

STRONGER STATES FOR INCREASED STABILITY

Digitalization of public service delivery for peace and security in Africa

AN OSAA ADVOCACY BRIEF



**United
Nations**



Stronger States for increased stability: digitalization of public service delivery for peace and security in Africa

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An OSAA advocacy brief¹

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Cover photo: World Bank / Sarah Farhat.

¹ This advocacy brief was developed to supplement the United Nations Secretary-General's biennial report on the review of the implementation of commitments made towards Africa's development (A/75/950), section E "Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies by silencing the guns in Africa", and the United Nations Secretary-General's report on the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/75/917-S/2021/562).



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1. Situational assessment

Photo: Women beneficiaries of social protection and nutrition programmes funded by the World Bank's International Development Association in the village of Soavina in Madagascar.
Credit: World Bank / Sarah Farhat.

Africa faces persistent and emerging challenges that impede the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development.

Instability and conflict continue to generate and exacerbate poverty and institutional fragility, which in turn decrease resilience and prospects for peace. Indeed, 6 out of the 10 countries at the top of the International Rescue Committee's 2022 *Emergency Watchlist*, a global list of humanitarian crises that are expected to deteriorate the most over the coming year, are in Africa.²

The nature of conflicts in Africa is becoming progressively more complex and regionalized. While most conflicts in Africa are intra-State in nature, they increasingly involve non-State armed groups with links to criminal interests or terrorist networks that operate across borders, as well as self-defence and militia groups, which are often formed along ethnic lines and fuel intercommunal violence. As a result, peace has become more challenging to sustain, and protracted and recurring conflict more difficult to prevent or resolve, often because their underlying causes are not well understood or addressed. Peace agreements, rarely fully implemented, typically cover proximate causes and seldom address the deep-rooted factors that

cause or sustain conflict. Furthermore, as highlighted in the report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/75/917-S/2021/562), many countries in Africa continue to face multiple challenges to societal stability and national cohesion, which have been exacerbated by the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Active conflict, instability and conflict incidents show a clear upward trend across the continent over the past five years. According to one database, in 2019 there were 27 active conflicts in 19 countries in Africa, and 8,855 known fatalities as a result of those conflicts. Since 2015, the number of conflicts has slightly increased. In addition, from 2015 to 2020, the number of incidents related to civil unrest nearly doubled.³

² International Rescue Committee, *2022 Emergency Watchlist: System Failure* (2021). The African countries on the list are Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Sudan.

³ Nils Petter Gleditsch and others, "Armed conflict 1946–2001: a new dataset", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 39, No. 5 (September 2002), version 20.1; Therese Pettersson and others, "Organized violence 1989–2020, with a special emphasis on Syria", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 58, No. 4 (November 2021), version 20.1.



2. Continental action

Photo: Thousands displaced by floods and conflict near Jowhar, Somalia.
Credit: UN Photo/Tobin Jones.



In response to peace and security challenges on the continent, in 2016 the African Union adopted the *Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020*.

The *Master Roadmap* advocates that “peace, security and socio-economic development should be pursued simultaneously”, and asserts that “Africa should ... assume total responsibility for its destiny”. Given the many outstanding challenges, the ambitious *Master Roadmap* was extended for another 10 years, until 2030, with periodic reviews every two years. The *Master Roadmap*, therefore, represents Africa’s unified plan for achieving a continent free of conflict.

While the *Master Roadmap* addresses direct proximate challenges or scourges fostering instability or violent conflict in Africa – such as the persistence of terrorism and violent extremism (challenge 6) and the illicit inflow of arms and weapons into Africa (challenge 3a) – it largely does not go beyond this layer to address pre-emptive social sector service delivery actions that States could take to lay a more solid groundwork for peace and stability.



3. Causes and drivers of instability and violent conflict in Africa

Photo: A protester making his voice heard against poor public service delivery
Credit: Duncan Noakes, Adobe Stock

To respond effectively to instability and violent conflict in Africa, it is important to begin by identifying elements of the multidimensional and complex nature of their causes and drivers.



