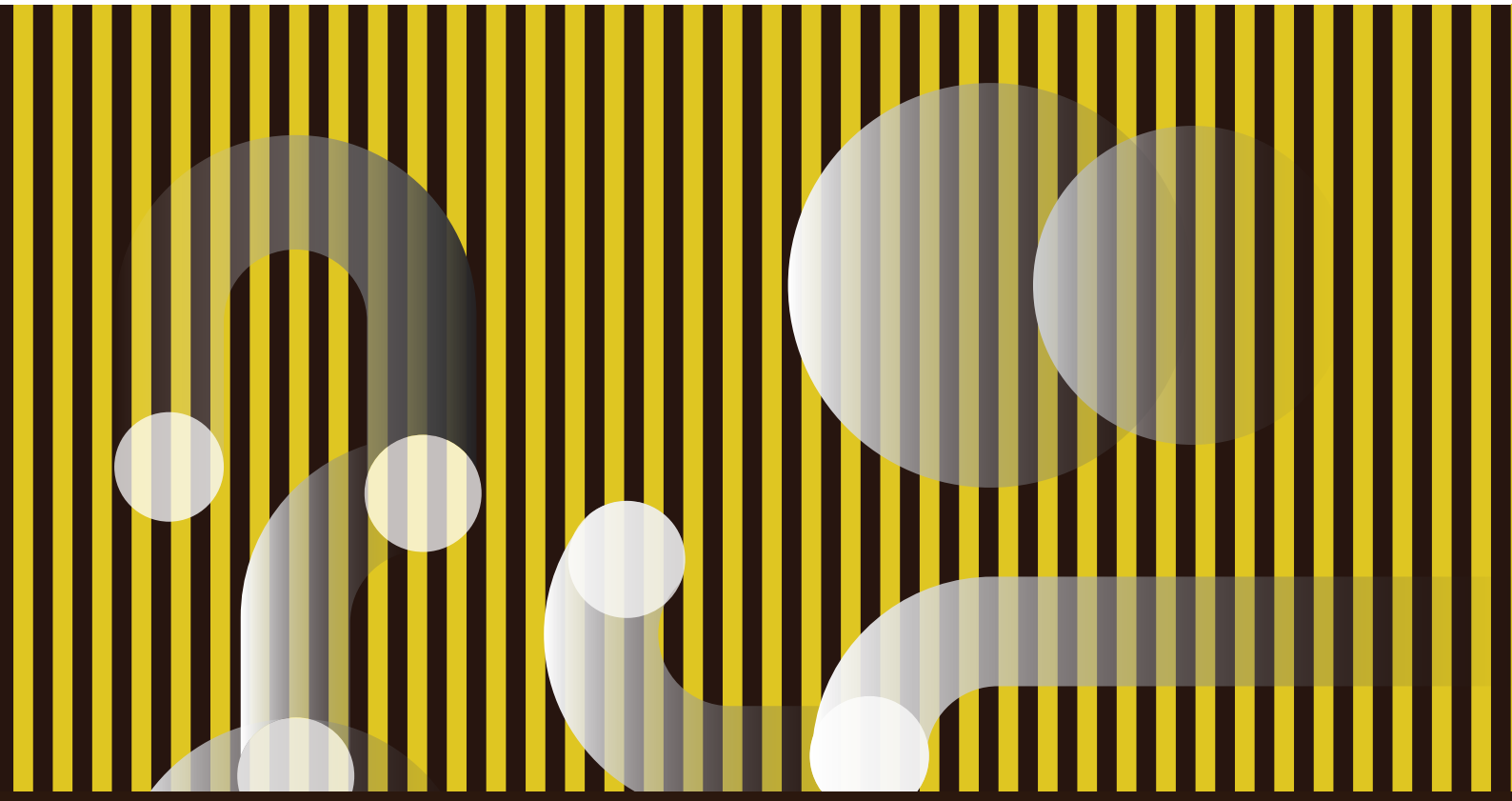
THE CAREER CAFÉ

RETHINKING THE FUTURE OF WORK IN AFRICA

Towards a Pan-African Think Tank

Synthesised Report of two High-Level Convenings in Nairobi, Kenya, on 4 June 2026, and Kigali, Rwanda, on 25 June 2026



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Participants at the Kigali Future of Work Convening, 25 June 2026.

Participants at the Nairobi Future of Work Convening, 18 June 2026.

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Short Videos

The Future of Work in Africa Think Tank Initiative https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrFzlBwyMPo

The Future of Work Reset https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcDHV9GJGno

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Act!	Act Change Transform
AfDB	African Development Bank
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AICE	AI Centre of Excellence
AU	African Union
CAT	Central Africa Time
DFI	Development Finance Institution
EU	European Union
FAWE	Federation of African Women Educationists
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICED	International Centre for Evaluation and Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
KAM	Kenya Association of Manufacturers
KAS	Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MIG	Metal Inert Gas (welding)
ODA	Official Development Assistance
R&D	Research and Development
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
TIG	Tungsten Inert Gas (welding)
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
USIU-Africa	United States International University-Africa
VR	Virtual Reality

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Africa stands at a defining moment. Rapid technological change, shifting geopolitics, evolving labour markets, declining development assistance, climate change, demographic transitions, and growing global uncertainty are fundamentally reshaping the future of work.

At the same time, Africa possesses the world's youngest and fastest-growing population its greatest strategic asset. If effectively harnessed, this demographic dividend has the potential to position Africa as a global leader in shaping the future of work. Achieving the aspirations of the African Union's Agenda 2063 including creating decent and productive jobs, developing world-class human capital, accelerating industrialisation, promoting youth and women's employment, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, and building a prosperous, integrated, and globally competitive continent will require intentional leadership, continuous foresight, and coordinated action.

Recognising this imperative, The Career Café convened two high-level continental gatherings in Nairobi, Kenya (4 June 2026) and Kigali, Rwanda (25 June 2026) to launch a continental dialogue on the future of work and establish the Africa Future of Work Think Tank. The convenings brought together senior leaders from government, the private sector, academia, development finance institutions, civil society, and international organisations to co-create the strategic foundations of a new Africa-led platform dedicated to supporting workforce transformation across the continent.

Participants reached a broad consensus that Africa's workforce ecosystem is not keeping pace with the speed and complexity of global change. Education and training systems remain insufficiently aligned with labour market needs, labour market intelligence is fragmented, and workforce planning remains largely reactive rather than anticipatory. Artificial intelligence emerged as both a transformative opportunity and a disruptive force, with agreement that Africa must move beyond being a consumer of technology to becoming a leader in responsible AI innovation, talent development, and digital competitiveness. Adaptability, critical thinking, entrepreneurship, resilience, and lifelong learning were identified as essential competencies for Africa's future workforce.

The convenings identified six strategic priorities for continental action: education, artificial intelligence, health, agriculture, entrepreneurship, and strategic foresight. Strategic foresight and artificial intelligence were recognised as cross-cutting enablers underpinning all other priority areas. Participants also reaffirmed that inclusion, partnerships, youth leadership, gender equity, and meaningful engagement of women, informal workers, and Francophone communities are essential to building an inclusive and resilient workforce.

A central conclusion emerging from both convenings was that Africa can no longer rely on periodic consultations or fragmented initiatives to prepare its workforce for the future.

