



ACCELERATED DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

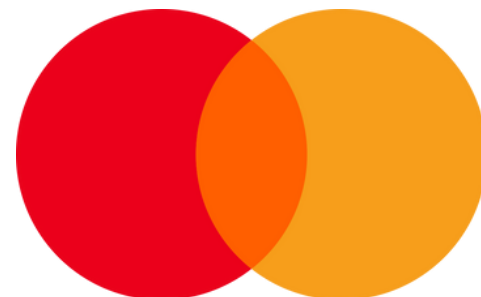
SUMMIT 2025

ETHIOPIA

REPORT



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extensia



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ADT



Technology, traction, talent - Extensia's Accelerated Digital Transformation summit explores new waves of opportunity

By Dr Madan Rao, Conference Chairman, Extensia

The 2025 edition of the Accelerated Digital Transformation (ADT) Summit, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on February 26-27 at the Sheraton Addis, attracted over 475 attendees. This Summit is the latest in Extensia's authoritative series of events across 12 countries in Africa over the last 20 years and is also its 10th event in Ethiopia.

Participants at ADT 2025 represented 199 companies, 9 African countries and 5 countries from outside Africa. There were 10 sponsors and vendors, 5 keynote speakers, 4 showcase sessions, 54 speakers, 11 panels, and 22 individual sessions.

The core theme of the Summit – Harnessing a New Wave of Opportunity – was effectively highlighted in the opening ceremony addresses by Tariq Malik, CEO, Extensia; Elfagid Woldegiorgis, Business Development Director for Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan, Mastercard; Samba Khonte Coulibaly, Chairman of Regulation and Communication, ACE Submarine Cable; Trilok Dabeensing, Director of IT, ICT Authority of Mauritius; and His Excellency Dr Belete Molla, Minister of Innovation and Technology, Ministry of Innovation and Technology, Ethiopia.

ICT infrastructure is as important as physical infrastructure like highways, bridges, and solar farms. This includes fibre highways, submarine cables, data centres, powerlines, and satellites, supported by capacity-building initiatives and cybersecurity frameworks. New partnership models based on 'coopetition' are called for, along with innovative models of co-investment.