These include a number of internal factors:⁴

- └ Disputes over political power and resources among political elites
- └ Lack of shared visions within ethnically diverse polities and the weaponization of identity for political ends
- └ Lack of access to justice, widespread impunity and the real or perceived partiality of justice systems, and nepotism and corruption, combined with the curtailment of freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly
- └ Scarcity or the unequal distribution of, or the lack of access to, financial resources and assets
- └ Lack of access to, and competition over, limited and often diminishing natural resources in rural communities, combined with weak or unequal land and resource governance
- └ Weak presence of the State, particularly in peripheral regions
- └ Lack of clarity and inclusivity in peace agreements and their poor implementation, the splintering of signatory parties, and the incomplete transformation of conflict economies



A myriad of external factors also contributes as drivers to instability and conflict, including the following:

- └ External competition for a country's natural resources continues to be a significant destabilizing factor in Africa
- └ Countries situated in a conflict-ridden region find themselves far more likely to experience the spillover effect of instability. This “bad neighbourhood effect” can have a destabilizing effect on countries⁵
- └ The effects of climate change present a precarious future for stability in many parts of the continent; for example, water shocks, either through drought or flood, are associated with all types of social conflict⁶
- └ Poor terms of economic relief offered by external creditors can present significant peace and security challenges for national authorities, as mass protests against the punishing terms can lead to widespread outrage

⁴ A/75/917-S/2021/562.

⁵ Jakkie Cilliers, “Violence in Africa: trends, drivers and prospects to 2023”, *Africa Report*, No. 12 (Pretoria, Institute for Security Studies, 2018).

⁶ Ibid.



4. Public service delivery and the State's ability to ensure peace and security

Sustainable Development Goal 16 calls for the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development.

The sixth internal driver of instability and violent conflict identified in section 3, however, notes that weak presence of the State, particularly in peripheral regions, is a key contributing driver to instability and violent conflict.

Stronger States are needed to deliver peace and security in Africa. One of the foremost duties of the State is the delivery of public services. Indeed, a direct line can be drawn between deficiencies and chronic undercapacity in public service delivery on the continent, and continued conflict and instability.

A nation State is often defined as the territory on which a centralized Government has the ability to exert sovereign control, including but not limited to a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force to ensure security and the provision of social services to its population. Notwithstanding internationally recognized borders, control may at its greatest reach extend to the entire physical territory. In other cases, however, it may not extend much further than the limits of the capital city. In many cases, nation State control is a hazy, sometimes shifting reality, with the least control at the periphery.

The population of the nation (or, indeed, nations) that forms part of a given nation State have duties or obligations towards the State – the payment of taxes, or mandatory military service, for example. At the same time, the State's obligations towards the people under the implicit or explicit social contract may include those agreed in international treaties or covenants, such as rights guaranteed to children, or promised in national constitutional frameworks or laws.

While service delivery is not the only determinant of State legitimacy,⁷ it is a primary way by which many citizens directly encounter the State and shapes their overall perception of it. In this regard, service delivery can affect the risk of violence, in that it affects State legitimacy.⁸ Legitimacy is grounded in justifiable rules, and can unravel when power is used in ways that are not justified.⁹

In the hierarchy of political goods, the relevance of services has been referred to as giving “content to the social contract between the ruler and ruled”.¹⁰

⁷ Pauline H. Baker, *Reframing Fragility and Resilience: The Way Forward* (Washington, D.C., Creative Associates, 2017), as cited in United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2018).

⁸ Carina Omoeva and Elizabeth Buckner, *Does Horizontal Education Inequality Lead to Violent Conflict?* (New York, United Nations Children's Fund, 2015), as cited in A/75/917-S/2021/562 and United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace*.