What is now required is a lean, Africa-led, data-driven, and research-intensive think tank with dedicated full-time staff and the institutional capacity to continuously anticipate emerging trends, risks, opportunities, and challenges.

Such a platform should generate real-time evidence, strategic foresight, and actionable intelligence to guide governments, industry, academia, and development partners in building a fit-for-purpose, future-ready workforce capable of responding to Africa's rapidly evolving social, economic, and technological landscape.

The Africa Future of Work Think Tank will serve as Africa's premier convener for strategic reflection on the future of work, providing a trusted platform where the African Union, regional economic communities, governments, the private sector, academia, development partners, civil society, and young leaders can collectively anticipate emerging challenges, identify opportunities, challenge conventional thinking, and shape Africa's workforce agenda. Through continuous horizon scanning, workforce intelligence, strategic foresight, policy analysis, evidence synthesis, and knowledge translation, the Think Tank will provide timely insights and practical recommendations to support workforce planning, skills development, innovation,entrepreneurship, and employment policies in real time.

By fostering sustained dialogue, strengthening partnerships, and translating evidence into coordinated action, the Think Tank will support continental institutions and national governments in accelerating implementation of the African Union's Agenda 2063. Ultimately, it seeks to actively contribute tobuilding a fit-for-purpose, future-ready workforce that harnesses Africwa's demographic dividend, strengthens economic resilience, drives industrialisation and innovation, creates decent employment, and positions Africa not merely to respond to the future of work, but to help shape it.

INTRODUCTION

The Career Café convened two inaugural high-level gatherings in Nairobi, Kenya, on 4 June 2026, and in Kigali, Rwanda, on 25 June 2026, to launch a new continental initiative on the future of work in Africa. The two convenings were designed as a sequence: the Nairobi findings served as the analytical foundation for Kigali, and together they constitute the intellectual and relational foundation of a Pan-African Think Tank on the Future of Work.

The timing of the convenings was intentional. Africa stands at an inflection point. By 2050, 42 per cent of the global workforce will be African, making the continent's ability to navigate the future of work one of the most consequential challenges of the coming decades. Participants in both sessions gathered with a shared sense of urgency. They identified a confluence of global disruptions the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence, the decline of official development assistance, geopolitical realignment, the fragmentation of global institutions and the erosion of traditional multilateral financing mechanisms that is rewriting the rules of economic development in real time.

The costs of inaction were already evident to those in the room. Skills gaps and poor health are undermining productivity and stifling innovation. Mismatches between training outputs and labour market needs are producing large numbers of graduates who cannot find employment. Existing continental bodies, while important, have bureaucratic structures that hold them back from keeping pace with the demands of the current moment. National governments have the mandate but lack the analytical depth or convening authority to act alone.

Africa's progress towards the African Union's Agenda 2063 was acknowledged as significant, yet slowed by bureaucratic consensus, making it too slow given the rapid pace of global change. Participants noted that the continent's demographic profile, the youngest and fastest-growing workforce in the world, is not a guarantee of prosperity. It becomes a dividend only through deliberate, sustained investment in skills, employment ecosystems and enabling policy environments. Left unmanaged, it becomes a vulnerability.

The Nairobi convening drew participants from government, the private sector, multilateral organizations, development finance institutions, training institutions, and civil society across Kenya and the region. It was structured around a scene-setting provocation, four short keynote inputs, a facilitated panel discussion, and a plenary harvest of emerging themes. The Kigali convening followed the same format at the Kigali Convention Centre on 25 June 2026 and was deliberately held in Rwanda because of the country's widely recognised commitment to long-term national planning, implementation discipline, and a results-oriented development culture. These are precisely the qualities the initiative seeks to cultivate at a continental scale.

Both convenings were held under Chatham House rules. Participants are not individually quoted in this report unless attribution is publicly appropriate.

Dr Luchuo Engelbert Bain, Convener, The Career Café, opens the Kigali Future of Work Convening, 25 June 2026.

KEY THEMES AND POINTS OF CONVERGENCE

The following themes emerged consistently across both convenings. While the Nairobi session generated a more detailed sectoral analysis and the Kigali session brought a sharper focus to institutional design and the imperative for action, the underlying points of convergence are substantively the same.

The Urgency of the Moment

A participant makes the case for urgent action at the Kigali convening.

Both convenings opened with a shared recognition that Africa is at an inflection point. The convergence of rapid AI adoption, declining ODA, democratic backsliding in some regions, and the retreat of major bilateral development partners has created both a crisis and a structural opportunity. A recurring concern was the mismatch between the scale of the challenge and the nature of current responses. Decades of declarations and programmes have failed to resolve the fundamental misalignment between what Africa's young people are being prepared for and what economies actually need.

The Kigali session reinforced this with particular force. Participants challenged the tendency to treat the future of work as a distant topic for conferences and policy papers. The session argued that the future is already unfolding, that delayed responses heighten the risk of exclusion, skills obsolescence and institutional irrelevance, and that the appropriate response is not more analysis but coordinated, measurable action. As one participant put it: Africa cannot afford "irrational patience."

Training Without Jobs: A Fundamental Misalignment

One of the strongest themes running through both convenings was the structural mismatch between what training systems produce and what labour markets require. The point was made emphatically in Nairobi that the problem in Africa is not, primarily, a shortage of training. The continent trains people in large numbers. The failure lies in the design: training is too often conceived without reference to the jobs that exist, are emerging, or could be created. A major paradox was identified in Kigali: jobs are reportedly being created and students continue to graduate, yet unemployment remains high and employers still cannot find workers with the skills they need.

The consensus across both sessions was clear: training must follow jobs, not precede them. Before any programme is designed, the question to ask is which jobs exist and which ones are emerging. Training should then be organised accordingly. The discussion called for universities and training institutions to work far more closely with employers, public agencies and industry bodies, and for curriculum update cycles to be shortened from episodic five-year reviews to continuous, employer-informed processes.

Cross-sector discussion on training and labour market alignment, Kigali, 25 June 2026.

Weak Labour Market Intelligence

Closely connected to the training-jobs mismatch was a widely shared concern about the weakness of labour market intelligence across the continent. Effective workforce planning, whether by governments, training institutions or the private sector, requires reliable, real-time data on what skills are in demand, where, at what level, and what that demand is likely to look like over the next five to ten years.

A concrete example was cited: Metal Inert Gas (MIG) and Tungsten Inert Gas (TIG) welding, a skilled trade currently in high demand in Canada, Germany and Austria under bilateral labour agreements. African training systems are not producing enough qualified welders to meet demand, not because training is unavailable, but because the intelligence linking overseas labour demand to domestic training pipelines is either insufficiently robust or too slow. Participants called for stronger, real-time labour market intelligence systems, built in partnership with private-sector actors, employment platforms and national statistics offices.

The Kigali session reinforced this aspect by proposing the establishment of continuous

feedback mechanisms between learning institutions and industry, including employer roundtables, graduate tracer studies, and curriculum advisory panels, as practical tools to close the intelligence gap.

Reskilling the Existing Workforce

A point that several participants emphasised in Nairobi, and that risked being overshadowed by the focus on youth employment, was the critical importance of reskilling workers already in employment. Automation is advancing steadily across sectors. The workers most at risk are not only those entering the labour market but also those already in it, whose roles are being restructured around new technologies.

