



CALL FOR PAPERS

Title: Reimagining Africa's Digital Economies: Sociotechnical Systems, Human–Technology Interactions, and the Co-production of Digital Futures

The rapid expansion of digitalization and AI-mediated economies in Africa is inducing new possibilities of doing business, economic growth, and innovation for Africa. At the same time this expansion is exposing existing and new complex sociotechnical tensions as relates to inclusion, social and epistemic justice, power, identity, in/visibility, economic and ecological justice (Ademinran, Balogun & Ihezue 2023 & Olorufemi, 2023; Adamu & Nkwo 2023; Ndaka et al 2024). African technology ecosystems are deeply entangled with social norms, historical colonial legacies, political economies, diverse cultural worldviews and indigenous values of Africans. Particularly, AI technology is not just a technological phenomenon, but sociotechnical – embedding itself in everydayness of individual people, institutions and societies, their economies and their politics - co-producing each other - hence influencing new meanings of agency, identity, visibility, citizenship, economic benefits, public, and private life (Jasanoff & Kim 2019; Mavlunga, 2017; Augusto 2008). This society-technology co-production is complexified by African informal economies, the rich communal relationality and diverse indigenous knowledge systems, as well as existing social and digital inequalities, and political economies dominantly shaped and embedded in postcolonial infrastructures (Nyabola, 2018; Mhlambi & Tribelli 2023). Understanding AI-enabled economies in Africa requires new approaches that do not treat AI as just a tool, economic enabler or an immaculate techno-fixer to African social and economic problems, but as sociotechnical – deeply embedded and co-evolving with human values, prejudices, political and economic forces, social and cultural imaginaries.

At the core of digital economies, is AI -mediated Human Technology Interactions (HTI), that go beyond the normal human sphere of interaction, consciously or unconsciously shaping subjectivities, identities, in/visibilities and everyday life of users. Thus, technology users have to negotiate new forms of identities, self-definition, self-autonomy, self-preservation and agency in and through the pre-defined digital systems (Oduor 2021). These new forms of interactions raise new questions; a) How can individuals benefit from AI economies while preserving their autonomy in algorithmically mediated environments? b) How do AI systems influence, self-perception, self-identity, self-preservation, moral reasoning and social belongingness within a digitally mediated economy? c) what new norms, values, and forms of social beings emerge and/or disappear as human and machines intertwine and co-produce each other? Studies note that, African experiences of HTI remain under-documented in global AI research, with the dominant narratives on AI risks and design paradigms mirroring global realities as opposed to local realities (Birhane 2021; Mhlambi & Tribelli 2023). As a result, benefits and risks/harms of AI have been universalized in the global AI frameworks, which is also reflected in the recently formulated regional and national AI strategies and frameworks in the African region.

This Call for Papers invites scholars, practitioners, designers, technologists, and civil-society researchers to engage these intersections. We welcome African-centred, interdisciplinary, decolonial, feminist, design-based, and practice-oriented contributions.

The call focusses on two streams outlined below;

Stream 1: Sociotechnical Systems (SOCIOTECH)

Focus of the Stream

The SOCIOTECH stream explores the reciprocal shaping of AI and African societies. This includes analysing how technologies emerge within, reproduce, or disrupt social, political, economic, and cultural systems. Submissions should reflect an interest in:

- a. AI as a sociotechnical system
- b. co-evolution of technology and society
- c. institutions, infrastructures, and governance
- d. African sociopolitical contexts shaping technological deployment
- e. knowledge hierarchies, data economies, and local innovation ecologies

This stream builds on the growing body of African and Global South scholarship demanding that AI be situated within histories of coloniality, structural inequality, and ongoing socio-technical imaginaries for the future (Gwagwa et al 2022).

Suggested Topics for SOCIOTECH Stream

Papers may address (but are not limited to):

1.1 Governance & Institutions

- How AI reshapes public service delivery, eligibility systems, and accountability practices.
- Institutional capacity gaps in African states for governing AI (skills, organisational culture, bureaucratic incentives).
- Comparative analysis of African regulatory approaches and their socio-political implications.

1.2 Data, Power & Economic Models

- Political economy of African data: extraction, monetisation, credit-scoring, fraud-detection, public registries.
- Business models behind African fintech, digital ID, mobility or AgTech ecosystems — who benefits, who is excluded?
- Impact of cloud/compute dependence on digital sovereignty.
- Implications of cross-border data flows for regional integration (AfCFTA, Smart Africa).

1.3 Infrastructure, Access & Inequalities

- Inclusion/exclusion patterns produced by biometric ID, SIM registration, or algorithmic verification systems.
- How infrastructural gaps (connectivity, compute, localisation) shape uneven AI adoption across urban/peri-urban/rural contexts.
- Intersections with informal and precarious work — platforms, gig economies, local hustling systems.

- Digital ecosystem vulnerabilities created by privatised infrastructure (e.g., platforms acting as utilities).

1.4 Sociotechnical Imaginaries & Development Pathways

- How African governments, corporations, and communities imagine AI futures — continuity or rupture?
- Contests between Western AI governance frameworks and African epistemologies (Ubuntu, communalism, pluriversality).
- Case studies of civic innovation, cooperatives, indigenous networks shaping alternative pathways.
- Whose futures get prioritised in national AI strategies?

