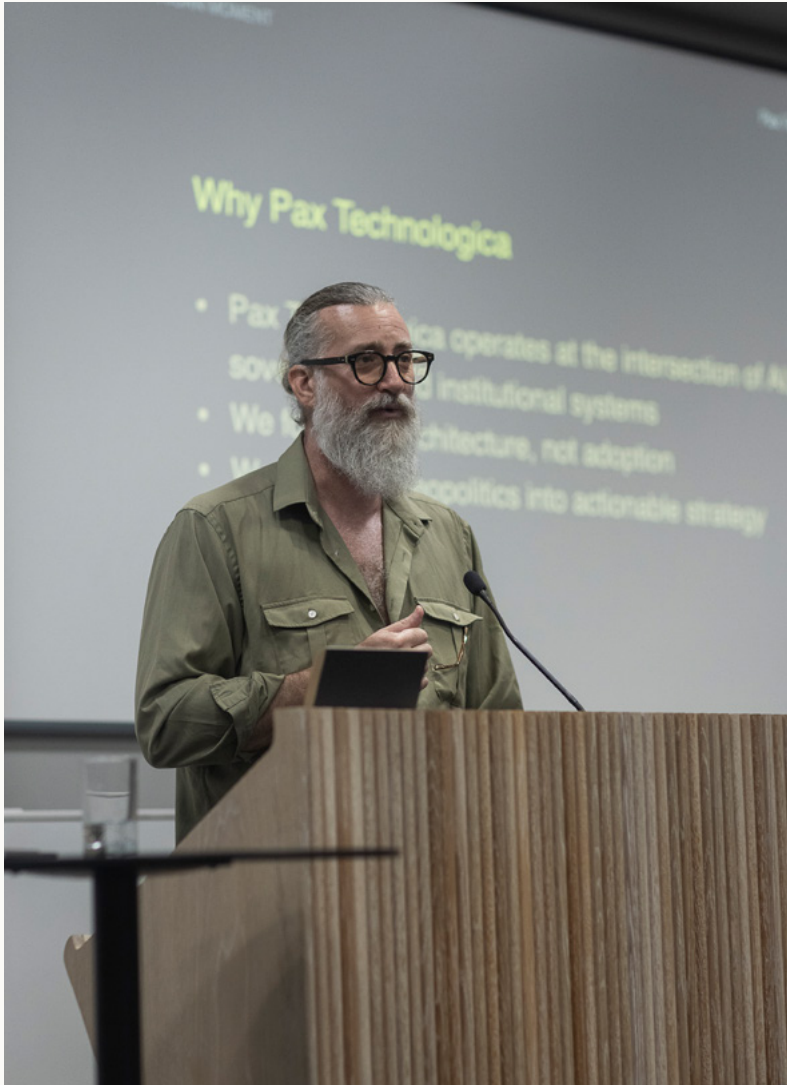




Event Overview

The Oxford Africa Symposium was designed as a journey from reflection to action. Over the course of two days, participants explored the opportunities and challenges facing Africa in the age of artificial intelligence, moving from broad strategic questions to practical proposals for implementation. The first day focused primarily on framing the intelligence economy, examining the geopolitical context, and exploring the institutional choices that will shape Africa's future. The second day built on these discussions by focusing on practical initiatives and collaborative efforts, culminating in a working session on the African AI Foundry that invited participants to develop concrete ideas and priorities for action.





From the outset, the organisers sought to create a symposium rather than a conventional conference. While keynote presentations and panel discussions provided important points of departure, equal emphasis was placed on participation, exchange, and dialogue. Speakers were encouraged to engage with questions from the audience, discussions frequently continued beyond their allotted sessions, and participants were invited to challenge assumptions and contribute their own experiences. The result was a highly interactive environment in which ideas were refined through conversation rather than simply presented from the stage.