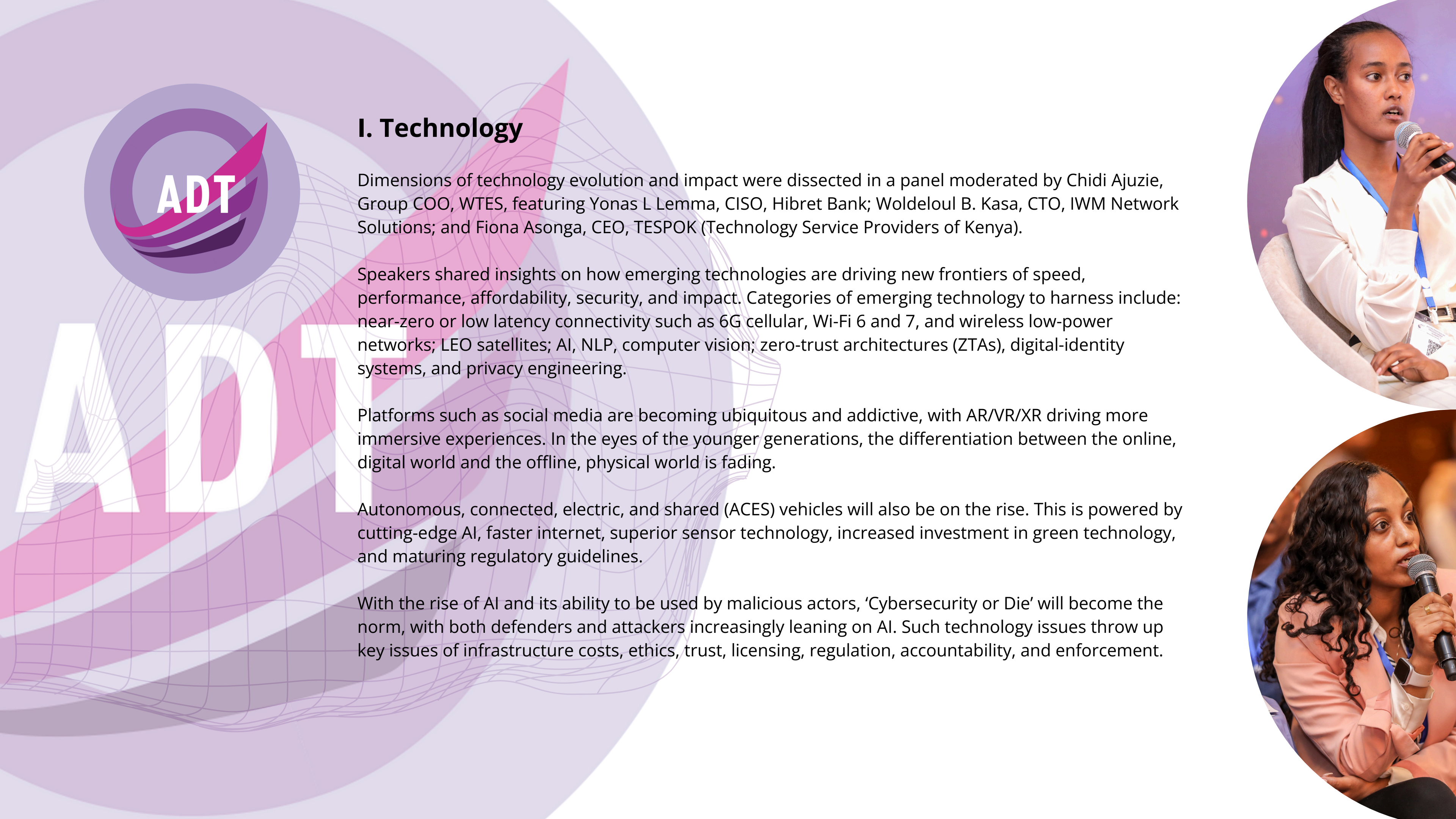
"The ADT Summit has become a cornerstone for dialogue, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas among key stakeholders in the ICT sector," observed Tariq Malik, CEO, Extensia. The approval of Ethiopia's first Artificial Intelligence strategy by the Council of Ministers in June 2024 is an indicator of the country's commitment to leveraging AI for national advancement.

The opening keynote by Dr. Christine Sund, Senior Advisor, ITU Regional Office for Africa, highlighted findings and recommendations from the DIII (Digital Infrastructure Investment Initiative). It aims to enhance digital connectivity by mobilising funding for digital infrastructure in underserved areas, focusing on innovative financing mechanisms and public-private sector collaboration.

The SDG Acceleration Agenda shows that 70% of the SDG indicators have a direct or indirect digital element. Traditional connectivity infrastructure must be enhanced by cloud services, data centers, storage, and compute capacity. Challenges to digital investment include demand fragmentation, core infrastructure gaps, unclear digital policies, project execution risk, and country risk for investors.

Here are the key takeaways by the Conference Chair from this insightful event, in three clusters: Technology, Traction and Talent ('3 Ts'). The speakers at ADT charted out a spectrum of emerging technologies, traction and impacts across sectors, and the need for talent and diversity to effectively harness successive waves of advancing and converging ICTs.





ADT

I. Technology

Dimensions of technology evolution and impact were dissected in a panel moderated by Chidi Ajuzie, Group COO, WTES, featuring Yonas L Lemma, CISO, Hibret Bank; Woldeloul B. Kasa, CTO, IWM Network Solutions; and Fiona Asonga, CEO, TESPOK (Technology Service Providers of Kenya).

Speakers shared insights on how emerging technologies are driving new frontiers of speed, performance, affordability, security, and impact. Categories of emerging technology to harness include: near-zero or low latency connectivity such as 6G cellular, Wi-Fi 6 and 7, and wireless low-power networks; LEO satellites; AI, NLP, computer vision; zero-trust architectures (ZTAs), digital-identity systems, and privacy engineering.