One participant described leading the automation of a major East African bank, a move that would put nearly 300 people out of work. The approach taken was to retrain the affected employees for new roles within the same organisation, particularly in areas requiring human judgement, customer relationships and oversight of automated systems. The result was a workforce that remained largely intact. Reskilling is both ethically sound and economically rational, and should be treated as equally important to creating new jobs.

Adaptability, Resilience and Emotional Intelligence

The Kigali convening placed particular emphasis on the human capabilities that remain valuable and, in many cases, become even more valuable as AI and automation advance. Adaptability emerged as the core future-of-work capability. The COVID-19 pandemic was cited as evidence of how quickly established systems and routines can be disrupted, and of how those who adapted fastest were least affected.

Emotional intelligence, the capacity for self-awareness, empathy, relationship management and communication, was discussed not as a soft or optional attribute but as a practical capability that supports leadership, teamwork, learning and resilience in rapidly changing conditions. Participants cautioned against reducing future-readiness to AI literacy alone. Technical and digital competencies are necessary but not sufficient. The skills frameworks that education systems and employers develop must integrate emotional intelligence and transferable interpersonal skills alongside digital and domain-specific knowledge.

Artificial Intelligence: Threat, Tool and Opportunity

AI was the central theme that generated the most discussion and the strongest sense of urgency across both convenings. A strong consensus emerged that AI should not be treated as a discrete sector or a new technology to be added to existing systems. It is a general purpose, transformative force, a new layer of infrastructure analogous to electricity, that will reshape virtually every job category. The shift from reactive to strategic engagement with AI was described as one of the most urgent tasks facing the continent.

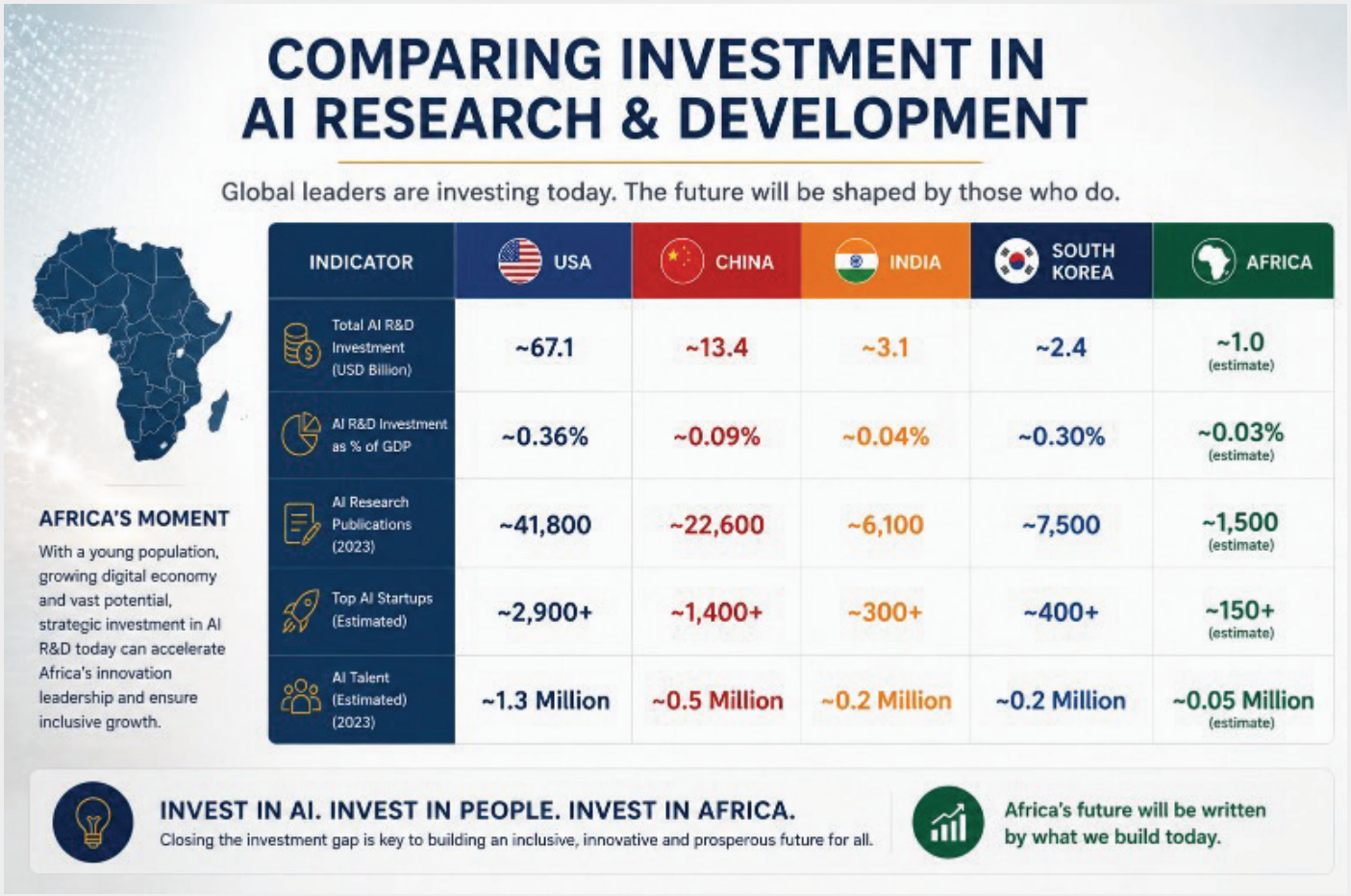
Participants cited concrete evidence that AI is already creating new job categories that African training systems are not yet preparing people for, while simultaneously automating tasks within existing job categories in ways that are not yet reflected in workforce planning. The question of whether AI is 'coming for jobs' or 'coming with jobs' was deliberately left open: the answer depends significantly on the preparedness of individuals, institutions, employers and policymakers. Critically, Africa is currently a consumer of AI rather than a driver of it importing tools, models and frameworks developed elsewhere, often without understanding their limitations, embedded assumptions or governance implications.

Inclusion as a Design Principle

Youth voices as co-designers: a participant at the Kigali convening.

In Kigali, inclusion was identified as one of the two defining principles of the entire initiative. Future-of-work strategies must involve people from different generations, sectors, geographies, genders and income levels not only as beneficiaries but also as co-designers, researchers and decision-makers. Strategies designed without the participation of women, youth and informal workers will invariably fail to address their needs and may actively compound existing inequalities.

Participants emphasized that inclusion should go beyond tokenism to enable meaningful participation in agenda-setting, program design, implementation and evaluation. Young people, in particular, were called upon to serve as co-designers and working-group members, not merely as beneficiaries of the think tank's outputs.