This spirit of exchange extended beyond the formal programme. Conversations continued during coffee breaks, shared meals, and walks through Oxford's colleges and parks in unusually warm summer weather. Many of the most

productive discussions took place in these informal settings, where ideas could be explored in greater depth. These moments helped build relationships and trust, creating opportunities for collaboration that extended beyond the symposium itself.

The diversity of participants was one of the gathering's defining characteristics. The symposium brought together government officials, policymakers, entrepreneurs, investors, academics, researchers, development practitioners, technology leaders, and participants in the Pax Technologica–Blavatnik summer fellowship programme. Among them were former ministers, ambassadors, founders of technology ventures, leaders of innovation hubs, representatives of financial institutions, experts in agriculture, trade, education, and public policy, and emerging voices from across Africa and beyond. This breadth of experience ensured that discussions combined strategic vision with practical insight and reflected a wide range of perspectives on the opportunities and challenges ahead.





What emerged over the two days was not a single consensus view but a shared recognition of the importance of the moment. Participants approached questions of artificial intelligence from different backgrounds and with different priorities, yet many converged on the view that Africa's future in the intelligence economy will be shaped not only by technological capability but also by decisions concerning institutions, coordination, investment, governance, and **leadership**. The symposium provided a space in which these questions could be explored collectively, laying the groundwork for the discussions, partnerships, and initiatives described in the sections that follow.

“AI is not a technology conversation, it is a strategic conversation. It needs to live in boardrooms.”

Irene Phoebe Kiwia



Themes & Contributions

DAY ONE



Opening Overview: The Global Context

The symposium opened with reflections from Greg Williams, former Global Editorial Director of WIRED, who situated artificial intelligence within a wider geopolitical and economic context. Contrasting extraordinary technological achievements with persistent global inequalities and conflict, Williams highlighted the increasingly strategic nature of AI development and deployment. As competition between the United States and China intensifies, he argued, countries and regions outside this axis face important questions about agency, autonomy, and their ability to shape the rules and institutions of the emerging intelligence economy.

The African Moment and *Architects of the Possible*

Throughout the symposium, Thomas Ermacora, John Kamara, and Irene Phoebe Kiwia explored the strategic choices facing Africa in the age of artificial intelligence. Rather than focusing primarily on technological capability, their discussions emphasised questions of ownership, coordination, infrastructure, and long-term value creation. A recurring theme was the importance of moving beyond isolated initiatives towards forms of collaboration capable of operating at continental scale. These ideas provided an important reference point for many of the sessions that followed and helped frame the wider conversation about Africa's role in the intelligence economy.



Conversation with Ambassador Philip Thigo

Joining remotely from Kenya, Ambassador Philip Thigo reflected on Africa's position in a rapidly changing technological landscape. While acknowledging significant infrastructure gaps, he argued that the continent's primary challenge is one of agency rather than capability. Thigo called for stronger public-sector capacity in areas such as technology procurement and contract negotiation, warning that governments must be equipped to engage global technology companies on equal terms. He also advocated for new coalitions between countries, institutions, and entrepreneurs seeking alternatives to existing centres of technological power.



Africa as the Global Keel

Greg Williams hosted a conversation between Thomas Ermacora and Nils Gilman on the occasion of the launch of *Africa as the Global Keel: Artificial Intelligence and the African Dream in the Twenty-First Century*. The essay argues that Africa is uniquely positioned to benefit from the intelligence economy, drawing on its demographic strengths, natural resources, renewable energy potential, and entrepreneurial dynamism. The discussion explored how these assets might be combined to create new forms of economic and technological leadership. At the same time, the speakers stressed that opportunities alone are insufficient and that success will depend on strategic choices made over the coming years.

The African AI Foundry

John Kamara introduced the African AI Foundry, a new initiative designed to support African AI research, venture creation, and institutional capability. Reflecting the broader theme of “build, not buy,” the Foundry seeks to strengthen local capacity rather than depend exclusively on imported technologies. Kamara outlined a model combining research, entrepreneurship, capital formation, and ecosystem development across multiple hubs on the continent. Particular emphasis was placed on practical applications, sovereign capability, and the development of technologies designed for African contexts and needs.