Platforms such as social media are becoming ubiquitous and addictive, with AR/VR/XR driving more immersive experiences. In the eyes of the younger generations, the differentiation between the online, digital world and the offline, physical world is fading.

Autonomous, connected, electric, and shared (ACES) vehicles will also be on the rise. This is powered by cutting-edge AI, faster internet, superior sensor technology, increased investment in green technology, and maturing regulatory guidelines.

With the rise of AI and its ability to be used by malicious actors, 'Cybersecurity or Die' will become the norm, with both defenders and attackers increasingly leaning on AI. Such technology issues throw up key issues of infrastructure costs, ethics, trust, licensing, regulation, accountability, and enforcement.





Edge computing will increasingly be used to allow processing of data closer to their origins. Issues of data privacy and sovereignty will arise in the domain of data centres. More hyperscale remote data centres and cloud services will proliferate as well.

Every new technology evolution and/or revolution creates new opportunity frontiers. With it, comes challenges, but the challenges then spur further technology development opportunities. For instance, the growth of widespread networked connectivity (the internet) created real-time safety and security challenges – this consequently birthed cybersecurity opportunities.

The future of technology should be seen as an evolution and not revolution in the next five to ten years, according to the panel. Traditional infrastructure models will co-exist but the transformative future will involve more artificial intelligence, machine learning, and edge computing.

In the face of such transformations, the mandate for African countries is to connect the unconnected (especially rural communities) and commit to ethical development, transparency, and mitigation of biases. They should also strengthen robust regulatory oversight to balance technology innovation with safeguards against misuse.

There is a strong need for not just localisation of content but generation of content, services and training from local contexts. Knowledge sharing is called for to harness emerging use cases and from communities across and beyond Africa. This also needs encouragement of local entrepreneurship and innovation.

In an engaging fireside chat and insightful workshop, Degol Gossaye, General Manager, Raxio Ethiopia, highlighted the growing role of data centres in driving digital transformation. For example, data centre colocation offers companies across industries significant advantages over building in-house facilities. This allows businesses to focus more on their core competencies while benefiting from enhanced security, reliability and scalability.

Ethiopia's focus on boosting its economy through digital transformation initiatives requires a dependable state-of-the-art infrastructure. Data centres support such initiatives by providing infrastructure that serves as the backbone of these transformation projects. They also offer redundancy and resilience, ensuring business continuity in the face of natural disasters or cyber threats.

Data centres provide mission-critical support for the financial sector, and enhance financial inclusion by providing access to banking services for underserved populations. Data centres can also constitute a reliable and secure infrastructure for tech startups, enabling them to focus on innovation without worrying about the complexities of IT infrastructure management.

The keynote on 'Cybersecurity and Resilience' by Fiona Asonga, CEO, TESPOK (Technology Service Providers of Kenya) cautioned stakeholders of the growing rise of cyberthreats. Alertness and responsive measures are called for at the level of individuals, organisations and nations. Capacity building and robustness can be increased via regional collaboration as well.

A range of cutting-edge technology solutions were showcased by Wingu, Mobile Technologies, Raxio, and ABS Satellite. For example, Ajay Jethwani Vice President, Sales, Africa, ABS Satellite, shared examples of satellite technology solutions for cellular backhaul, managed platform services, and video distribution. They enable the extension of telecom networks by enabling wider international networks for operators, as well as cost-effective connectivity for enterprises, government and NGOs.



