Techplomacy

Newsletter
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Amb. Philip Thigo, MBS

Office Of The Special Envoy on Technology

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL
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Kenya-Italy AI Partnership

STRENGTHENING BILATERAL COOPERATION IN AI, EARTH OBSERVATION, AND INNOVATION THROUGH THE AI HUB FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

Kenya and Italy continue to strengthen bilateral cooperation in artificial intelligence (AI), Earth observation, and innovation through sustained high-level engagement. Recent discussions with the Italian Ambassador-Designate to Kenya, H.E. Vincenzo Del Monaco, the Deputy Ambassador, Lorenza Gambacorta, and the Science Attaché focused on advancing the AI Hub for Sustainable Development, co-created under the Mattei Plan, which positions AI and data as key enablers of inclusive development and climate resilience. The engagement also explored opportunities to expand collaboration in Earth observation, building on Italy's longstanding satellite investments and strategic presence in Malindi to support evidence-based decision-making. The two countries plan to advance the next phase of Techplomacy collaborations in Q1 2024, in partnership with Kenyan and Italian private sector stakeholders.





Strengthening Kenya-Saudi Arabia Collaboration on AI

Kenya and Saudi Arabia are strengthening collaboration on artificial intelligence through high-level engagement and strategic institutional partnerships. During a visit to the Saudi Authority for Data and Artificial Intelligence (SDAIA) on the sidelines of the UNIDO G21, discussions—held with the support of H.E. Ambassador Ruwange, Kenya's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Florence Kimata, Advisor to the Cabinet Secretary for Industrialization, Trade and Investment—focused on Saudi Arabia's national AI vision and opportunities for deeper cooperation. Key areas of alignment included AI capacity building, talent development initiatives such as the Elevate Program, institutional strengthening, and applied AI for development, with contributions from the International Center for AI Research and Ethics (ICAIRE). The engagement reaffirmed a shared commitment to advancing skills, research, and responsible AI deployment, and to deepening bilateral cooperation in the next phase of this partnership.

Strategic Engagement on the Establishment of Kenya's Al Scaling Hub

Kenya is advancing strategic engagement on the establishment of a national AI Scaling Hub through coordinated government and development partner collaboration. A recent engagement with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—held with PS Dr. Korir Sing'oei (State Department for Foreign Affairs), the Office Of The Specia Envoy on Technology, and PS Prof. Abdulrazak Shaukat (State Department for Science, Research and Innovation), and led by Samburu Wa-Shiko, Regional Representative for East Africa—focused on aligning priorities and shaping Kenya's pathway forward. Building on a year of joint ideation with Dalberg and the Gates Foundation, the proposed AI Scaling Hub is envisioned as part of a pan-African network emerging across Rwanda, Nigeria, and Senegal. The Hub represents a strategic investment in sovereign AI capabilities, including local model development, access to compute, and country-led AI use cases in priority sectors, while anchoring Kenya within a continental architecture for AI governance, talent development, and innovation.







Strengthening Partnerships for Africa's Al Future

Partnerships for Africa's AI future continue to be strengthened through strategic engagement among global technology leaders, policymakers, and regional innovators. Recent discussions with Emmanuel Lubanzadio of OpenAI and Dr. Tonny Omwansa, held on the margins of the Silicon Xchange in Nairobi, focused on accelerating responsible and inclusive AI adoption across the continent, deepening sovereign capabilities across the AI value chain, and anchoring innovation in locally defined priorities. The engagement also underscored Nairobi's growing role as a continental hub for digital innovation, where policy, research, and technology ecosystems converge to shape Africa's technological future.

A significant milestone was achieved at UNEA-7 with the formal adoption of the Resolution on the Environmental Sustainability of AI Systems, marking a landmark step in global efforts to align emerging technologies with environmental protection objectives. This achievement came after several rounds of extensive negotiations, consultations, and sustained multilateral engagement involving member states, experts, and stakeholders. The resolution reflects a growing global recognition of the profound impact that artificial intelligence can have on resource use, energy consumption, and ecosystems—both as an enabler of environmental solutions and a potential driver of new sustainability challenges.

