#TheAfricaRoundtable

Global Perspectives Circle

Spotlight on DPI

How to advance Digital Public Infrastructure to boost Africa's economies

Key Take Aways

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KEY TAKE AWAYS

Co-Creation vs. One-Size-Fits-All Approaches

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) initiatives must be co-created with African partners rather than imported as ready-made solutions. Success stories like Benin demonstrate the value of countries learning from global examples while adapting solutions to local contexts. This ensures digital sovereignty and ownership, which is essential for sustainable DPI implementation. European partners should position themselves as collaborators rather than solution providers.

Balanced Approach to Empowerment

Successful DPI implementation in Africa requires a balanced approach centered on empowerment. Key elements identified include: 1) Political will and making DPI a national priority; 2) Building local capacity across government agencies, regulatory bodies, and the private sector; and 3) Strategic investment that creates mutual benefits and ensures long-term sustainability. This balanced approach enables countries to not just receive DPI but to own, lead, and scale it themselves.

From Frameworks to Implementation Investment

While specifications and frameworks for DPI exist, a critical gap remains in funding the implementation phase. The specific funding needs are often tangible and achievable—for example, an assessment of 44 African countries found that approximately $250 million would be sufficient to build inclusive and interoperable payment systems across these markets. Initial "small-check" funding of just $100,000-250,000 can catalyze implementation in countries like Zambia, proving that targeted investments can unlock significant progress.

Sandboxing and Experimentation Create Trust

Creating safe environments for experimentation is essential for DPI adoption. Sandbox environments allow governments to test solutions, build trust in new systems, and demonstrate their value before wide-scale implementation. This approach provides the opportunity to verify that technical requirements meet real-world needs, facilitates stakeholder buy-in, and reduces implementation risks. Partners should support the development of these experimental spaces and share learnings openly.

Strategic Partners Drive DPI Success

Different sectors offer unique contributions to DPI implementation. Telecommunications companies have proven to be powerful drivers, as demonstrated by

M-Pesa's success through Safaricom. They reach the last mile in ways traditional institutions cannot and provide existing infrastructure that DPI initiatives can leverage. Similarly, central banks are critical partners for financial DPI, bringing concerns for financial stability while enabling innovation that reaches the unbanked. Other financial institutions can help expand services to the underserved. Engaging the right sectoral partners early in development is essential for creating sustainable, widely adopted digital infrastructure.

Digital Identity Systems as Foundation

Digital ID systems serve as a cornerstone of effective DPI, enabling citizens to access a wide range of services while allowing governments to deliver more efficient public services. The absence of digital identity systems creates significant inefficiencies and often leads to the emergence of expensive commercial alternatives. Countries should prioritize establishing sovereign digital identity solutions that are accessible to all citizens.

Sector-Specific Applications Drive Adoption

While DPI provides the foundation, sector-specific applications in health, education, agriculture, and trade demonstrate tangible value to citizens. Countries like South Africa are focusing on citizen-centric services, such as unified job portals, rather than abstract DPI concepts. Successful implementation requires starting with use cases that address immediate citizen needs rather than technical infrastructure for its own sake.

Startups and Entrepreneurs as DPI Innovators

Entrepreneurs can serve as pioneers for DPI adoption and innovation. Cross-continental talent exchange and capacity building programs can inspire a new generation of tech entrepreneurs who understand both African needs and European innovations. Creating entrepreneurial ecosystems around DPI can drive regulatory change, build new infrastructure, and develop the next generation of leaders who will own, lead, and scale digital infrastructure. Startup incubators and innovation hubs play a crucial role in nurturing these tech champions who can transform digital service delivery.

Sustainable Funding Models for Long-Term Impact

Innovative funding approaches could include minimal user fees for government services that sustain operations long-term. For example, Kenya's government services portal has been sustained for over a decade through a minimal fee structure. Rwanda's Irembo platform enables entrepreneurs to earn from government service delivery. These models demonstrate how initial investments can create self-sustaining systems that generate their own revenue and continue operating independently beyond the initial funding phase.