Attendance



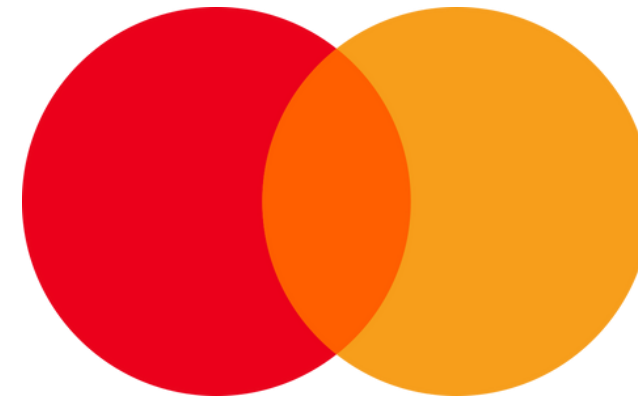
475 Attendees
14 Countries
199 Companies
10 Sponsors

Speakers



54 Speakers
22 Sessions
11 Panels
5 Keynotes
4 Showcases





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II. Traction

Strategies for total coverage, spanning smart cities and rural communities, were discussed in a panel moderated by Extensia COO Adrian Hall, featuring Beza Mamo, Director, Payment Application, EthSwitch; Abel Molla, Senior Investment Advisor, British Embassy, Addis Ababa; and Chidi Ajuzie, Group COO, WTES. It was recognised that connectivity enables financial inclusion along with many other services.

In several African markets, it was found that rural users outpace urban users in terms of usage. In fact, the more remote an area, the more connectivity becomes an essential tool rather than a 'nice to have plaything'. Once networks are installed and coverage is provided, subscribers gravitate towards connectivity and usage grows rapidly.

Unfortunately, investors do not make investments on a 'build it and they will come' philosophy, creating a disconnect resulting in challenges where it comes to financing rollouts. Services will ultimately drive usage, and this increased usage will justify infrastructure costs.

In this regard, third-party infracos can increase adoption whilst reducing costs by accessing cheaper finance and mitigating costs through shared access. Universal service funds play an integral role in providing the interim financing of otherwise uneconomical network rollouts, until such time as commercial viability is reached.





In a fireside chat, Wim Vanhelleputte, CEO, Safaricom Telecommunications Ethiopia, shared insights into what it takes to drive the growth, development and impact of the first commercial MNO in a country that had been serviced by a single state-owned enterprise for over 100 years.

A country's ICT ministry and regulator (MiNT and ECA, in this case) need to continually collaborate to modernise and liberalise the ICT landscape. It should be acknowledged that this is no easy task, but takes time to progress. Operators face challenges in providing affordable broadband access while still trying to achieve profitability.

Further growth in two-operator markets like Ethiopia can be spurred via shared infrastructure of third-party independent providers, or the entry of a third operator. Operators should deliver reliable broadband access to all consumers, and not just basic service.

As a revenue stream, voice is on the decline for operators as compared to data. Offering data services over 4G networks (and beyond) is the right approach to get more market traction. Everyone has a fundamental right to a quality broadband connection whether they are in high density urban locations or low-density rural areas, Vanhelleputte affirmed.

Further traction for digital infrastructure and sector transformation can be enhanced via effective national ICT strategies and regional collaboration, according to an international panel moderated by Melat Mebratu Gebeyehu, Digital Financial Literacy Coordinator, United Nations Capital Development Fund. It featured Dr. Girum Ketema, Director, Digital Agriculture and Finance, Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Institute (ATI), and Trilok Dabeesing, Director of IT, ICT Authority of Mauritius.

Ethiopia is actively implementing various ICT strategies for its national development agenda. These strategies prioritise the use of ICT to modernise key sectors, enhance public services, and stimulate innovation. This calls for infrastructure expansion, digital literacy, and policy reforms, thus leading to economic and social progress. Examples include Digital Ethiopia 2025, National Financial Inclusion Strategy, and National Agricultural Roadmap.

Mauritius has focused on robust ICT infrastructure as a cornerstone of its digital inclusion efforts. This includes development of digital literacy and ICT skills, which has contributed to the country's high rates of internet penetration and widespread adoption of digital services. Such holistic approaches based on participatory formulation of policies help create a truly connected society.

Regional collaboration frameworks span the African Union's activities and COMESA strategies (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa). Such engagements promote the sharing of cross-border resources, harmonisation of digital policies and infrastructure, and the exchange of best practices.

