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African Development Bank and Club de Madrid partner to advance digital transformation in Africa

African farmers adopting digital tools are seeing revenue increases of 40–45% annually

📅 29-May-2025



Moderator, Dr. Victor Oladokun with panelists Mame Omar Diop, UNESCO Representative to Côte d'Ivoire; Dr. Obiageli "Obi" Ezekwesili, former Nigerian Minister of Education; Mehdi Jomaa, former Prime Minister of Tunisia; Julia Duncan, Global Director for Development Finance at Bayer; and Pren-Tsilya Boa-Guehe, Head of Global Affairs for Africa at Google, at the High-Level Side Event on Digital Transformation for Inclusive Growth and Governance on 27 May 2025, during the 2025 AfDB Annual Meetings.

Digital platforms are catalysing important development markers across Africa such as enabling smallholder farmers to access agronomic guidance, financial advice, and markets, an audience during a panel discussion at the African Development Bank Group's Annual Meetings heard.

Furthermore, digitising Africa's public sector systems could unlock up to \$687 billion in additional revenues across the continent, African Development Bank Group Chief Economist and Vice President for Economic Governance & Knowledge Management, Kevin Urama said.

He was speaking on Tuesday 27 May at a high-level side event co-hosted with the Club de Madrid (<https://clubmadrid.org/>) during the Bank's 2025 Annual Meetings in Abidjan. Urama highlighted that digitising tax systems alone could yield up to \$125 billion, without raising tax rates.

Held under the theme "Driving Africa's Economic Future: Digital Transformation for Inclusive Growth and Governance," the event brought together public and private sector leaders to discuss how digital

technologies can accelerate inclusive economic transformation in Africa.

The panel discussion, moderated by Dr. Victor Oladokun, Senior Advisor to the Bank President for Communications and Stakeholder Engagement, comprised:

- Mehdi Jomaa, former Prime Minister of Tunisia and member of the Club de Madrid
- Julia Duncan, Global Director for Development Finance at Bayer
- Dr. Obiageli “Obi” Ezekwesili, former Vice President at the World Bank and former Nigerian Minister of Education
- Mame Omar Diop, Head of the UNESCO Office in Abidjan and Representative to Côte d’Ivoire
- Pren-Tsilya Boa-Guehe, Head of Global Affairs for Africa at Google

Speakers underscored the transformative potential of digital technologies across sectors. Bayer’s Julia Duncan noted that farmers adopting digital tools are seeing revenue increases of 40–45% annually. “Digital platforms are enabling smallholder farmers to access agronomic guidance, financial advice, and markets,” she said.

“We are a continent that missed out on the agrarian and industrial revolutions. But one revolution we are not missing out on is the digital revolution,” said Ezekwesili. “We are not just participating, but also showing that we can be part of the production systems driving the revolution.”

Boa-Guehe of Google echoed this view: “Africa isn’t far behind the rest of the world in Artificial Intelligence, because AI is at a nascent stage globally—but we must act swiftly.” She highlighted a forthcoming AI sandbox initiative under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat, aimed at fostering innovation through collaboration between policymakers, startups, and the private sector, within sound regulatory frameworks.

Emphasizing the urgency of education reform to support Africa's digital ambitions, Ezekwesili said: "Nine out of ten African children are not attaining basic literacy. The system is failing them. If we want to lead in the digital revolution, we must start by rethinking teacher training, teaching methods, and curricula, using evidence-based approaches."

Former Prime Minister Jomaa stressed the role of strong political leadership, attributing Tunisia's digital success to strong political will and a clear reform strategy, centered around the Tunisia Digital 2020 Plan. "For us, digital is not just about economic growth, it is about institutional reform and governance efficiency," he said. "The key factor underlying all our digital success in Tunisia is education."

UNESCO's Mame Omar Diop noted that Africa currently accounts for just 2.5 percent of the global AI market, valued at over \$130 billion in 2023 and projected to reach \$1.9 trillion by 2030. Highlighting the importance of embedding ethical considerations—tackling bias and transparency—into the design of AI systems, he noted that UNESCO has led the development of the only global standard aimed at ensuring AI systems uphold human rights and freedoms.

Boa-Guehe concluded by stressing the importance of continental institutions: "For the private sector to scale digital solutions across Africa, it needs strong institutional anchors. The African Union and the African Development Bank have the convening power and credibility to lead this transformation."

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