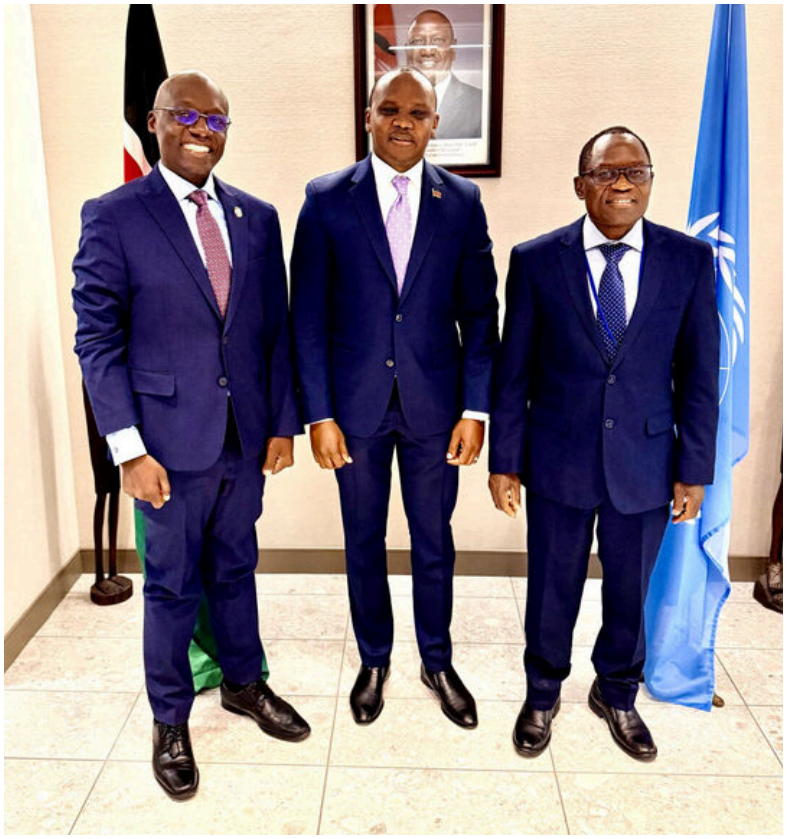
UNEA-7 Resolution Adopted

HISTORIC ADOPTION OF THE RESOLUTION ON ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY OF AI SYSTEMS FOLLOWING EXTENSIVE MULTILATERAL ENGAGEMENT.

The negotiation process was co-facilitated by Martin Row, Deputy Permanent Representative at the German Mission to UNEP, whose leadership ensured balanced discussions and progress across divergent national priorities. Throughout the process, there was strong collaboration from Team Europe, whose unified position, coordinated technical inputs, and consistent diplomatic engagement were instrumental in building trust, bridging gaps, and ultimately securing consensus.



WSIS+20: Coordinating Kenya's Digital Priorities



Kenya is coordinating its national digital priorities as part of the WSIS+20 review process through sustained intergovernmental engagement. During a Kenya delegation briefing at WSIS+20 in New York, held alongside H.E. Amb. Ekitela Lokaale, Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations, and Mr. Steven Isaboke, Principal Secretary for Broadcasting and Telecommunications, discussions aligned on advancing people-centred digital transformation, bridging digital divides, and ensuring that digital public infrastructure and artificial intelligence support inclusive growth and the Sustainable Development Goals. As Kenya co-facilitates the WSIS+20 process, such briefings are critical to maintaining coherence across policy, diplomacy, and delivery at national, regional, and global levels, while shaping the next phase of international digital cooperation.