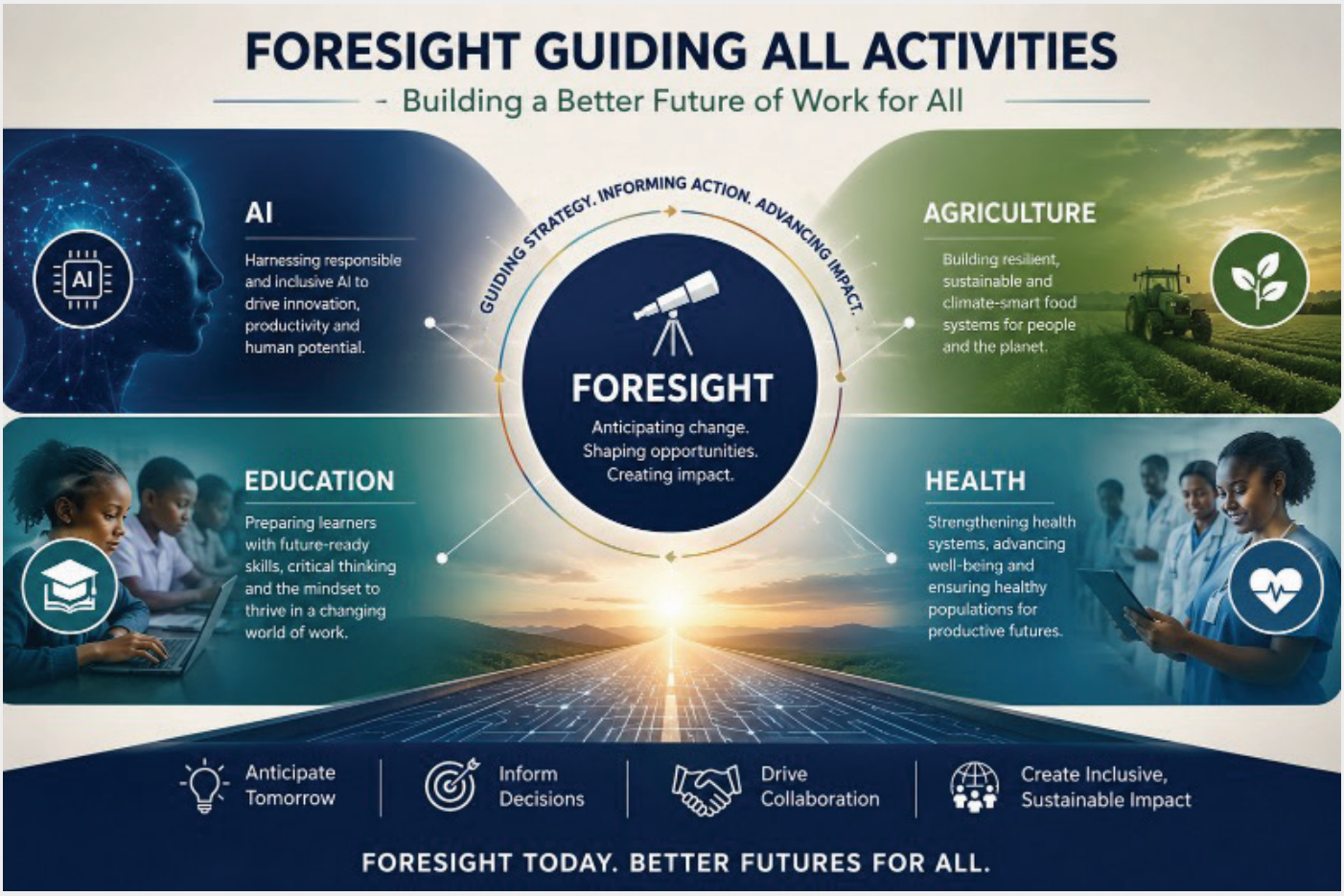


Women's voices at the centre of the agenda: panellists at the Kigali convening.

Partnership and Coordinated Action

Partnership was the second defining principle from Kigali. No single institution can resolve unemployment, skills gaps, digital disruption and workplace inequality. The problems are systemic and interconnected, requiring a response that matches their complexity. Participants underscored that fragmented initiatives operating in isolation cannot achieve the systemic impact Africa requires at scale.The Kigali session proposed an organised partnership platform rather than a loose network. It proposed a platform with a defined governance structure, thematic working groups, named institutional leads, assigned responsibilities, and a public accountability framework. This is consistent with the Nairobi conclusion that the think tank must be a genuine co-creation among a broad constituency of senior champions, not another institution designed in a single office and presented to others for endorsement.

Cross-sector dialogue in action: participants at the Kigali convening.



The six strategic pillars of the Africa Future of Work Think Tank, with Foresight as the cross-cutting function.

THE SIX PRIORITY PILLARS

The think tank's substantive work is organised around six priority pillars. These were identified and thoroughly debated at the Nairobi convening and confirmed at Kigali. Each pillar represents a domain in which the future-of-work challenge is both urgent and distinctive in the African context.

Education

Participants identified education as the foundation of any meaningful workforce transformation but expressed deep concern about the current misalignment between what education systems produce and what African and global economies require. Several structural failures were identified. Many graduates, including those with postgraduate qualifications in fields such as public health, are entering a labour market with little absorptive capacity for them at their level of training. Educational institutions continue to produce graduates in fields with limited employment prospects, while shortages persist in technical and applied fields where labour demand is growing.

The role of TVET institutions was highlighted as particularly important. TVETs can develop practical, market-relevant skills at scale, but their social status is low and their link to labour market demand is weak. Recommendations from the education discussion included reviewing and updating curricula in short, regular cycles with direct employer involvement; making employment outcomes a core KPI for educational institutions alongside enrolment and graduation rates; and investing in TVET systems as a strategic national priority.

Artificial Intelligence

AI generated the most discussion of any pillar. The convergence of rapid capability growth, widening investment gaps between Africa and the rest of the world, and the absence of African voices in global AI governance was described as a strategic risk. Participants noted that while AI is already reshaping labour markets by creating new job categories, automating existing tasks, and accelerating productivity in some sectors, African institutions are largely responding reactively rather than shaping the transition.

Recommendations included investing significantly in African AI research and development rather than remaining dependent on tools and models developed elsewhere; establishing AI centres of excellence linked to African universities;

developing African datasets that reflect the continent's linguistic, cultural and economic diversity; and integrating AI literacy (alongside responsible and ethical AI use) into curricula at all levels, from primary school to professional development. Governance capacity is as important as technical capacity: Africa must have a voice in the global frameworks being developed around AI rights, worker protections and data sovereignty.

Agriculture

Agriculture was acknowledged as the backbone of many African economies and as a sector with enormous potential for job creation. Yet participants noted that its contribution to employment is poorly understood and systematically undervalued in policy. Agriculture tends to be discussed in terms of food security and smallholder productivity rather than in terms of job creation and value chain development.

The discussion emphasised that agriculture's potential as a job creator is best understood through a value chain lens. Creating jobs in agriculture requires investment not only in primary production but also in input supply, processing, storage, logistics, quality assurance, marketing and export facilitation. Women's participation in agriculture was highlighted as both a significant reality and an underutilised opportunity: women constitute the majority of the agricultural workforce in most African countries, yet are systematically excluded from extension services, financing and decision-making on land use.

Recommendations included prioritising agricultural value chains over farming alone; removing regulatory barriers that prevent smallholder farmers, particularly women and young people, from accessing markets; and integrating agricultural workforce data into national labour market intelligence systems.

Health

The health sector generated significant discussion, both as a priority employer and as an area where workforce planning has been chronically misaligned with labour market realities. The paradox of the health workforce was noted: African countries are simultaneously producing health graduates who cannot find employment and experiencing critical shortages of the health workers they need. A mismatch between training volumes, specialisation choices and actual employer demand in both the public and private health systems is producing this outcome.

The potential of health technology to reshape the sector was illustrated by a specific example: a startup that had digitised prescription writing with AI, replacing a process that had previously required a pharmacist's physical presence at every dispensing point. The broader point is that health should not be viewed solely as a public good funded by the government, but as a sector with enormous private employment potential and a major site of technological disruption, requiring active workforce-planning responses.