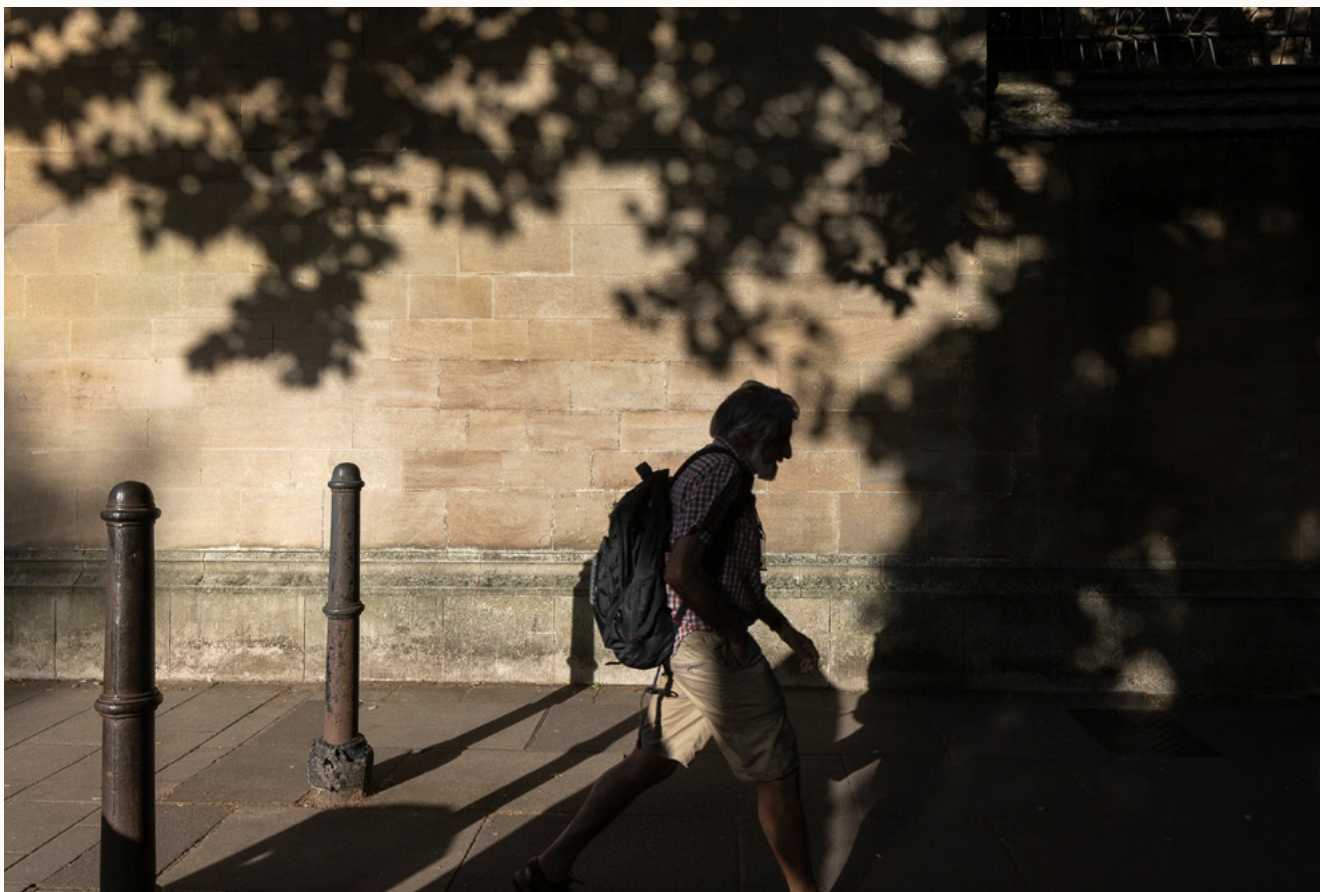
Ecosystem Building

Moderated by Lydia Charles Moyo, the Ecosystem Building panel brought together Edwin Roberts, Caroline Chibelushi, and Deogratius Stephen Massawe. The discussion explored how innovation ecosystems emerge and scale, highlighting the importance of talent, relationships, and supportive institutions. Roberts emphasised the power of mission-driven entrepreneurship and the often-overlooked importance of trust and relationships. Chibelushi argued that successful partnerships should strengthen local capability rather than create dependency, while Massawe reflected on Rwanda’s experience with digital public infrastructure and public-private collaboration.



Capacity Building for the Intelligence Economy

In a session focused on leadership and capability development, Irene Kiwia examined the human and institutional foundations required for success in the intelligence economy. She argued that discussions about AI often focus too heavily on technology itself, while underestimating the importance of leadership, talent, governance, and organisational readiness. Building capability, she suggested, requires investment not only in tools and infrastructure but also in people and institutions capable of using them effectively.



Close of Day One

The first day concluded with a conversation between Thomas Ermacora and Aaron Maniam of the Blavatnik School of Government. Framed around the relationship between “big ideas” and “small ideas,” the discussion explored both ambitious long-term visions and the practical steps required to realise them. Ermacora reflected on concepts such as an African sovereign technology fund, while Maniam highlighted the importance of less visible forms of infrastructure, including skills, institutions, experimentation, and public capability. Together, the discussion reinforced a recurring theme of the symposium: that transformative visions require equally serious attention to implementation.

DAY TWO



Opening Reflections on Day Two