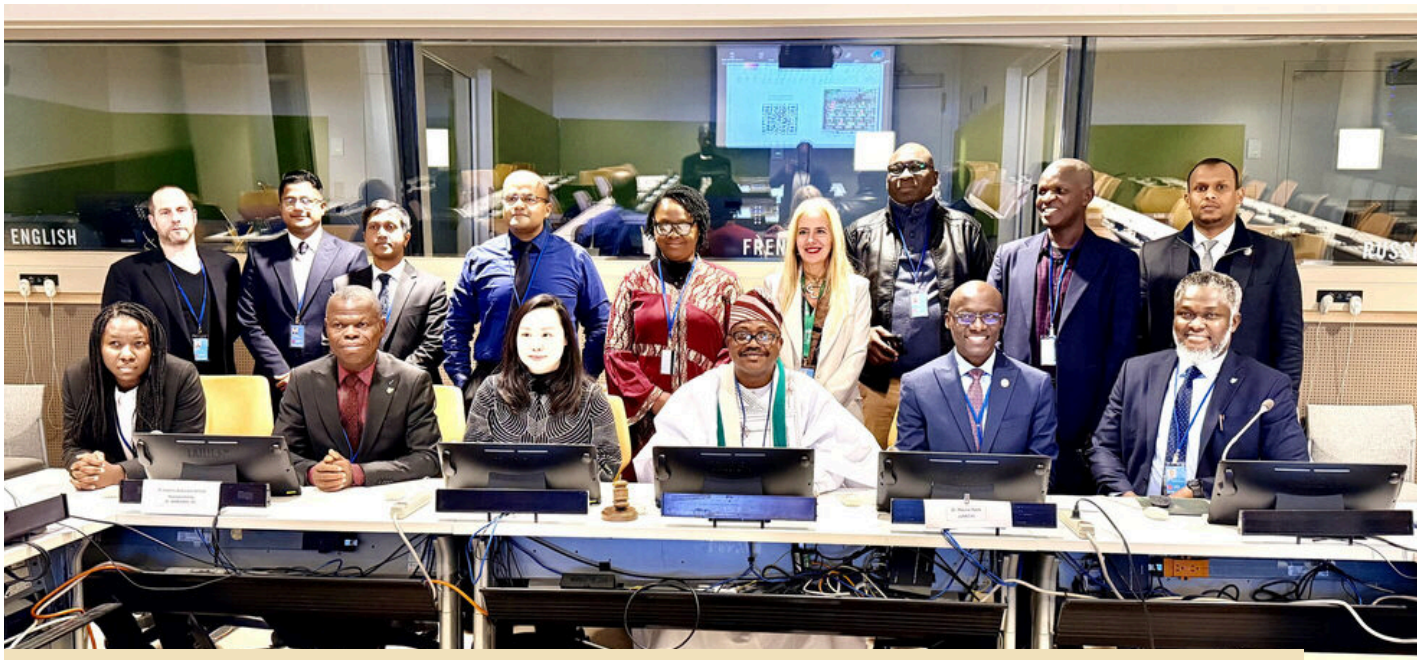
Enabling Environments for Investment to Achieve the WSIS Goals

The WSIS+20 side event, convened by the International Chamber of Commerce, brought together key stakeholders to discuss strategies for advancing digital investment and inclusive growth. Panelists, including H.E. Tara Soomro (UK Mission to the UN), Yu Ping (UNDP), and Cheryl Miller (USCIB), highlighted three main points: predictable policy frameworks foster investor confidence; robust digital infrastructure, including public digital platforms and intelligence, reduces risk and expands access; and



human capital, digital literacy, and strong public-private partnerships are critical for translating investment into inclusive development. Participants emphasized that aligning these elements is essential to accelerating progress toward the WSIS vision.

Re-imagining Digital Cooperation for Sustainable Development



Nigeria hosted an important dialogue on digital cooperation, emphasizing Africa's leadership in advancing the continent's digital agenda. The discussion reaffirmed the relevance of WSIS as an early global experiment in multistakeholder collaboration and highlighted the need to renew that collaborative spirit in the era of intelligence. Stakeholders called for enhanced local and regional WSIS follow-up to accelerate progress toward the SDGs and Africa's Agenda 2063, strengthen data ecosystems, and enable citizens to meaningfully participate in and benefit from digital transformation. Panelists emphasized that digital cooperation achieves impact when governments, the private sector, civil society, academia, and communities work hand in hand, translating global commitments into local action.