Sectoral impacts of digital transformation were evaluated in a panel moderated by Dr. Habib Mohammed, Director for AI and Robotics Centre of Excellence, Addis Ababa Science and Technology University. The panellists included Erkan Satik, Director of Cloud Ecosystem and Alliances, Wingu Africa; Ajay Jethwani, VP of Sales, Africa, ABS Satellite; and Kasaye Eshetu, Business Development Director for Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan, Mastercard.

The panellists shared specific examples from their organisations, illustrating how digital transformation has delivered tangible impacts, while also addressing the difficulties faced in implementing digital strategies at scale in mass markets. Cutting-edge examples of mobile payment solutions via wristbands and even rings were discussed.

The World Bank Report on Digital Africa (2024) explains that a multitude of firms can become more profitable by using digital tools more productively and intensively. Many companies are digitally enabled but do not adequately adopt digital technologies for productive tasks, such as business administration, planning, sales, and payments.



While much has been written about the rise of mobile phones and digital payments in Africa, they only constitute entry points to digitalisation, and do not necessarily lead to digitalisation of other business functions. The report also calls for expanding digital transformation to microbusinesses and informal businesses, which account for most employment in Africa.

A future-looking panel on 'AI Practices and Policies' – introduced for the first time at ADT 2025 – featured Melka Girma, COO, Shega Media and Technologies; Trilok Dabeasing, Director of IT, ICT Authority of Mauritius; and Aatif Jamal, Acting Chief Technology & Information Officer, Safaricom. It was moderated by IT consultant Bruck Sewnet.

AI and ML have significant potential to transform digital finance applications and financial inclusion. Countries like Mauritius have developed notable participatory approaches to framing AI policies to promote its adoption and also have an Emerging Technologies Council. The rise of DeepSeek has given much food for thought on the potential of frugal innovations in AI, and served as a wake-up call to AI developers in emerging economies. Capacity building needs to be stepped up at the level of coding, maths, and domain-specific knowledge.

The banking and financial services sector, as well as a range of fintech startups, are redefining wealth generation and financial inclusion, according to a panel featuring Henok Shiferaw, Market Implementation Director for Ethiopia, Mastercard; Naoll Addisu, Technology Advisor to The Governor, National Bank of Ethiopia; and Elsa Muzollini, CEO, MPesa, Safaricom. The discussion spanned issues such as open APIs by Safaricom for developers, use cases of blockchain, and bringing more people into the formal banking system. Farmers are crucial to the economy, and solutions such as Mastercard's Community Pass provide easier and secure access to financial services.



Specifically focusing on the host country of ADT 2025, the panel on 'Connected Ethiopia' featured Teshome Worku, Senior Director, Wingu Group, and Tilahun Melak Sitote, University Dean, Addis Ababa Science and Technology University. Moderated by Gelila Moges, Economist, Ethiopian Internet Society, the session charted Ethiopia's progress in advancing its ICT sector and frameworks for broadening its impact. This included strategies for maximising investments in data centres, and the increasing use of ICTs to improve research, teaching and learning by academic institutes.

III. Talent

The digital ecosystem has thrown up a range of opportunities for entrepreneurs, but the startup movement calls for more talent development, investment, and policy interventions. Such strategies were proposed in a panel on 'Startup Ecosystems' moderated by Solomon Tadesse, Country Director, Digital Opportunity Trust. The panellists were Biruk Aschalew, President, Enderase Youth Association; Abiy Tadesse Belay, Head, Innobiz K Ethiopia Incubation Centre, Ministry of Innovation and Technology (MinT); and Meseret Warner, CEO and Founder, Ignite Investment.

Digital financial services were identified as a significant opportunity for startup founders, thanks to the growing youth demographic and their tech-savviness. 'Low-hanging fruits' exist in addressing basic market needs through digital solutions. However, scaling requires overcoming infrastructure limitations and access to consistent internet.

Incubators and makerspaces are vital for providing early-stage support and scaling up talent, but this necessitates increased funding and wider community engagement. Collaboration and synergy among the different players in the ecosystem are critical to the early success and long-term growth of startups.