⁹ Claire McLoughlin, C. 2015a. “Researching State legitimacy: a political approach to a political problem”, Research Paper, No. 36 (Birmingham, United Kingdom, Developmental Leadership Program, 2015), as cited in United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace*.

¹⁰ Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004), as cited in United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace*.

Specifically, the delivery of education, health care, water, sanitation, and even justice and security, have been described as “the glue” that binds State and society together.¹¹

Furthermore, uneven coverage of services can undermine State legitimacy, when it is viewed as a manifestation of group exclusion. Perceptions of unequal or exclusionary access to services influence the way citizens regard the “rightfulness” of the State.¹² In some cases, uneven service delivery can stoke grievances against the State or against groups that are seen to be receiving unfairly disproportionate access. Perceived favouritism towards one group may boost the favoured group’s trust in the State, but also it may undermine other groups’ trust in the State.¹³

The legitimizing effect of service delivery also depends heavily on how services are delivered. A five-country study of citizen perceptions and service delivery in conflict-affected contexts finds that, with regard to State legitimacy, fairness and inclusiveness in service delivery matters as much as, if not more than, the quality of services or who delivers them. Service delivery that falls short can undermine perceptions of Government and can have a delegitimizing effect.¹⁴

Southern Voice and the United Nations Development Programme have identified three elements critical to mitigating the health, social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Picture above: Children using computer technology in the classroom.
Credit: Riccardo Niels Mayer, Adobe Stock.

¹¹ Jennifer Milliken and Keith Krause, “State failure, State collapse, and State reconstruction: concepts, lessons, and strategies”, *Development and Change* vol. 33, No. 5 (December 2002), as cited in United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace*.

¹² Sarah Dix, Karen Hussmann and Grant Walton, “Risks of corruption to State legitimacy and stability in fragile situations”, U4 Issue, No. 3 (Bergen, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2012), as cited in United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace*.

¹³ Mcloughlin, “Researching State legitimacy”.

¹⁴ Georgina Sturge and others, *Tracking Livelihoods, Services, and Governance: Panel Survey Findings from the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium* (London, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, 2017), as cited in United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace*.

It can be extrapolated that these three elements are also critical for keeping the public's trust in State-led service delivery. The first element is transparency, meaning that information on budgetary processes and Government decisions, implementation modalities, and beneficiaries are publicly accessible, or at least that there are reasonable checks and balances. Transparency is crucial to engendering trust, reaffirming the social contract and strengthening social cohesion.


The second element is inclusiveness, ensuring that “no one is left behind” in public service delivery. Inclusiveness requires that services cover all groups, especially those deemed vulnerable, and that equity of service quality and access are prioritized.

The third element is responsive and timely public service delivery. When required, innovation around alternate service delivery models should be undertaken, especially the digitalization of service delivery. In addition, early response and preparation to ensure that institutions are resilient and can respond effectively are critical.¹⁵



Picture above: Launched in October 2016, the drone delivery project made Rwanda the first country in the world to use the drone technology at the service of saving lives.
Credit: Sarah Farhat / World Bank.

¹⁵ SDG 16 Hub, “Transparent, inclusive, and responsive public service delivery (4th e-discussion)”, 27 April 2021. Available at <https://www.sdg16hub.org/group/southern-voice-undp-sdg-16-trends-and-emerging-issues/discussion/transparent-inclusive-and> (8 March 2022).