Opening the second day, Thomas Ermacora reflected on themes emerging from the previous discussions and returned to the question of collective action. Revisiting ideas from Africa as the Global Keel, he introduced the metaphor of the “slingshot” to capture the importance of urgency, focus, and momentum. While individual initiatives matter, he argued, meaningful change depends on networks of institutions and leaders working towards shared goals.

Designing Africa’s Intelligence Future

A highlight of the second day was the launch of *Designing Africa’s Intelligence Future: Essays on AI, Governance, and Public Value*, a collection of essays produced through the Pax Technologica–Blavatnik summer fellowship programme. Moderated by Frank van Hasselt, the panel featured five of the six Fellows who had contributed to the publication: Marlon Nyakabau, Siaka Salami, Arfan Ramadhan, Sitong Lyu, and Omotayo Dada (Nilofar Saiyed was unable to attend). Drawing on their essays, the Fellows explored topics including AI governance, trade, public value, and human-centred innovation. The discussion generated significant engagement from the audience and brought a valuable next-generation perspective to the symposium’s broader themes.



Architects of the Possible: Practical Steps Forward

Later on the second day, Kheri Mbiro moderated a discussion with Irene Kiwia, John Kamara, and Thomas Ermacora examining the practical implications of *Architects of the Possible*. Moving beyond diagnosis, the conversation focused on implementation, institutional coordination, and the conditions required for large-scale collaboration. Participants explored questions of trust, governance, investment, and leadership, emphasising that strategic visions must ultimately be translated into practical action.



Foundry Working Session

The symposium concluded with a collaborative workshop focused on the future development of the African AI Foundry. Participants worked in groups to explore possible priorities, initiatives, and institutional models, with discussions centred on what the Foundry should build, how it should operate, and what forms of knowledge, infrastructure, and support it could provide to governments, enterprises, and communities across the continent.