Venture capital has spurred significant growth in African startups, with notable success stories demonstrating the potential for high-impact investments. The current 'funding winter' necessitates strategic pivoting and a focus on sustainable business models for both founders and enablers. Local resources mobilisation and leveraging available innovative finance mechanisms are the key actions to pursue. Government commitments in availing resources for startup incubators and other enablers will have important implications in attracting more support from other players as well.

Digital infrastructure and media are spurring the growth of the 'Creator Economy,' with a range of gaming companies, AR/VR/XR immersive experience designers, and social media influencers. Opportunities and challenges in this space were explored by a panel moderated by Extensia COO Adrian Hall, featuring Daniel Getachew, Founder and CEO, Guzo Technologies; Mahder Getaneh, Architect and XR developer, Bema Technologies; and Oliyad Tesfaye, CEO, Tobiya Game Studio.

The panellists showcased their talent in blending gaming with practical use cases like tourism, education and healthcare. Localised content can lead to engaging gaming environments with real-world applications. There is no limit to the imagination of such bright young entrepreneurs – but there are limited financial rewards and support at the moment. There is also a significant gap between skill requirements and availability of skilled workforce.

Furthermore, there is a renewed threat of talent drain, with more advanced countries like Dubai making a concerted effort to attract companies operating in this space with significant financial incentive and access to resources. Further local and regional traction can help expand into new and existing verticals. Collaborations with industry, government and universities hold the key to retaining tomorrow's technology leaders, especially among youth.



Succeeding in the online economy calls for a focus not just on infrastructure but also customer experience and digital engagement, as discussed in a fireside chat with Frida Eposi, Digital Innovation Fellow, African Union Commission. Unfortunately, design is often added only as an afterthought to make things 'look or feel better' rather than being included right at the early stages of prototyping of products and services. Digital design must embrace principles of inclusion, and capacity building for user experience and interaction need to be integrated with traditional ICT courses.

Dimensions of diversity in Africa's talent pool were explored and emphasised in a fireside chat featuring Omar Bagersh, Director, Spiralytix, and Bethelhem Seifu Shawel, Assistant Professor, Addis Ababa University. Diversity in technology spans considerations of gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic backgrounds. Many under-represented groups face barriers to entry, such as unequal access to STEM education and biased hiring practices.

Inclusion is a shared responsibility and goes beyond recruiting diverse communities. It involves creating environments where these individuals can thrive and become leaders. Retention, fair pay, career growth, and workplace culture are just as important as recruitment in the ICT sector. Mentorship, sponsorship, and funding are essential for fostering true inclusivity and bridging the leadership and entrepreneurship gap.

Collective effort is essential to ensure diversity, inclusion, and empowerment in the talent pool. This is not a one-man (or one-woman!) job. It requires a collective effort across leadership, teams, industries, and policymakers to make meaningful progress.

An insightful session focused on BPO opportunities in Africa, in a panel introduced for the first time at an Extensia event. Titled 'Africa BPO Outlook,' it was moderated by Naoll Addisu, Technology Advisor to The Governor, National Bank of Ethiopia, and featured Meried Bekele, Managing Director, IE Networks; Yilkal Abate, President, ICT Association of Ethiopia; Elefelious G. Belay, University Dean, Addis Ababa University; and Tigest Damtie, CEO, Cloud 251.

Findings from the Everest Group were cited, such as Sub-Saharan African BPO hubs' rise from low complexity customer experience queries to specialised operations such as enterprise technical support. Third-party outsourcing providers serving Western markets are setting up hubs in Africa.

Macro-factors driving Africa's BPO outlook are STEM-focused education, the largest youth population base in the world, attractive cost arbitrage, and proximity to Europe in terms of location and time zone. Some African governments are strengthening local data security laws for the BPO sector. Emerging BPO hubs include Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda, Mauritius, and Kenya, with other countries like Ethiopia positioning themselves for this sector as well.