5. Digitalization: a conduit for enhanced efficiency in public service delivery and an enabler for peace and security

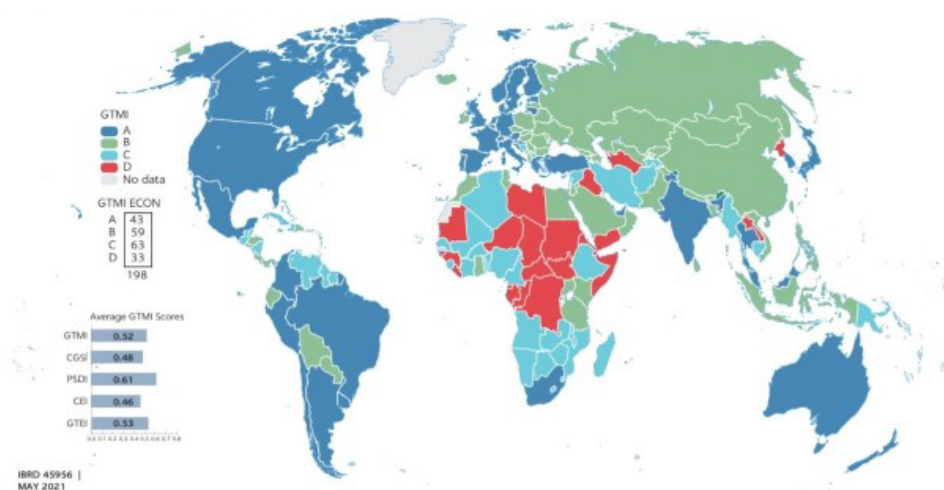
Photo: Moves toward electronic medical records are enhancing citizen interaction with public health services in Rwanda.
Credit: Rwanda The United Nations Collection – Photographer Martin Thaulow Good people – 2405.

Approaching peace and security in Africa from a development standpoint – the nexus approach – it is useful to interrogate how States can improve service delivery, which in turn can reduce instability and violent conflict.

A recent trend involves the digitalization of public service delivery. “GovTech” is a growing area of technology that aims at increasing efficacy and efficiency of Government functions. It emphasizes three aspects of public sector modernization: citizen-centric public services that are universally accessible, a whole-of-government approach to digital Government transformation, and simple, efficient and transparent Government systems. Simply stated, GovTech is the application of emerging technologies – such as advanced sensing, advanced data processing, artificial intelligence and blockchain – to improve the delivery of public services through increasing efficiency and lowering costs.

Despite increasing investment across the world, GovTech maturity is lower than expected in Africa. Of the economies reviewed in a recent World Bank report, the *GovTech Maturity Index*, those facing large-scale GovTech challenges are more evident in Africa than in other regions. The report also points out that “despite good progress in most regions, digital divides persist between and within regions”. The report calls on Governments to use more “disruptive digital technologies”, which it says can greatly improve core Government operations and online service delivery.¹⁶

Map of the State of GovTech around the world, by GTMI group, as of December 2020



Note: Countries with lower GovTech Maturity Index (GTMI) scores (A=highest, D=lowest) have lower adoption of digitalization for public service delivery.

Source: Cem Dener and others, *GovTech Maturity Index: The State of Public Sector Digital Transformation* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2021).

¹⁶ Dener and others, *GovTech Maturity Index*.

Despite achievements in GovTech and the digitalization of public service delivery, according to the World Bank's *GovTech Maturity Index* report, some notable challenges hinder rapid uptake:

- └ High-level governmental commitments, including allocation of necessary resources, are vital to implementing the whole-of-government approach, removing inefficiencies, and reducing the risks of fraud and corruption
- └ It will be necessary for Governments to make substantial investments in hardware, software, change management and skills to support the transition to integrated digital solutions and shared platforms
- └ Enhanced regulatory environments and stronger institutions are needed to mitigate the increasing risks to cybersecurity, data protection and privacy
- └ GovTech solutions should not exacerbate existing divides, especially concerning accessibility of services and distributional implications of the cost of mobile data or Internet, as well as access to devices, inclusion and literacy¹⁷

In view of both Africa's relatively rapid economic growth in recent years, and the continuing reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of opportunities exist, including the following:

- └ GovTech solutions are crucial for ensuring the continuity of core Government operations and the security of remote access for government officials, supporting vulnerable people and businesses, and deploying less expensive and more reliable information and communication technology infrastructure solutions
- └ Digital government capacity is positively associated with perceptions of lower corruption
- └ GovTech envisions a whole-of-government approach, and in this connection, interoperability of government systems enables Governments to generate data for more informed decision-making, compliance and monitoring
- └ Citizen engagement is facilitated through GovTech by promoting continuous two-way communication between Governments and citizens through digital solutions such as text messaging, open-source applications, social media and online petition platforms¹⁸



Picture above: African technology companies are developing the solutions Governments will need in the GovTech sector.