Several recurring themes emerged from the discussions. Participants emphasised the importance of sovereign infrastructure, including data centres and compute capacity located on African soil. Others highlighted opportunities for low-compute, open-source AI models tailored to African languages, contexts, and sectors such as agriculture. Additional proposals included an African platform for showcasing frontier technologies developed on the continent, new approaches to data stewardship and ownership, and mechanisms for translating research into deployable products and services. Questions of talent development, capital formation, and public-private collaboration also featured prominently.

While the proposals varied considerably in scope and ambition, they shared a common objective: strengthening Africa's capacity to shape and benefit from the intelligence economy on its own terms. More than any other session, the workshop reflected the symposium's broader ambition to move beyond analysis and towards practical experimentation, institution-building, and implementation.



Close of the Symposium

In their closing remarks, Thomas Ermacora and John Kamara thanked participants for their contributions and reflected on the discussions that had taken place over the previous two days. They emphasised the importance of sustaining momentum beyond the symposium itself and invited participants to continue contributing to the ideas, initiatives, and collaborations that had emerged. The event concluded with a shared recognition that while the opportunities presented by the intelligence economy are significant, realising them will require sustained effort, coordination, and leadership in the years ahead.



“Sovereignty is no longer
around borders, it has moved
to digital space.”

John Kamara



Reflections & Insights

While participants approached artificial intelligence from different professional, institutional, and geographic perspectives, several common themes emerged over the course of the symposium. The following insights do not represent a formal consensus, but rather a synthesis of ideas that recurred across multiple sessions and conversations.

1. People Before Technology

Many speakers cautioned against viewing artificial intelligence primarily as a technological challenge. While infrastructure, data, and compute are important, the longterm success of any AI strategy ultimately depends on people. Leadership, education, institutional capability, and public trust emerged repeatedly as prerequisites for meaningful progress. Technology alone cannot compensate for weak institutions, fragmented leadership, or a lack of strategic direction. Several participants also suggested that this human-centred perspective may represent one of Africa's most important contributions to the global conversation on AI. At a time when much of the debate is focused on technical performance and scale, Africa has an opportunity to foreground questions of public value, social impact, and human development. The challenge is not simply to build more powerful systems, but to ensure that they serve people and societies in meaningful ways.

2. From Inheriting to Architecting

A recurring theme throughout the symposium was the need for Africa to move from inheriting technological systems designed elsewhere to actively shaping its own future. Participants argued that the continent's role in the intelligence economy should not be limited to adoption and consumption. Instead, African institutions, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and researchers must play a greater role in designing the infrastructure, governance frameworks, and economic models that will shape the next generation of intelligent systems.

3. Build, Don't Buy

The phrase "build, don't buy" became one of the defining ideas of the symposium. Participants emphasised the importance of developing local capability rather than relying exclusively on imported technologies and solutions. This does not imply technological isolation, but rather a commitment to building knowledge, talent, infrastructure, and enterprises capable of creating value within African economies. Ownership matters not only for economic reasons, but also for resilience, adaptability, and long-term sovereignty.

4. Coordination Is the Bottleneck

Africa possesses many of the ingredients required to thrive in the intelligence economy, including talent, markets, natural resources, entrepreneurial energy, and growing digital infrastructure. The challenge identified by many participants was not a lack of capability but a lack of coordination. Too often, promising initiatives operate in isolation.

Creating mechanisms for collaboration between governments, universities, entrepreneurs, investors, and civil society may prove more important than any single technological breakthrough.

5. Data Is an Architecture Issue

Discussions about data frequently moved beyond questions of collection and access towards broader questions of governance and architecture. Participants stressed that data should be viewed as part of a larger system that includes ownership, stewardship, interoperability, and value creation. Decisions about how data is governed will influence who benefits from AI systems and where economic value is ultimately captured.

6. Procurement Is a Strategic Lever

Several speakers highlighted the importance of public procurement as an often overlooked tool for shaping technological development. Governments are not merely regulators of technology; they are also major customers. Procurement decisions can influence markets, support local innovation, create demand for new solutions, and encourage the development of domestic capabilities. Building expertise in procurement and contract negotiation was therefore identified as an important component of technological sovereignty.