Recommendations included reforming health workforce planning to align training volumes with the labour market's absorption capacity; integrating health technology into health worker training; and treating health sector employment as a productivity investment rather than solely a social expenditure.

Entrepreneurship

The discussion on entrepreneurship was candid about the structural barriers that young African entrepreneurs face and critical of approaches that romanticise entrepreneurship as a pathway out of unemployment, while failing to provide the structural support it requires.

Three structural barriers were identified as particularly damaging. The first was 'pilot-itis': the tendency for innovative pilots to generate excitement but die when initial funding runs out, often because they were never designed with a path to financial sustainability. The second was the scarcity of risk capital. The contrast with the United States, where a robust angel investor and venture capital ecosystem supports entrepreneurs through multiple failures, was stark. Africa's risk capital landscape is thin, and most African entrepreneurs fail at the gap between initial grant funding and commercial viability not for lack of ideas or effort, but for lack of appropriately structured financing. The third barrier was the absence of sustained mentorship: one-off advice is far less effective than structured, ongoing guidance from people who have built businesses themselves.

Recommendations included actively encouraging domestic angel investment and venture capital through government policy and fiscal incentives; ensuring incubation and acceleration programmes are linked to real capital, not just training; and redesigning entrepreneurship support programmes to recognise that failure is part of the process and that the culture around business failure needs to change.

Foresight

Participants described the foresight pillar as the central nervous system of the proposed think tank rather than simply one of six equal priorities. Its purpose is to identify, in advance, the workforce implications of trends that have not yet become crises, so that policy responses can be designed before disruptions become emergencies.

The need for foresight was illustrated by the example of bilateral labour migration. One participant in Nairobi surmised that had serious

foresight work been done 15 years ago on the likely direction of bilateral labour agreements between Europe, North America and Africa, and on the skills those agreements would demand, training systems could have been prepared in advance. Instead, demand for trades such as welders, electricians and healthcare workers is currently out of sync with training pipelines.

The same logic applies to AI. The most significant workforce disruptions from AI are arguably yet to come. A foresight function requires full-time staffing by professionals whose sole responsibility is to scan the horizon, model scenarios, and translate them into actionable strategic guidance. Outputs should include quarterly horizon-scanning briefs, annual scenario reports, and direct advisory engagements with governments and the private sector.

SECTOR-SPECIFIC PERSPECTIVES

The Nairobi convening produced detailed, candid assessments of the role and limitations of each major sector in addressing the future-of-work challenge. These perspectives were broadly confirmed in Kigali.

Multi-sector dialogue at the Kigali convening: perspectives from government and the private sector.

Government

Participants with government backgrounds offered a frank assessment of both the importance and the limitations of the state as a driver of workforce transformation. Government was described as the largest single employer and the most powerful shaper of the conditions for job creation. Policy on trade, taxation, regulation, infrastructure, education and health forms the architecture within which all employment occurs. No serious workforce strategy can succeed without government engagement.

At the same time, several structural weaknesses in government were identified. Performance frameworks in most ministries focus on outputs, such as the number of training programmes delivered and the number of graduates produced, rather than on employment outcomes. Ministries responsible for productive sectors are rarely held accountable for the number of jobs created in those sectors. The pace of change is also a concern: curriculum reform, regulatory updates, and policy shifts that take years to move through approval processes cannot keep pace with labour markets that change on a quarterly basis.

Rwanda's long-term development orientation, including Vision 2050 and its emerging national AI policy, was cited in Kigali as a model for what deliberate, sustained government commitment to the future of work can achieve. Recommendations for government included mandating that productive ministries report on jobs created within their sectors; updating government training institutions to integrate AI and digital tools; and establishing mechanisms for the government to engage continuously with private-sector intelligence on emerging labour market trends.

The Private Sector

Participants from the private sector were consistent in their view that private-sector engagement in African workforce discussions is far too peripheral. Jobs are predominantly created by the private sector, yet workforce strategies are predominantly designed by governments and development institutions, with the private sector consulted after the fact rather than engaged as a co-architect from the outset.

The disconnect has real consequences. Employers are unable to find workers with the skills they need, while training systems continue producing graduates trained for roles that no longer exist. The private sector was also identified as a source of underutilised labour market intelligence: companies, industry associations and private employment agencies hold real-time data on which skills are scarce, which roles are emerging and which technologies are being adopted data that rarely finds its way into workforce policy or training system design.

Recommendations included making private sector engagement central, not peripheral, to the think tank's governance and working groups; creating structured mechanisms for employers to provide continuous, actionable feedback to training institutions; and engaging industry associations as strategic partners in curriculum design and labour market intelligence gathering.

The Role of Development Finance Institutions and Donors

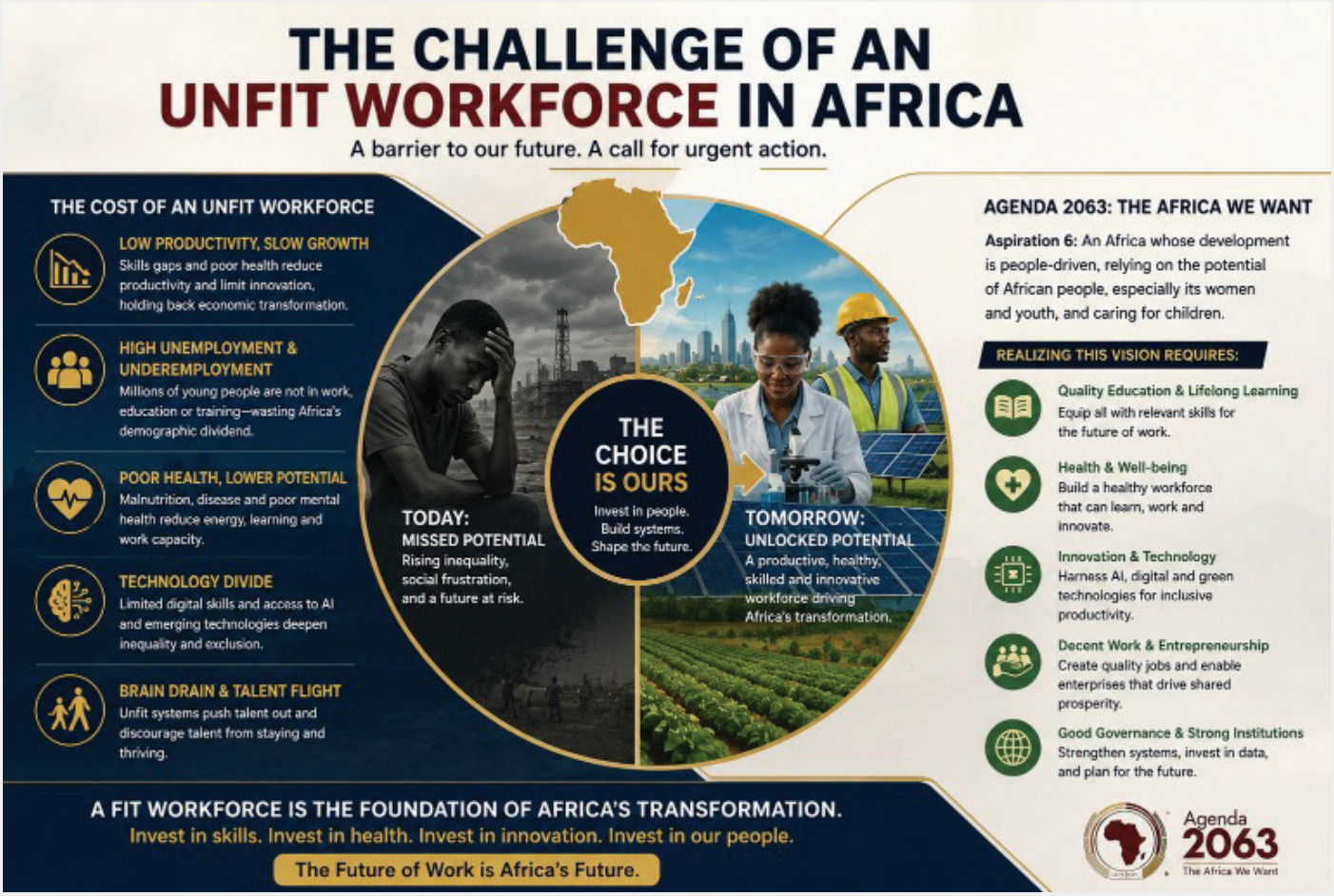
The role of development finance institutions (DFIs) and donors was discussed with considerable candour. These organisations have historically been major funders of workforce and education programmes across Africa, yet their approach has significant limitations. Funding tends to follow priorities set in donor capitals, with limited co-design with African institutions. Project cycles are short relative to the time required for systemic change. Exit strategies are built into programmes from the outset, undermining sustainability.