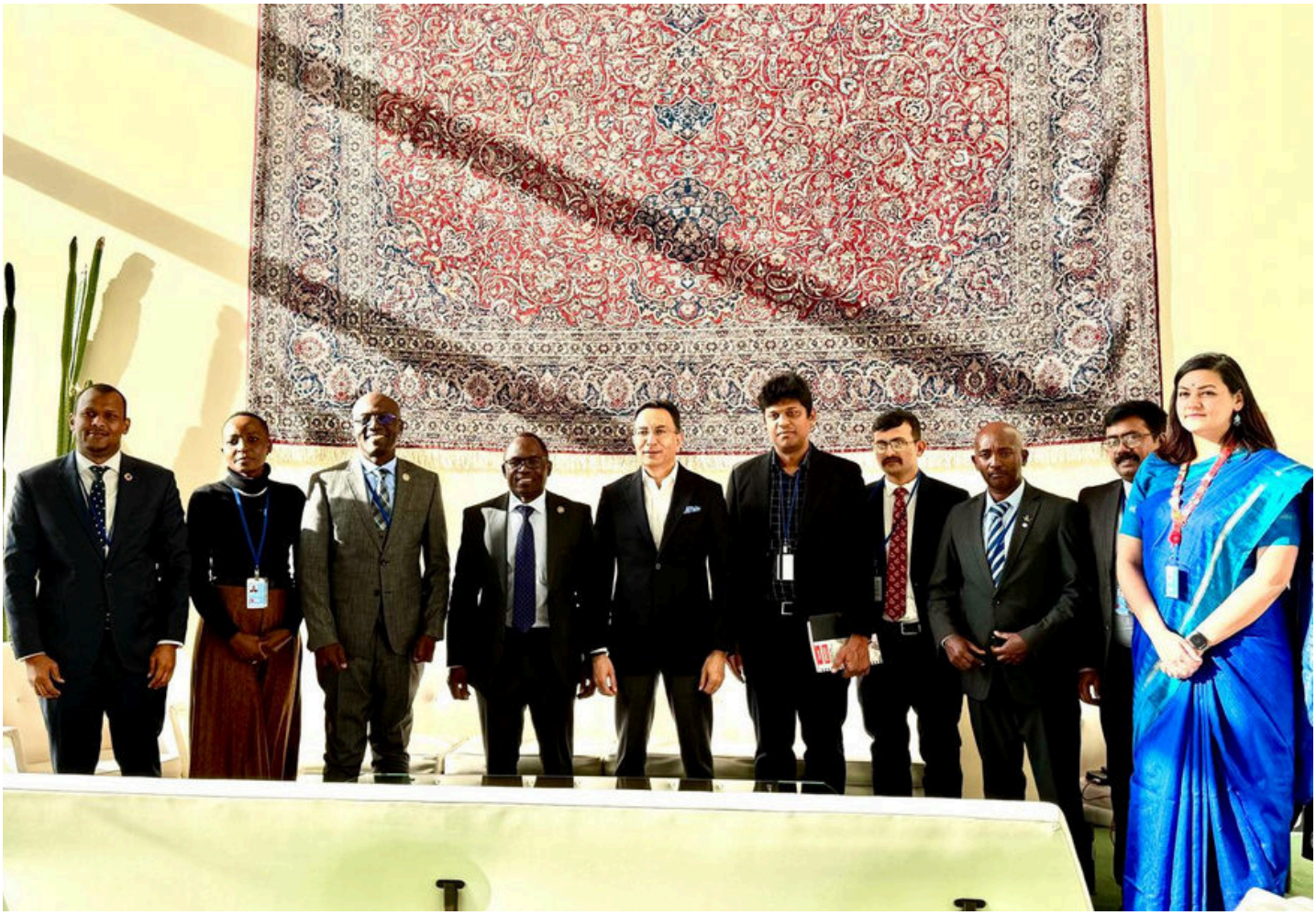
WSIS+20 at the UNGA: Kenya's National Statement



Kenya's delegation delivered its National Statement at the WSIS+20 Outcome Review Meeting at the United Nations General Assembly, reaffirming the country's commitment to a people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented digital future. The statement emphasized bridging digital divides, investing in digital public infrastructure, building AI capacity, and strengthening global digital cooperation.

As co-facilitator of the WSIS+20 review process, Kenya highlighted its focus on translating global commitments into practical, implementable outcomes that advance inclusive growth and the Sustainable Development Goals. Special recognition was given to H.E. Balonzi Ekitela Lokaale for his exemplary leadership and co-facilitation of the WSIS+20 process alongside Albania.