7. Capital Must Be Formed Locally

The symposium repeatedly returned to questions of investment and ownership. While international capital will continue to play an important role, participants argued that longterm value creation depends on strengthening local mechanisms for financing innovation and enterprise development. Whether through venture capital, sovereign investment vehicles, development finance, or new institutional models, the ability to form and retain capital within African economies was seen as essential for ensuring that the benefits of technological progress remain on the continent.

8. From Access to Capability

Many countries have made significant progress in expanding access to digital technologies. Participants argued that the next challenge is to move beyond access towards capability. This means developing the skills, institutions, leadership, and organisational capacity required to use technology effectively and strategically. The distinction is important: access creates opportunity, but capability determines whether that opportunity can be translated into lasting economic and social value.

9. AI Must Address African Realities

Participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of focusing on practical use cases rather than technology for its own sake. The most promising applications of AI are often those that address concrete challenges rooted in African realities. Agriculture featured prominently in these discussions, as it remains central to the lives and livelihoods of millions of people across the continent. Similar opportunities were identified in areas such as healthcare, education, trade, financial services, and public administration. The common principle was clear: successful AI strategies begin with real problems and real needs, and only then consider which technologies may help address them.

10. Urgency Without Panic

A final theme concerned the importance of timing. Many participants agreed that the coming years will be critical in determining Africa's position within the intelligence economy. At the same time, there was broad recognition that effective responses require strategic thinking rather than reactive decision-making. The challenge is not to chase every technological development or respond to every wave of hype, but to act with urgency while maintaining focus on long-term goals. Participants repeatedly stressed the importance of building capability, institutions, and partnerships that can endure beyond the current moment.





Next Steps

The Oxford Africa Symposium marked an important milestone in the development of the African AI Foundry. Building on the ideas, partnerships, and proposals that emerged during the symposium, Pax Technologica, AICE Africa, and their collaborators will continue to refine the Foundry's vision, governance, and programme of activities. Particular attention will be given to initiatives that strengthen African capability in areas such as research, entrepreneurship, infrastructure, talent development, and ecosystem building. Alongside this work, participants also identified opportunities for focused initiatives around specific sectors and use cases, including a proposed workshop exploring the application of AI to agriculture and related challenges.

Responsible

The symposium also highlighted the growing body of publications that has emerged from the collaboration between Pax Technologica, AICE Africa, and a wider network of contributors. Recent publications include *Architects of the Possible: Who Will Build Africa's Intelligence Economy?*, *Africa as the Global Keel: Artificial Intelligence and the African Dream in the Twenty-First Century*, and *Designing Africa's Intelligence Future: Essays on AI, Governance, and Public Value*, the latter two of which were launched during the symposium. Together, these publications have helped establish an intellectual framework for thinking about Africa's role in the intelligence economy. Building on this foundation, Pax Technologica and its partners intend to develop an expanded programme of essays, reports, and thought-leadership publications exploring themes such as governance, entrepreneurship, public value, institutional capability, and technological sovereignty. The forthcoming publication of *The Intelligence Enterprise* by Irene Phoebe Kiwia will form part of this continuing programme.

Intelligent

Future convenings will continue to play an important role in this work. The Oxford symposium demonstrated the value of bringing together leaders from different sectors, disciplines, and geographies in a carefully curated environment that prioritises dialogue, exchange, and practical collaboration. Pax Technologica and its partners intend to build on this approach through future gatherings, workshops, and collaborative initiatives designed to strengthen networks and accelerate collective learning. If the intelligence economy will be shaped by institutions, relationships, and shared purpose as much as by technology, then convening is not simply a supporting activity—it is part of the work itself.



“The quality of a technology is decided by the quality of attention we bring to it. Pax Technologica exists to hold that attention: patiently, beautifully, together.”

Paul Hughes







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