Credit: S.Gvozdz, Adobe Stock.

¹⁷ Dener and others, *GovTech Maturity Index*.

¹⁸ Ibid.



Example 1: South Africa

South Africa is a leader in digital transformation in the sub-Saharan Africa region, particularly in core government systems, citizen engagement and enablers. The State Information Technology Agency (SITA) website presents the country's 2020–2025 digital transformation strategy, which, in addition to optimizing operations, emphasizes four key elements: engaging citizens, empowering employees, transforming services and creating shared platforms. SITA's GovTech site provides a platform for sharing knowledge concerning lessons, solutions and ideas. A new e-government portal was launched in 2020 to improve access to online services for citizens, businesses and government entities. Also, in 2001, the Centre for Public Service Innovation was established to develop digital skills and promote innovation for improved service delivery in collaboration with civil society organizations and the private sector. The Centre for Public Service Innovation's Multi-Media Innovation Centre is open to all public sector

entities, and public employees are invited to use it to explore innovative practices or for training. The Department of Public Service and Administration launched the Batho Pele (People First) Programme in 1997 to transform public service delivery based on eight principles: consultation, service standards, redress, access, courtesy, information, transparency and value for money. This approach has been adjusted over the years, with the addition of the Know Your Service Rights campaign and other initiatives to promote Batho Pele within the public service. The annual national Batho Pele excellence awards recognize public servants who are selfless, dedicated and committed, and go the extra mile in serving citizens.

Source: Dener and others, *GovTech Maturity Index*.



Example 2: Somalia

It is also important to highlight the good practices that are emerging in difficult settings such as Somalia. In Somalia, the financial management information systems of the federal Government and five States all use cloud-based solutions; since 2015, two web-based applications have been used to support daily operations in six locations. Monthly budget results of the federal Government are posted in open-data format on the cloud, and member States regularly post their monthly budget reports on their respective Ministry of Finance websites. In 2019, four States cost-effectively launched and operationalized their cloud-based human resource management information and payroll systems. The federal Government and Somalia's

States are currently developing similar cloud-based systems to improve their core government systems. These systems operate as disconnected platforms, and data exchange is not yet automated. Additionally, the federal Government and States have several ongoing projects to support other key actions of the digital agenda, including the development of a digital identification system for improving civil registration and online services. All these platforms were developed with substantial support from development partners, and the Government is currently focused on strengthening institutional capacity and preparing for the transition to the next level of public sector digital transformation within five years.

Source: Dener and others, *GovTech Maturity Index*.



Picture above: The use of technology to expedite processing of imports and exports aims to streamline sometimes cumbersome processes.

Credit: StreetOnCamera, Adobe Stock.



Example 3: Kenya and Namibia



The digitalization and automation reforms undertaken by the Kenya Revenue Authority and the private sector have had positive outcomes. The money transfer system M-Pesa has transformed tax policy and administration. The system includes an online application for tax administration (the iTax system) and allows taxpayers to file and pay taxes electronically. Kenya Revenue Authority has automated and digitized several of its functions to improve the efficiency of service delivery, promote paperless operations, enforce compliance, reconcile tax collection, promote transparency and enhance accountability.

The digitization of VAT operations has helped identify data inconsistencies and raised VAT collections by more than \$1 billion between 2016 and 2017.

In Namibia, the time to comply and the number of VAT payments have remained flat in recent years, though both are above the global average. At the end of 2016, the Namibia Inland Revenue Department migrated to an integrated tax administration system, which offers new functions and reporting capabilities that will reduce delays in processing tax returns and the number of misplaced returns.