Strengthening Kenya–India Technology and AI Cooperation | WSIS+20 Readout



At the margins of WSIS+20, a high-level bilateral meeting was held between the Kenya delegation and the Government of India, led by H.E. Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw, India's Minister for Electronics and Information Technology, together with Kenya's Principal Secretary for Broadcasting and Telecommunications, Mr. Edward Isaboke. The discussion reviewed the strong momentum in Kenya–India technology cooperation, building on longstanding collaboration in digital public infrastructure, innovation, skills development, research, and entrepreneurship. Participants assessed progress across existing cooperation streams and explored opportunities to scale impact through more structured, long-term partnerships.

Particular focus was placed on the forthcoming India AI Impact Summit 2026, viewed as a pivotal moment in advancing the global AI agenda from principles and governance toward implementation and inclusive outcomes. The engagement also underscored the growing role of technology diplomacy, including cooperation within foreign service and diplomatic ecosystems. In addition, the delegations exchanged views on sustaining and operationalising commitments under the Global Digital Compact, including the Independent Scientific Panel on AI and the Global Dialogue Mechanism, reaffirming a shared commitment to an AI-enabled future grounded in trust, sovereignty, interoperability, and shared prosperity.

Kenya–Albania Reception | WSIS+20 and Global Digital Cooperation

At the margins of WSIS+20, a joint Kenya–Albania reception was held by the Government of Albania and Kenya's Permanent Mission in New York, led by H.E. Ambassador Ekitela Lokaale, to mark two decades of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process and its contribution to global digital cooperation. The reception provided an opportunity to reflect on WSIS's role in advancing inclusive connectivity, digital development, capacity building, and multistakeholder governance.





As co-facilitators of WSIS+20, Kenya and Albania worked in close partnership to deliver a process grounded in inclusion, consensus-building, and trust. Discussions highlighted shared achievements, reaffirmed commitment to open, secure, inclusive, and people-centred digital futures, and underscored the importance of sustained multilateral cooperation. Particular emphasis was placed on Kenya's role in supporting the permanence of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), recognised as a cornerstone institution for inclusive and transparent digital governance. The engagement reaffirmed Kenya's continued commitment to global digital governance and multilateral innovation through strong partnerships and collective action.



Harnessing Data and AI to Strengthen Environmental Governance | UNEA-7 High-Level Dialogue



At the margins of UNEA-7, Kenya co-hosted a high-level dialogue on Harnessing Data and AI to Strengthen Environmental Governance in partnership with Estonia, Italy, UNEP, the European Environment Agency, ITU, Standards Australia, ALU, Microsoft, and iX Africa. The dialogue convened policymakers, scientists, technologists, and development partners to examine how data, artificial intelligence, and digital public infrastructure can enhance environmental governance amid accelerating climate risks and technological change.

Discussions highlighted the growing role of AI in enabling near-real-time environmental monitoring, including deforestation detection, flood forecasting, pollution tracking, and biodiversity analysis, while underscoring that these capabilities depend on high-quality, accessible, and interoperable data.Participants noted persistent fragmentation in the global environmental data ecosystem, which continues to limit effective AI-driven decision-making, particularly in climate-vulnerable regions.

The dialogue emphasised the Global Environmental Data Strategy (GEDS) as a critical framework for addressing these challenges through shared standards, interoperable taxonomies, harmonised metadata, and aligned reporting systems. Kenya shared its experience in applying digital public infrastructure and Digital Public Intelligence to environmental stewardship, including AI-enabled early warning systems, satellite and drone-based ecosystem monitoring, climate and biodiversity data collaborations, and geothermal-powered green data centres supporting sovereign compute. The engagement reaffirmed the importance of collective investment in capacity building, sustainable data infrastructure, and interoperability to ensure AI contributes effectively to planetary resilience and inclusive environmental governance.

Implementing the Global Digital Compact: Aligning AI and Digital Governance with Environmental Sustainability

At the Seventh Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) in Nairobi, Kenya co-organised a high-level official side event convening governments, multilateral institutions, and technology leaders to advance a shared global priority: embedding environmental sustainability at the heart of digital transformation and artificial intelligence (AI) governance. Co-organised by Kenya, Belgium, France, Germany, Mexico, Sweden, Zambia, and UNEP, the event focused on translating the Global Digital Compact (GDC) from principle into practice — ensuring that digital progress drives climate action, inclusive growth, and environmental stewardship.