The Road Ahead

Looking ahead, effective digital governance and policy harmonisation are key macro-factors for the success of further digital transformation. Strategies and findings in this regard were shared in a panel moderated by Michael Adenew, Country Director, Oxford Policy Management, with the speaker lineup of Samba Khonte Coulibaly, Chairman of Regulation and Communication, ACE Submarine Cable; Samuel Chiwanda, CEO and Founder, Click Mobile; and Betelhem Girmay, Chief Human Resources Officer, iCog Labs,

“Ethiopia’s coffee culture reminds us that great ideas brew best through connection,” Adenew observes. Rather than barriers, it is bridges that must be built between sectors and countries in Africa for a bright digital future.

Chiwanda shared hard-earned lessons on harmonising regulations across sub-Saharan markets in the messaging space. Coulibaly inspired audiences to turn policy chaos into connectivity wins, while Girmay cautioned that ethics-free AI can widen the digital divide.

HE Yeshurun Alemayehu, State Minister of Innovation and Technology, congratulated the organisers, sponsors and partners in bringing together such an insightful meeting of the minds during the Summit. Such high-quality events help catalyse local communities of digital leaders, while also connecting them to broader continental and global movements for knowledge transfer and partnerships.





The attendees roundly applauded the organisers, partners, sponsors, speakers, moderators and exhibitors at ADT for bringing this insightful, well-structured, and impactful summit to Ethiopia yet again. Many speakers and participants shared some of their own takeaways from the conference proceedings on social media. These posts can be found using the hashtag #ADT2025 (eg. on LinkedIn, Twitter/X).

For example, here are links to LinkedIn posts on ADT insights and tips by [Michael Adenew](#), [Abiy Tadese](#), [Mahder Getaneh](#), [Simone Asnake](#), [Chidi Ajuzie](#), [Salma Shaban](#), [Samba Khonte Coulibaly](#), [Betelhem Girmay](#), [Tigest Damtie](#), [Ajay Jethwani](#), [Frida Eposi](#), [Emnet Mesfin](#), and [Shehryar Bakht Ali](#). Videos of sessions across two full days of the Summit are also accessible [online](#). Links to summit photos and Extensia's YouTube channel with rich content are available on Pages 21–24 of this report.

In conclusion, ICTs are not just an industry in their own right, but also a key enabler of all other industries, thus occupying a unique 'vertical' and 'horizontal' position. With the pace of changes accelerating and converging rapidly, the next decade promises even more profound advancements and opportunities to leapfrog traditional barriers. Addressing core data foundations of the AI economy will also help add more 'African Intelligence' to 'Artificial Intelligence.'

"Since our last summit, we have seen many countries across Africa make substantial progress in the development and application of their ICT initiatives. Upcoming events of Extensia for the rest of 2025 and beyond will continue to bring together key stakeholders to catalyse such opportunity," summed up Tariq Malik, CEO, Extensia.