Source: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa: *Fiscal Policy for Financing Sustainable Development in Africa: Economic Report on Africa 2019* (Addis Ababa, 2019).



Picture above: Children in Niger attending school with their tablets, supported by UNICEF. With this initiative, every child, no matter where they live, can have access to technology for equal learning opportunities. Credit: Frank Dejongh, UNICEF.



6. Policy recommendations

In this advocacy brief, we have described how State efforts to improve public service delivery through digitalization and the enhanced uptake of GovTech in Africa can lead to improved public confidence in Governments, which in turn decreases the likelihood of instability or violent conflict.

Individuals in society are more likely to have a positive perception of the State if they perceive that public services – the main medium through which most people interact with their Government – are provided fairly and with transparency, in an inclusive manner and in a way that demonstrates responsiveness to their needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how critical GovTech solutions can be in difficult times – and how painful a chronic deficit in GovTech capacity can be –

to ensure the continuity of core government operations, provide secure remote access to online services, and support vulnerable people and businesses. While African Governments have made tentative moves towards GovTech integration, efforts so far have not been enough to ensure a paradigm shift. In this regard, moves towards the digitalization of government services and public service delivery in Africa should be accelerated to turn opportunities into sustainable peace, security and development outcomes.



Picture above: In Kenya, even citizens in remote locations can engage with the State through digital technologies.
Credit: ITU Pictures.

African countries may consider the following, as per recommendations elaborated in the World Bank's 2021 *GovTech Maturity Index*:



It is important to establish an integrated national team of all key stakeholders, working to foster and improve GovTech results, within the framework of a whole-of-government approach. In this connection, government stakeholder entities may include ministries and agencies of telecommunications, digital economy, finance, interior, education, health and social protection.

Ensuring sufficient resources and developing guidelines for procuring new technology solutions are essential for the sustainability of GovTech investments and the monitoring of government performance.



Government investments in cloud solutions, open-source applications, web services and other shared platforms can reduce the cost and shorten the implementation time of digital transformation in the public sector.

Digitization of Government-to-person payments has taken on a renewed importance and urgency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital solutions for transferring cash to vulnerable populations can reduce costs for Governments, as well as improve recipients' access to payments and bring digital payments one step closer to becoming the large-scale conduit for financial inclusion.



The use of next-generation online service portals can expand transactional services to save time, reduce costs and improve the quality of services. Further, universally accessible user-centric services can be launched to reach vulnerable sections of the population and reduce the digital divide.



Multifunctional citizen participation platforms, particularly in the form of CivicTech solutions, can be expanded to deepen the citizen-government relationship, improve accountability and build public trust in Government.

Government investment in developing citizens' digital skills and promoting innovation in the public sector is crucial to supporting the transition to a data-driven culture and strengthening technical skills.



The adoption of strong legal frameworks and creation of effective data protection agencies are important steps that Governments can take to strengthen citizen trust in data-driven societies and promote GovTech more effectively.

Efforts can be accelerated to ensure interconnectivity between traditional and "new" data to advance digital transformation. The integration of traditional data and digital data can accelerate and strengthen service delivery, particularly for historically underserved and marginalized populations.



The development of local GovTech ecosystems should be promoted by supporting local entrepreneurs and start-ups to develop new products and services, as well as by providing incentives to draw on private sector skills, innovation and investments to address public sector challenges.¹⁸