High-Level Leadership and Global Representation

The panel brought together senior leaders representing diverse regional and policy perspectives, including Hon. Mike Mposha, Minister of Green Economy and Environment, Zambia; H.E. Willem Van de Voorde, Special Envoy for Climate and Environment, Belgium; H.E. Verónica García Gutiérrez, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to UNEP, Costa Rica; H.E. Barbara Pompili, Ambassador for the Environment, France; H.E. Gisele Fernández Ludlow, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to UNEP and UN-Habitat, Mexico; Ms. Åsa Johansson, Deputy Director-General, Ministry of Climate and Enterprise, Sweden; and Mr. Marcel J. Dorsch, Senior Expert, German Environment Agency. The session was moderated by Ms. Sally Radwan, Chief Digital Officer, UNEP.



From Principles to Action

Discussions centred on operationalising Principle (e) of the GDC on environmental sustainability, with emphasis on embedding sustainability in national AI strategies, advancing digital public goods, closing the digital and AI divide, and strengthening multilateral cooperation for financing, capacity-building, and technology transfer.

Kenya's Perspective

Kenya highlighted how its National AI Strategy and flagship digital initiatives are advancing the GDC at national level — integrating sustainability, innovation, and inclusive development. A central message was that no country should outsource its intelligence in the age of AI. Building sovereign AI capabilities, anchored in local data, talent, and infrastructure — while remaining globally interoperable — is essential for resilience, innovation, and environmental stewardship.

A Call to Action

As implementation of the Global Digital Compact accelerates, the imperative is clear: digital transformation must be green, inclusive, and sovereign by design. This dialogue reaffirmed Kenya's leadership in shaping a global agenda where AI and digital governance deliver lasting value for people, planet, and prosperity.



Catalysing Africa's Digital Future: Innovation Infrastructure, Tech Diplomacy, and Regional Cooperation

Ambassador Philip Thigo, Kenya's Special Envoy on Technology, participated in Silicon Xchange 2025, a high-level convening that brought together leaders from government, industry, venture capital, research, and civil society to examine how Africa can strengthen its innovation infrastructure and accelerate inclusive digital transformation. Co-organised with Kenya, the forum provided a platform to reflect on the policies, partnerships, and pathways required to position Africa as an active participant in the global AI and innovation economy.

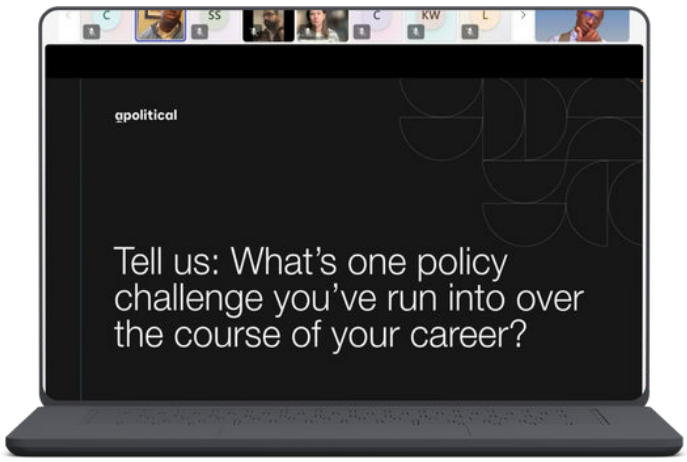
Ambassador Thigo contributed to a panel discussion on Building Africa's Innovation Infrastructure: Policy, Pathways and Cross-Border Collaboration, alongside representatives from Google and OpenAI Africa. The discussion underscored the importance of coherent policy frameworks, regional cooperation, and strategic investment in building resilient and inclusive innovation ecosystems. It was noted that without deliberate action, AI capabilities risk remaining concentrated in a small number of countries and firms, limiting Africa's agency and reinforcing dependency.

Key priorities highlighted included strengthening sovereignty over African data and knowledge systems; accelerating investment in regional digital and compute infrastructure, including shared GPU hubs, fibre corridors, and renewable-powered data centres; and advancing interoperable digital public infrastructure to enable cross-border scaling, deeper markets, and inclusive growth. The importance of risk-based, proportionate regulation that protects citizens while enabling innovation was also emphasised, alongside sustained investment in local talent, regulatory capacity, and standards. The engagement reaffirmed that Africa's digital future must be intentionally built through regional cooperation, strategic technology diplomacy, and long-term investment in capability and infrastructure, positioning the continent not only as a beneficiary of global innovation but as a contributor to its design and governance.