**An important forum for sharing expertise
and determining the future of
technology.**

**Simone (Gebre) Asnake - *Project Manager - IE
Networks***

**ADT Summit gives us opportunity to
share insights and engage with industry
leaders**

Ajay Jethwani - Vice President, Sales - ABS Global

**ADT Summit provides a great stage
for engaging discussions, always love
to attend this summit**

**Wim Vanhelleputte, CEO, Safaricom
Telecommunications Ethiopia**

TESTIMONIALS

**A rich and intense week during the
Accelerated Digital Transformation (ADT)
Summit in Ethiopia.**

**Samba Khonte Coulibaly - *Chairman Regulation and
Communication - ACE Submarine Cable***

**Thanks to ADT summit for the
opportunity and colleagues for the great
insights and knowledge sharing**

Chidi Ajuzie - *COO -WTES Telecoms*

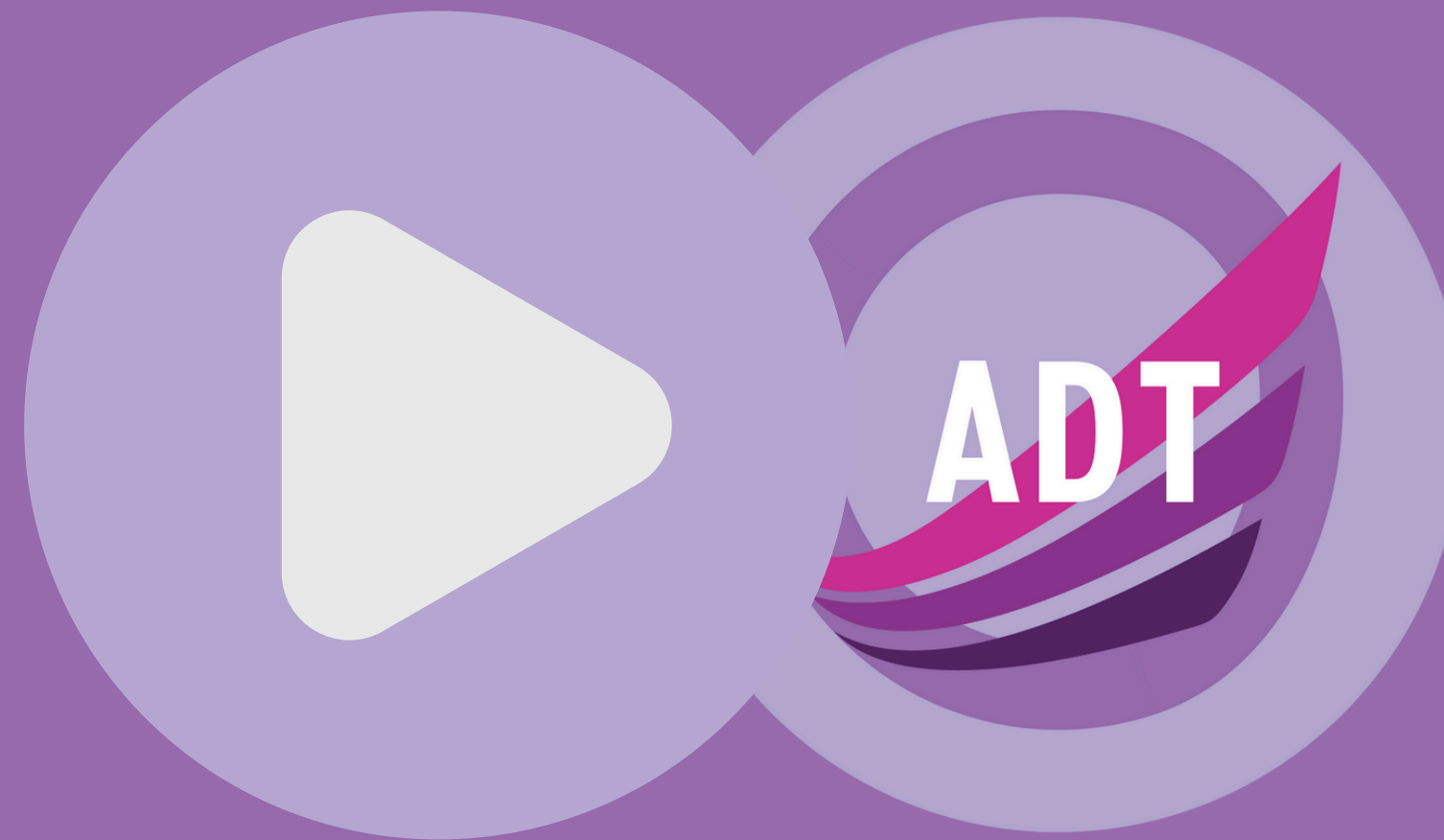
**What a great
event this is!**

**Degol Gossaye, General Manager, Raxio
Ethiopia**



Summit 2025

Showcase Video



Videos of sessions

Day 1



Videos of sessions

Day 2



Photos

Click on the image to take you to the website

Day 1



Day 2

Thank You!
See you next year...

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