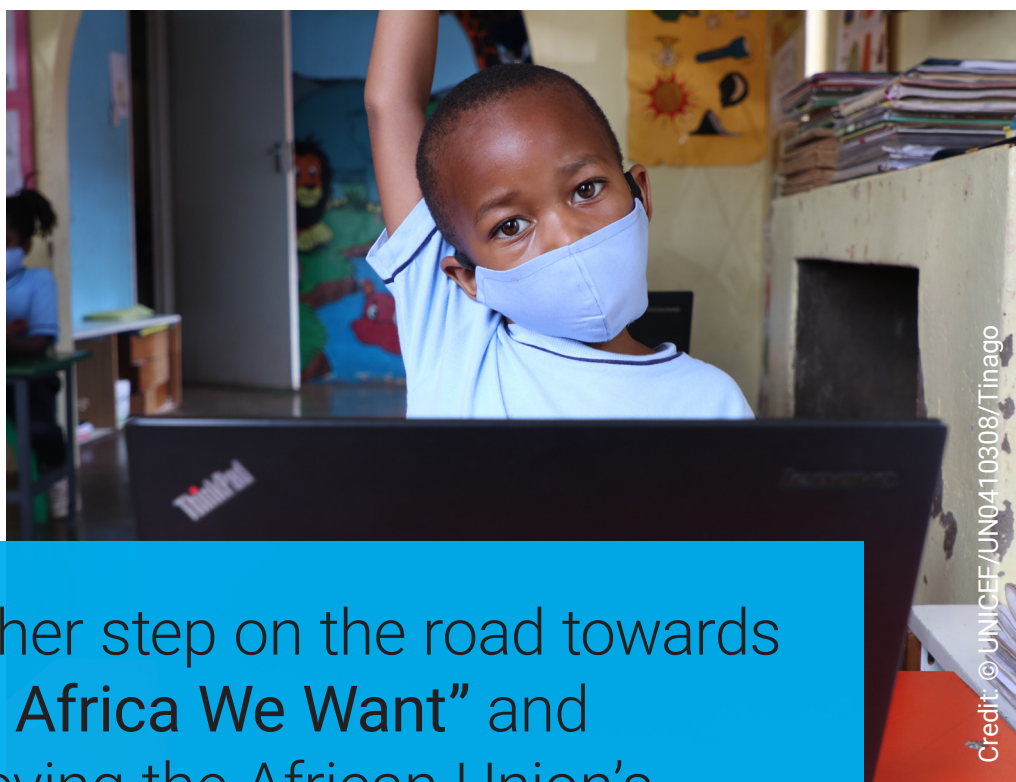
¹⁸ Dener and others, *GovTech Maturity Index*.

The enhanced digitalization of public service delivery in Africa is an important tool through which the continent will achieve Aspiration 4 of the African Union's Agenda 2063 – a peaceful and secure Africa.

In order to leverage digitalization as a driver for sustainable development and durable peace, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) has launched “A Pen for a Gun”, a new initiative that aims to promote schools as hubs for development, social cohesion and peace. A Pen for a Gun builds on the multiplying impact that school-feeding programmes have by: (a) increasing school enrolment, attendance and finalization rates; (b) boosting nutrition, improving children's

overall health enrolment and strengthening their learning capacities; (c) promoting gender equality and social inclusion; and (d) enhancing local economic growth. The initiative seeks to promote comprehensive approaches that use complementary tools such as digitalization to maximize the positive impact of school-feeding programmes. This enhanced public service delivery is expected to increase prosperity, equality and opportunities within local communities, leading to stronger social cohesion and resilience and decreased risk of violent conflict. A Pen for a Gun is OSAA's contribution to the global School Meals Coalition and the African Union's Silencing the Guns initiative.

Picture below: The Learning Passport is a new solution designed to close the learning poverty gap, a digital library of teaching and learning resources covering the entire primary and secondary education curriculum. It opens up great opportunities for learning online improving the education of millions of children.



Another step on the road towards
“The Africa We Want” and
achieving the African Union's
Agenda 2063



Picture above: The public sector across Africa is making progress in the adaptation of advanced technologies, to make governmental interactions with citizens more efficient.
Credit: drik, Adobe Stock.



Stronger States for increased stability:

DIGITALIZATION OF PUBLIC SERVICE
DELIVERY FOR PEACE AND SECURITY
IN AFRICA

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