5. Policy-Relevant Risks & Opportunities

Stream 2: Human–Technology Interaction (HTI)

Focus of the Stream

This stream emphasises how Africans interact with AI systems and how these interactions reshape selfhood, identity, social values, and everyday life. We prioritize submissions that examine:

- individual and collective experiences with AI systems
- embodied interactions (biometrics, sensors, wearables, implantable AI)
- AI-mediated self-definition, autonomy, and self-determination
- moral, relational, and affective dimensions of HTI
- emerging norms around trust, safety, privacy, and digital reputation
- new forms of agency and vulnerability within human–AI entanglements

The HTI stream responds to growing recognition that AI’s societal impacts are lived and felt—shaping subjectivities, aspirations, and forms of being in the world (Birhane, 2021; Oduor, 2021).

Suggested Topics for HTI Stream

Possible topics include:

2.1 Lived Experience & Everyday Interactions

- Ethnographies, diaries, participatory methods.
- User experiences of error, misclassification, opacity.
- How people “make do” with AI systems that are badly designed for African realities.

2.2 Identity, Autonomy & Self-Presentation

- Biometrics, digital ID, algorithmic profiling and their effects on selfhood.
- Youth agency, creativity, hustling, gaming, fringe communities.
- Gendered, racialised, classed experiences of AI.
- How AI mediates dignity, humiliation, and social belonging.

2.3 Safety, Trust & Digital Harm

- Algorithmic bullying, doxxing, reputational harm, false positives.
- Coping strategies and workarounds.
- **How trust is negotiated in low-literacy, low-recognition, or high-surveillance contexts.**

2.4 Embodied & Immersive Interaction

- Facial/voice recognition, wearables, affect recognition.
- Disability and accessibility experiences.
- Embodied harms and micro-traumas from repeated algorithmic gatekeeping.

2.5 Human–AI Co-shaping & Agency

- How people push back, hack, repurpose, or resist AI systems.
- Culturally rooted digital agency (humour, remix, mutual aid).
- What design principles preserve user autonomy and self-determination?

Contribution to the African AI Landscape

This Call for Papers aims to contribute to an emergent scholarly and civic-technological ecosystem on AI in Africa by:

1. **Foregrounding African epistemologies**—challenging dominant Western-centric approaches to AI theory and design.
2. **Enhancing empirical evidence**—documenting real-world African sociotechnical and HTI experiences.
3. **Supporting decolonial AI innovation**—exploring alternative design logics, values, and futures.
4. **Bridging research and policy**—informing continental AI frameworks, including the African Union’s 2024–2025 Continental AI Strategy.
5. **Cultivating interdisciplinary dialogue**—bringing STS, computer science, design, anthropology, philosophy, law, and indigenous studies into conversation.

Conclusion

We invite original, high-quality submissions that help reimagine AI futures grounded in African lived realities in HTI, intellectual traditions, and sociotechnical complexity. Contributors may use empirical studies, theoretical analyses, design cases, participatory methods, or speculative futures to advance debate across both streams.

Submission Guidelines

Academics or practitioners wishing to respond to this call should submit their abstract via this form by the specified deadline.

- Abstract length: **250 words**

- Submission format: [Via Online Form here](#)

We encourage interdisciplinary submissions that draw from a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches. Successful contributors will be invited to submit full-length papers.

Timelines and Terms

Successful Contributors will be notified within a month, and will be invited to participate in authors' workshops and to submit **a full draft paper (6000 words)** per the indicated Schedule:

05-Dec-2025	Launch Call for Abstracts
30-Jan-2026	Deadline for Abstracts form submission
20-Feb-2026	Adjudication and notification of successful Authors
Mar-2026	<i>Engagement and contracting with Authors</i>
Apr/May-2026	<i>Virtual writers' workshops</i>
30-Jun-26	Deadline for Full papers submission
End-2026	<i>Completion of Publication manuscript</i>

Selection Criteria

Our selection process will focus on assessing:

- Relevance to the Call for Papers theme
- Originality and contribution to the field
- Rigor and methodological soundness
- Potential for policy impact

Both conceptual and empirical works will be considered. We encourage submissions that bring new evidence and learning case studies to the fore; that discuss potential opportunities and challenges for South Africa and Africa; and that make tangible policy recommendations for South Africa.

By focusing in these ways, we aim to stimulate critical thinking and policy-relevant research that can inform digital developments and governance practices in South African and the broader Global South.

Commitment and Remuneration

Selected paper authors will receive an honorarium of R50,000 for producing their paper (amount is to be shared if more than one author).

The selected contributors will be formally contracted to participate in the working papers series, confirming their commitment to:

- Author the approved chapter in accordance with an agreed schedule.
- Incorporate comments, recommendations and edits made by peer reviewers and editors.
- Attend scheduled project / review meetings where progress reporting and presentations will be expected; and
- Fully comply with the terms of contract, applicable university policies, and a prescribed Style Guide in all drafts of the work provided.

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