A shift in donor expectations was noted: development institutions increasingly ask grantees and partners to demonstrate how technology and AI are integrated into their work. This creates both a new funding opportunity and a new risk that technology adoption becomes performative rather than genuinely transformative. Recommendations included conditioning funding on demonstrated employment outcomes rather than training outputs; investing in African research and evaluation capacity to generate evidence from within Africa; and minimising the administrative burden on recipient institutions to the minimum necessary for accountability.

Training Institutions and Academia

Training institutions, including universities, polytechnics and TVETs, were criticised at the Nairobi convening for being systematically incentivised to produce graduates regardless of whether those graduates can find employment in their field of study. Participants said their KPIs are almost universally focused on enrolment and graduation rather than on employment outcomes.

One participant noted that knowledge of a problem does not automatically translate into solutions. Government offices and academic institutions are full of reports that accurately describe workforce challenges yet have had no impact on policy or practice. The think tank's value lies in closing that gap by translating evidence into action, not in producing more reports. Recommendations included reforming the performance frameworks of training institutions to include employment outcomes; embedding structured employer advisory boards across all major training institutions; and requiring TVETs and polytechnics to demonstrate active industry partnerships as a condition of public funding.



MAJOR FINDINGS

The following findings, drawn from the Nairobi and Kigali convenings, represent the strongest and most consistent conclusions across both sessions.

Finding	Why it Matters	Implication for Action
The future of work is already unfolding.	Delayed responses increase the risk of exclusion, skills obsolescence and institutional irrelevance.	Prioritise immediate pilots, policy adjustments and measurable commitments. Africa cannot afford 'irrational patience.'
Skills mismatch is a coordination failure.	Graduates, employers and training providers are operating with incomplete or disconnected information.	Create continuous feedback mechanisms between learning institutions and industry. Make employment outcomes the primary metric for training systems.
Labour market intelligence is critically weak.	Without real-time data on demand, supply and emerging roles, both training and policy are designed in the dark.	Build labour market intelligence systems in partnership with the private sector, employment platforms and national statistics offices.
Human capabilities remain critical in an AI-enabled economy.	Adaptability, judgement, empathy and communication skills complement and in some roles substitute for technical and digital competencies.	Integrate emotional intelligence and transferable skills into curricula and workplace learning at all levels.
AI outcomes are shaped by preparedness.	The technology can displace tasks while simultaneously creating new roles and increasing productivity.	Expand AI literacy and governance capacity while supporting reskilling, diversification and responsible adoption. Africa must be a driver, not only a recipient.
Inclusion and partnership are not optional design choices.	Fragmented, non-inclusive initiatives cannot address interconnected labour-market challenges at the required scale.	Build a formal cross-sector platform with shared governance, clear accountability and meaningful participation from women, youth and informal workers.
Government participation enables scale.	Private and civic initiatives need policy alignment and institutional support to achieve systemic impact.	Engage relevant ministries and agencies early. Tie government performance frameworks to employment outcomes within productive sectors.
Entrepreneurship support is structurally inadequate.	The gap between initial grant funding and commercial viability is where most African entrepreneurs fail. Risk capital, not training, is the binding constraint.	Develop risk capital ecosystems. Design support programmes that acknowledge failure as part of the entrepreneurial process.
Foresight is a full-time function, not a periodic activity.	The most significant workforce disruptions from AI, geopolitical shifts and demographic change are still ahead. Reactive responses will always be late.	Establish a dedicated, full-time foresight capability as the central function of the think tank.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations consolidate the substantive outputs of both convenings, grouped by theme.

1. Reorient Training Towards Jobs That Exist and Are Emerging

Training programmes must be anchored in existing and emerging job opportunities before they are designed, not after. Labour market intelligence sourced from employers, employment platforms, national statistics offices and international labour market data should be the starting point for all curriculum design. Update cycles must be shortened from episodic multi-year reviews to continuous, employer-informed processes.

2. Strengthen Labour Market Intelligence Across the Continent

African governments, training institutions and the private sector should jointly invest in real-time labour market intelligence systems. This includes employer roundtables, graduate tracer studies, curriculum advisory panels, and the integration of private employment agency data into national labour statistics. The think tank should produce an African Labour Market Intelligence Quarterly publication as an early and recurring output to help shape the future of work in Africa.

3. Position the private sector as a central player in workforce planning

Private-sector actors should be involved in designing workforce programmes from the outset, rather than being relegated to the periphery or brought in only as an afterthought. Industry associations should serve as strategic partners in curriculum design and as primary providers of labour market intelligence. The think tank's governance structure should include substantive private-sector representation, not merely symbolic.

4. Actively Involve Government in Enabling and Accounting for Job Creation

African governments should be engaged not only as policymakers but also as accountability partners for employment outcomes. Productive ministries should be required to report on jobs created within their sectors. Government training institutions, including civil service training programmes, must integrate AI and digital literacy. Mechanisms for continuous government engagement with private-sector intelligence on emerging labour market trends should be established.

5. Link development funding directly to employment results

DFIs and donors should condition funding on demonstrated employment outcomes rather than on training output metrics. Co-design processes between development institutions and African counterparts must be genuine and structured from the outset of programmes. African research and evaluation capacity should be funded and supported to generate evidence from within the continent.

6. Invest in African AI Capacity and Promote Responsible Adoption

Africa must move from being a recipient of AI innovation to a driver of it. This requires significant investment in African AI research and development, the establishment of AI centres of excellence connected to African universities, and the creation of datasets in African languages and African-context datasets. AI literacy and responsible, ethical AI governance should be integrated into curricula at all levels. The think tank should develop a continental AI readiness framework for governments, employers and training institutions.

7. Develop a Future-Ready Skills Framework

A continental skills framework for the future of work should integrate digital and AI literacy with emotional intelligence, critical thinking, adaptability, communication and creativity. This framework should provide a common reference point that national curriculum designers, employers and training institutions can adapt to their contexts. It should be reviewed and updated on a two-year cycle in response to labour market intelligence.

