

# Call for Papers: African Governance in the Digital Age

## Introduction

Since the mid-2000s, digitalisation has raised hopes of imminent political, economic, and social transformation in Africa. Almost two decades later, techno-optimism is increasingly giving way to techno-pessimism. African governments have generally been unable to capitalise on the digital revolution, leaving it to the market and the private sector. Meanwhile, the leaders of some of Africa's authoritarian regimes have successfully stunted the transformative potential of technology through restrictive legislation, 'troll farms', and internet shutdowns. What was once thought of as 'liberation technology' has become "remarkably compatible with the maintenance of the status quo".<sup>1</sup> Or has it? Are the techno-pessimists overlooking progress under the surface? Have the tectonic plates shifted, and will digital transformation eventually force through a recalibration of state-society relations in Africa?

In its inaugural working paper series, Tayarisha, the African Centre of Excellence in Digital Governance, with support from the Hans Seidel Foundation, sets out to explore some of these questions. Research and public debate on digitalisation tend to either exaggerate its transformative potential, or to disregard it entirely. In addition, the starting point is generally Europe and/or North America, which means the emphasis is on costs and benefits that are important in advanced, industrialised economies. By contrast, this working paper series takes its starting point in Africa and in a different set of assumptions about the state, its institutions, the market, and its actors. In addition, it intends to move beyond binary simplifications, and shed light on the complexities, nuances, dilemmas, and paradoxes associated with digitalisation. Furthermore, while inviting more robust theorisation, it also invites empirically grounded work and appreciative enquiries.

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<sup>1</sup> N. Cheeseman, L. Garby, and I. Hassan (2021), "Introduction: Introduction: Why Digital Democracy Will Take More than Technology in Africa". In N. Cheeseman and L. Garby (eds), *Decoding Digital Democracy in Africa*, Stanford: Digital Civil Society Lab, Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, Stanford University, p. 4.

## Themes

The series invites submissions on the effects of digitalisation on state-society relations in Africa, including the following (and related) themes and sub-themes:

- Government-citizens relations
  - Open data
  - Open governance
  - Platform governance
  - GovTech
  - AI/ML in public policy
  - Algorithmic governance
  - Digital divides
- Government-private sector relations
  - Digital infrastructure
  - Digital regulation
  - Data ownership
  - Public Innovation
  - Platform economy and market dynamics
- Private sector-academia relations
  - Brain drain
  - Future skilling
  - Education outcomes
  - Universal service obligations
- Relations between politicians and the electorate
  - E-participation
  - Social media
  - Digital freedoms

Other relevant submissions, within the overall research objective, are welcomed and will be considered.

## Timelines and Terms

The working paper series will inform a series of seminars and policy dialogues/public debates, collectively forming a new knowledge compendium, part of which will be published as an edited volume. Academics or practitioners wishing to contribute to the working paper series should submit their abstract (250 words) to [Zibusiso.Manzini-Moyo@wits.ac.za](mailto:Zibusiso.Manzini-Moyo@wits.ac.za) by 30 September 2022.

Contributors will be notified by 7 October and will be invited to present a first draft during an authors' workshop by end-October, and to submit a full draft paper (6000-8000 words) by 18 November. Papers will be peer reviewed, and final papers are envisaged to be published on

the Tayarisha website in early 2023. All contributors will receive an honorarium of EUR 2,500 (will be split for papers with more than one author) confirming their commitment to:

- Author the approved chapter in accordance with an agreed schedule;
- Incorporate comments, recommendations and edits made by peer reviewers, editors and reference group;
- Attend scheduled project 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.

## Background

Tayarisha is the African Centre of Excellence in Digital Governance. Hosted at the Wits School of Governance, University of the Witwatersrand, it provides a hub for research, education, and outreach on the challenges and opportunities presented by digitisation in Africa. Tayarisha straddles the nexus between government, business, and society, and intends to contribute to the creation of public good by conducting academically rigorous, cutting-edge research; providing world-class education; and contributing to public debate.

The working paper series is supported by the Hans Seidel Foundation (HSF), a German political foundation with a commitment to democracy, peace, and development. HSF runs around 100 projects in 65 countries worldwide. The focus of these projects is on strengthening civil society, civic involvement and promoting the rule of law, education and management training, raising environmental awareness and advising decision-makers in politics, business and administration.

## Contacts

Dr Halfdan Lynge, Research Manager, Tayarisha Centre, [halfdan.lynge@wits.ac.za](mailto:halfdan.lynge@wits.ac.za)

Prof Geci Karuri-Sebina, Coordinator, Tayarisha Centre, [geci.karuri-sebina@wits.ac.za](mailto:geci.karuri-sebina@wits.ac.za)