Appointment to Apolitical Advisory Council on the Policy Impact Modeler



Ambassador Philip Thigo, Kenya's Special Envoy on Technology, was appointed to the Advisory Council for Apolitical's Policy Impact Modeler and participated in the inaugural meeting of the Council. The engagement focused on the growing need for governments to strengthen evidence-based decision-making amid increasing policy complexity, uncertainty, and rapid technological change.

The Policy Impact Modeler was discussed as a tool that applies artificial intelligence to simulate policy options, enabling public institutions to anticipate impacts, assess trade-offs, and design more inclusive, resilient, and effective interventions prior to implementation. He contributed perspectives from Kenya and the Global South, with emphasis on responsible AI deployment, institutional capacity building, and safeguarding sovereign decision-making in the Age of Intelligence. The appointment reflects continued engagement in shaping global tools and frameworks that strengthen public-sector capability and improve policy outcomes for citizens.

Skilling, Employability, and Sovereignty in the Age of Intelligence

A strategic dialogue was held between the Office of the Special Envoy on Technology and Zindi, led by Ms. Celina Lee, CEO of Zindi, to reflect on the findings of the Zindi Employability Report. The report provides timely insights into Kenya's evolving AI and data science talent ecosystem, examining how skilling pathways are translating into employability outcomes.

The discussion highlighted both encouraging progress and persistent gaps in converting AI and data science training into jobs, innovation, enterprise creation, and inclusive economic growth. The report was recognised as an important evidence base for understanding what is working and where further policy and ecosystem interventions are required.

The dialogue also explored opportunities for deeper collaboration, particularly building on Zindi's partnership with Cassava Technologies, which links pan-African AI infrastructure with Africa's largest AI talent platform.



Looking ahead, shared priorities include scaling skilling efforts beyond training into employability and entrepreneurship, strengthening direct linkages between talent pipelines, infrastructure, industry, and real-world use cases, and embedding AI skilling within a broader framework of digital and intelligence sovereignty. The engagement underscored the need for the next phase of AI skilling in Kenya and across Africa to focus on capability deployment—aligning education systems, industry demand.

Deepening Kenya–UAE Collaboration on AI Capacity, Sovereignty & Impact



The Office had the honour of visiting H.E. Omar Sultan Al Olama, UAE Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence, Digital Economy and Remote Work Applications, at his offices in Abu Dhabi.

The conversation focused on strengthening Kenya–UAE cooperation in artificial intelligence, building on our shared experience serving on the UN High-Level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence (HLAB-AI) and the important follow-up processes now underway. In particular, we reflected on the priorities outlined in the UN Secretary-General's report, "Innovative Financing for Capacity Building," and how countries can move from ambition to implementation in developing inclusive, sustainable, and sovereign AI ecosystems.

We exchanged insights on how both Kenya and the UAE are deepening AI adoption and development across the full AI stack — from trusted data and sustainable compute, to skills, governance, and high-impact public-interest use cases. I was especially impressed by the UAE's integrated national AI strategy, combining visionary public-sector leadership, world-class research institutions, major investments in compute infrastructure, and agile regulatory frameworks, all anchored in real-world deployment across government, industry, education, and sustainability.

The UAE's growing investments across Africa, including through its $1 billion AI for Development Initiative, offer a compelling model for development-driven and responsible AI partnerships.

We also discussed AI Everything Kenya, and opportunities for deeper UAE engagement, particularly given the initiative's origins in the UAE. We look forward to welcoming H.E. Al Olama to Kenya in May, as we continue strengthening collaboration across policy, innovation, investment, and talent development.

Finally, we shared perspectives on Kenya's Action Lab, our mission-based platform for public-interest AI, and the real-world use cases being developed across agriculture, climate resilience, public service delivery, education, and digital public infrastructure. These exchanges reinforced the value of South–South cooperation and peer learning in accelerating responsible and inclusive AI adoption.

Grateful for the warm hospitality, strategic insights, and shared commitment to ensuring that artificial intelligence delivers people-centred, sustainable, and sovereign development outcomes for our countries and beyond.