8. Prioritise Reskilling Alongside New Job Creation

Reskilling existing workers must be treated as equally important as creating new jobs. As automation advances across sectors, the cost of inaction, both for individual workers and for overall productivity, will rise significantly. Employers should be encouraged and incentivised to invest in reskilling programmes. Short courses, recognition of prior learning and modular training pathways should be expanded to support transitions.

9. Pilot Work-Integrated Learning Models and Support Lifelong Learning

Internships, apprenticeships, mentorship programmes, live industry projects and micro-credentials should be expanded to provide learners with real-world experience alongside their formal education. Lifelong learning frameworks, including affordable short courses and modular qualifications that workers can pursue alongside employment, need to be developed and institutionalised.

10. Support Entrepreneurship with Capital and Structure

Domestic angel investment and venture capital should be actively encouraged through government policy and fiscal incentives. Incubation and acceleration programmes should be linked to real risk capital, not merely to training and mentorship. Support programmes should be designed to accommodate failure as part of the entrepreneurial process, and the culture surrounding business failure should be actively reframed in both public discourse and policy.

11. Ensure Meaningful Youth and Gender Inclusion

Young people and women should be meaningfully included at every stage of the think tank's work, as co-designers, researchers, working-group members, convening speakers and evaluation partners, not merely as beneficiaries. Gender balance across governance bodies, working groups and convening participation should be an explicit target, not an afterthought.

12. Establish a Dedicated Foresight Function

A full-time foresight capability, staffed by professionals whose sole responsibility is horizon-scanning and scenario planning, should be established as the think tank's core function. Outputs should include quarterly horizon-scanning briefs, annual scenario reports, and direct advisory engagements with governments and the private sector. The foresight function should have a cross-cutting mandate: its intelligence should inform all six thematic pillars.

13. Build a Formal Future-of-Work Partnership Platform

The think tank should establish a formal, structured partnership platform with defined membership, governance, thematic working groups, named institutional responsibilities, decision-making processes and public accountability. The platform should distinguish between founding partners, thematic partners and country correspondents. Formal invitations to founding partners should be issued in July 2026, with structured collaborative work beginning in August 2026.

WAY FORWARD

In both Nairobi and Kigali, participants concluded with a clear focus on the question: “What next?” The following section synthesises the agreed next steps and the proposed action framework from both sessions.

Immediate Next Steps

•Issue formal partnership invitations to prospective founding institutional partners in early July 2026.

•Engage relevant government ministries in Kenya and Rwanda at a senior level, with the ministries responsible for public service, education and labour as the most important immediate interlocutors.

•Establish a sector-specific consultation process involving structured conversations with the private sector, government, development finance institutions and civil society, held in separate, focused sessions.

•Begin structured collaborative work through agreed thematic workstreams in August 2026.

•Publish a concise progress update at the end of the first quarter of structured work (September 2026).

Proposes Action Framework

Workstream	Immediate Action	Lead Actors	Indicative Timing	Expected Output
Partnership formation	Issue formal invitations; confirm founding partners and terms of engagement.	The Career Café; government; anchor institutions	July 2026	Confirmed partner group and terms of engagement
Governance and planning	Agree on working groups, priorities, responsibilities and reporting.	Founding partners	August 2026	Joint workplan and governance framework
Skills and curriculum	Map priority skills gaps; identify pilot institutions and sectors.	Universities; TVETs; employers; labour agencies	August–September 2026	Skills-gap brief and pilot design
AI and digital transformation	Develop practical guidance and case studies for responsible AI adoption.	Technology firms; researchers; employers; policymakers	August–October 2026	AI readiness toolkit or policy note
Evidence and reporting	Develop measurable indicators; establish monitoring framework.	Research and knowledge team	July–September 2026	Baseline report and monitoring framework
Future of Work Summit	**Confirm host city, programme, partners, speakers and action showcases.**	**The Career Café and summit partners**	**November 2026**	**Continental summit with commitments and pilot announcements**

Accountability Measures

•The following accountability mechanisms were proposed at the Kigali convening:

•Publish a concise quarterly progress update covering partnerships, skills initiatives, youth participation, policy engagement and pilot implementation.

•Assign a named lead and a specific deadline to each agreed action.

•Develop a small, manageable set of indicators that can be tracked and publicly reported.

•Ensure every major convening ends with documented commitments and a follow-up schedule, not merely a set of impressions.

•Create channels for participants to contribute ideas and institutional resources between events, so engagement is continuous rather than episodic

CONCLUSION: THE CASE FOR A THINK TANK

The two convenings on the future of work, in Nairobi and Kigali, together laid the intellectual, relational and institutional foundation for what is intended to become the authoritative continental voice on the future of work in Africa. The discussions repeatedly returned to a single, uncomfortable truth: the problems are well understood, the declarations have been made, and the frameworks exist. What has been missing is a sustained, lean, Africa-led institution capable of the continuous, unglamorous, evidence-based work of connecting analysis to action at scale.

Several qualities distinguish this initiative from what has come before.

1.The first is a commitment to continuous, full-time engagement rather than episodic convening. The think tank would not meet periodically to produce position papers; it would employ full-time researchers and advisers working on these questions every day.

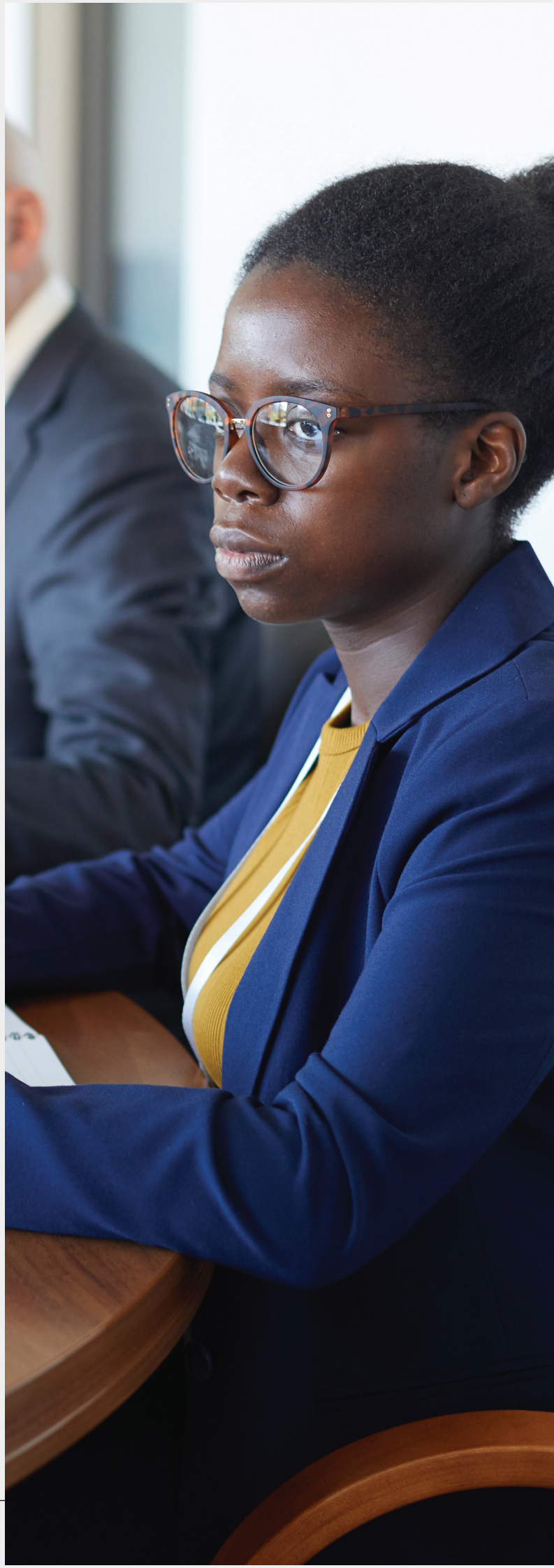
2.The second is an insistence on anchoring all work in real labour-market intelligence rather than in aspirational frameworks.