AI Impact Summit: From Commitments to Delivery



At the AI Impact Summit Curtain Raiser, organized by the Permanent Missions of India and France to the United Nations in New York, Kenya, through the Office Of The Special Envoy on Technology highlighted its longstanding engagement in shaping global AI outcomes. From early participation at Bletchley Park to active contributions in the Paris Action Summit, Kenya has been central to advancing the Current AI and Sustainable AI Coalition.

The remarks emphasized the urgent need to move from commitments to delivery, particularly in the areas of sustainable AI and public-interest AI. Key priorities include accessible computing, innovative financing, robust local data ecosystems, and practical use cases that generate impact for people, the planet, and inclusive growth.



AI, Multilateralism, and the Global Digital Compact

Philip Thigo met with Dr. Claire Melamed of the UN Foundation to discuss the evolving role of AI in multilateral settings. The conversation underscored the importance of UN-led processes and newly established institutions under the Global Digital Compact as the most legitimate and inclusive mechanisms for ensuring that the benefits of AI are broadly shared, while its risks and harms are mitigated. In a moment where AI capabilities and impact are increasingly concentrated, strengthening these multilateral pathways is essential to promote shared prosperity, equity, and sustainable development, rather than deepening existing digital divides.

Strengthening Kenya-Brazil Collaboration on Emerging Technologies

The meeting also acknowledged Brazil's leadership following the BRICS Leaders' Declaration, which reaffirmed the UN's centrality in global AI governance at a critical moment for inclusive, trusted, and effective multilateralism.

Kenya and Brazil reaffirmed a shared commitment to practical, UN-anchored multilateralism that advances innovation while promoting inclusion, trust, and sustainable development in the age of intelligence.





Building the Commons in the Age of Intelligence

Held discussions with Amandeep Singh Gill, UN Secretary-General's Tech Envoy, on the implementation of the Global Digital Compact and WSIS outcomes, including next steps for the Global Dialogue Mechanism and the Independent Scientific Panel. The exchange also covered broader approaches to AI capacity-building, reaffirming the central role of the United Nations in advancing inclusive, coordinated global efforts.

Accelerating Transboundary Environmental Data Governance in East Africa From Fragmented Data to Regional Intelligence

The Office Of The Special Envoy on Technology is pleased to share the release of a landmark report, Accelerating Transboundary Environmental Data Governance in East Africa – EA-READY Phase II, developed by UNEP in collaboration with GIZ and regional partners. East Africa stands at a climate crossroads. Increasing floods, prolonged droughts, food insecurity, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation are intensifying across borders. Yet environmental data systems across the region remain fragmented, siloed, and slow — limiting our collective ability to anticipate risk, respond early, and build long-term resilience. EA-READY Phase II (2026–2029) sets out a bold and pragmatic roadmap to move from fragmented national data systems toward a federated, interoperable, and sovereign regional environmental data infrastructure. The programme aims to reduce disaster alert latency by up to 90% — from hours to under 15 minutes — enabling faster response, saving lives, and protecting livelihoods across transboundary basins.



Key pillars of the initiative include:

Institutionalising regional data governance, anchored under the East African Community (EAC), UNEP, and IGAD, through a treaty-backed Environmental Data Governance Council.
Scaling interoperable data infrastructure across priority transboundary river basins, integrating hydrological, meteorological, satellite, and community-generated data.
Operationalising early-warning and decision-support services for floods, droughts, and agriculture, with strong last-mile delivery through SMS, USSD, radio, and community channels.
Building a regional fellowship and talent pipeline, embedding data science, climate intelligence, and AI capabilities directly within national institutions.
Unlocking sustainable financing through a pioneering Value-of-Data Framework, enabling blended finance, insurance instruments, and climate investment flows.
Beyond technology, EA-READY Phase II advances a deeper ambition: strengthening regional sovereignty in the age of intelligence, ensuring East Africa builds, governs, and benefits from its own environmental data systems while remaining globally interoperable.

By aligning African leadership, multilateral institutions, development partners, academia, civil society, and the private sector, this initiative positions East Africa as a global reference point for climate-resilient digital public infrastructure and responsible environmental intelligence.
We invite partners to engage in translating this vision into action — building a future where environmental data becomes trusted intelligence that safeguards lives, ecosystems, and prosperity across borders.

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