3. The third is the deliberate elevation of foresight as the central, cross-cutting function: not just responding to what has already happened but anticipating what is coming.

4.The fourth is the co-creation model. Both convenings were designed from the outset to build the initiative with a broad base of contributors, rather than to present a pre-designed structure for endorsement.

5. The fifth is the commitment to lean operations: high analytical quality, low administrative weight, and a results orientation that treats impact, not institutional size or programme expenditure, as the primary measure of success.

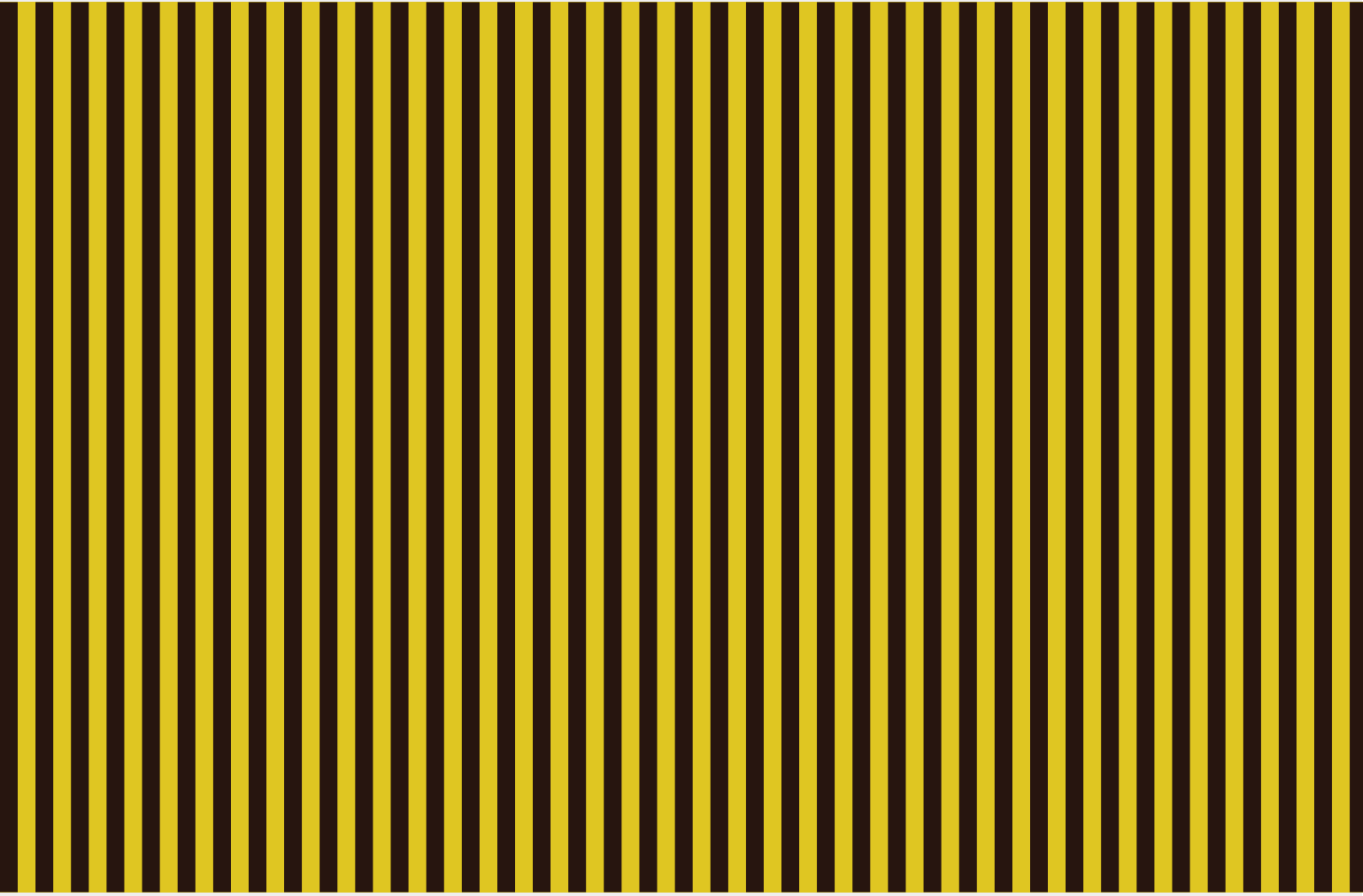
As one participant observed, impact begins the moment a convening ends. The Kigali session concluded with a phrase that captured the spirit of both sessions: “The future is not a distant destination. It is created through the choices, partnerships and actions we take now.” The work has begun. The next major milestone is the continental Future of Work Summit, planned for November 2026.



ANNEXES

Annex A: Participating Organisations

- Act Change Transform (Act!)
- African Development Bank (AfDB)
- AG Expert Consult
- AI Centre of Excellence (AICE)
- AstraZeneca
- Care International
- EU SWITCH Kenya Green Programme
- Faminga
- Federation of African Women Educationists (FAWE Africa)
- Imcon Consulting
- International Centre for Evaluation and Development (ICED)
- International Labour Organisation (ILO)
- Interpeace
- Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM)
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS)
- Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS)
- Kurrent Technologies
- Lux Arcana
- MasterCard Foundation
- Nairobi County Government
- Office of the Chief of Staff and Head of the Public Service, Government of Kenya
- Pathfinder International
- Power Africa
- Public Service Commission, Government of Kenya
- Sarrin Technologies
- Staple Landscape Ltd
- Techinika
- United States International University Africa (USIU-Africa)



About The Career Café

The Career Café is a Pan-African platform dedicated to workforce transformation, leadership development, and building the professional ecosystem across the African continent. It operates at the intersection of policy, practice, and people – convening leaders from government, the private sector, academia, and civil society to shape the future of work in Africa.

Driven by the conviction that Africa's demographic dividend is its greatest strategic asset, the Career Café works to ensure that the continent's young and growing workforce is equipped, empowered, and positioned to lead in an increasingly complex and technology-driven world. Through strategic convenings, research, and partnerships, the Career Café develops evidence-based insights and practical frameworks that inform workforce policy, shape investment decisions, and drive transformation at national and continental levels.

As the secretariat of the continental think tank on the future of work in Africa, the Career Café leads a growing network of experts, practitioners, and policymakers committed to building an adaptive, competitive, and future-ready workforce. It works with partners across Eastern, Western, Central, Northern, and Southern Africa to co-create an Africa-centred vision for the workforce of tomorrow – one grounded in the continent's realities and responsive to its ambitions.

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