The Age of AI: A Nation at Risk of Being Left Out of the Next Technological Revolution

A DataRay perspective on AI readiness, digital capacity, and strategic competitiveness in Somalia

Abdinur Khalif

Founder — DataRay Smart Solutions

March 15, 2026

Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping global economies, transforming how governments, businesses, and institutions make decisions, deliver services, and compete in increasingly data-driven markets. Across Africa, several countries are beginning to integrate AI technologies into financial systems, public services, and digital innovation ecosystems. However, Somalia remains at a relatively early stage of AI adoption, facing structural challenges that may slow its participation in the emerging global AI economy. This article examines Somalia's position within the evolving AI landscape, highlighting key barriers that limit technological advancement. These include the absence of a national AI strategy, limited large-scale initiatives from major corporations such as banks and telecommunications companies, gaps in research infrastructure, language barriers that affect accessibility to AI tools, and limited integration of AI education within academic institutions. As neighboring economies increasingly adopt AI-powered technologies, Somali businesses may face growing challenges competing in regional markets if digital transformation remains slow.

At the same time, Somalia possesses several opportunities that could support future technological growth. The country's relatively strong telecommunications infrastructure, expanding internet connectivity, and youthful population provide a foundation for digital innovation. With strategic investment in AI literacy, data infrastructure, research ecosystems, and institutional collaboration, Somalia could begin to build a more competitive technology landscape and gradually participate in the global AI-driven economy.

I. The Global Rise of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly evolved from a specialized research field into one of the most transformative technologies shaping the global economy. Governments, corporations, and institutions are increasingly integrating AI systems into sectors such as finance, healthcare, education, logistics, and public administration. These technologies enable organizations to analyze vast amounts of data, automate complex processes, and make predictive decisions with unprecedented efficiency.

Countries that successfully adopt AI technologies are positioning themselves for significant economic advantages. Businesses are becoming more efficient, governments are improving service delivery, and entirely new industries are emerging around data-driven innovation. As the global AI transformation accelerates, nations that fail to develop the necessary technological capabilities risk falling behind both economically and technologically.

II. Africa's Emerging AI Transformation

Across Africa, several countries are beginning to integrate artificial intelligence into their economic and technological development strategies. Governments, universities, and private companies are investing in AI research, startup ecosystems, and digital innovation infrastructure. Kenya, for example, has emerged as a leading technology hub in East Africa. Nairobi hosts a vibrant startup ecosystem supported by international investors, research institutions, and global technology companies. Kenyan banks and fintech firms are increasingly adopting machine learning systems for credit scoring, fraud detection, and financial risk analysis. Rwanda and South Africa are also investing heavily in AI research centers, innovation hubs, and national digital strategies aimed at strengthening their positions in the emerging data economy. These developments illustrate a broader continental shift toward technology-driven economic growth.

III. Somalia's AI Gap

While AI adoption is gradually expanding across Africa, Somalia remains at an early stage of technological integration. The country has not yet developed a comprehensive national strategy focused on artificial intelligence or advanced data-driven innovation. One of the most notable gaps is the absence of coordinated initiatives led by national institutions. In many countries, AI development is supported by strong collaboration between government agencies, universities, and large private-sector organizations. Such collaboration helps build research ecosystems, innovation programs, and technology-focused investment initiatives.

In Somalia, major institutions that could potentially play a leadership role, such as federal government agencies, large financial institutions, and major telecommunications companies, have not yet launched large-scale initiatives aimed at advancing artificial intelligence capabilities. This lack of coordinated strategy slows the development of a broader AI ecosystem and limits opportunities for businesses and researchers to experiment with advanced technologies.

IV. Current landscape of AI Development and Policy in Somalia

Although Somalia has not yet adopted a comprehensive national artificial intelligence strategy, several initiatives and policy frameworks indicate that the country is beginning to build the foundations for digital and technological development.

IV.I National ICT Policy and Strategy (2019–2024)

Somalia adopted the ***National ICT Policy and Strategy (2019–2024)*** to expand digital infrastructure and support technology-driven economic development.

The policy aims to strengthen the country's digital ecosystem by promoting connectivity, encouraging innovation, and supporting the development of digital services across government institutions and the private sector. Although the framework does not specifically address artificial intelligence, it provides important foundational elements such as improved internet access, digital infrastructure, and regulatory frameworks necessary for the adoption of emerging technologies.

IV.II Digital Transformation Strategy (2025–2030)

In 2025, Somalia began consultations for a **Digital Transformation Strategy (2025–2030)** in collaboration with the **International Telecommunication Union (ITU)**.

The strategy focuses on several core pillars, including:

- Digital government and modernization of public services
- Development of national data infrastructure
- Growth of the digital economy
- Adoption of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence

Although the strategy recognizes the importance of emerging technologies, it does not yet constitute a dedicated national AI strategy. Instead, it lays broader groundwork for Somalia's long-term digital transformation.

IV.III Emerging AI Ecosystem Initiatives

Several initiatives indicate growing interest in artificial intelligence within Somalia's emerging technology ecosystem.

Somali AI Summit (2024)

In 2024, Somalia hosted its first AI Summit, bringing together policymakers, technologists, researchers, and entrepreneurs to discuss the potential role of artificial intelligence in national development. The summit signaled increasing policy attention toward AI and its potential applications in key sectors.

Somali National AI Center

Another notable initiative is the **Somali National AI Center**, which aims to promote AI research and capacity building in the country. Its objectives include;

- Training 1,000 AI professionals by 2030
- Promoting international research collaborations
- Developing AI solutions for sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, and education

While these initiatives represent important progress, they remain

institutional and ecosystem-level efforts rather than a coordinated national AI strategy.

IV.IV Emerging Legal Foundations

Somalia has also begun establishing legal frameworks that are important prerequisites for responsible AI development. The country recently enacted the **Data Protection Act (2023)**, which regulates the collection, storage, and processing of personal data. This legislation is significant because effective AI governance requires:

- Strong data protection regulations
- Digital rights protections
- Ethical frameworks for artificial intelligence

Such legal foundations are essential building blocks for the eventual development of a comprehensive national AI policy.

V. Policy Gap

Absence of a National AI Strategy

Despite these developments, Somalia still lacks a dedicated national strategy for artificial intelligence. As a result, several key elements remain absent:

- A national roadmap for AI development
- A national AI investment framework
- A coordinated national research agenda for AI
- A regulatory system specifically addressing AI governance

This policy gap presents both a challenge and an opportunity. While Somalia risks falling behind in the global AI transformation, the absence of an established strategy also means there is significant space for researchers, startups, and institutions to contribute to shaping the country's future AI direction.

VI. Critical Challenges

Infrastructure Limitations

Although internet connectivity has improved in many urban areas, Somalia still faces infrastructure challenges that affect advanced technological development. AI systems often require significant computing power, cloud infrastructure, and large-scale data storage capabilities. Without strong digital infrastructure and research facilities, building sophisticated AI systems becomes more difficult.

Education and Skills Development

Artificial intelligence development requires a highly skilled workforce trained in data science, machine learning, and advanced computing techniques. However, many educational programs in the region have not yet fully integrated modern AI and data science curricula. This gap limits the number of professionals capable of building and deploying advanced AI systems.

Language Accessibility

Another important barrier relates to language accessibility. Most advanced AI platforms and technical resources are developed primarily in major global languages like English. While many Somali professionals operate comfortably in English, broader adoption of AI tools may remain limited if systems are not accessible within Somali language contexts. Developing localized AI interfaces and language-support technologies could significantly expand access.

Weak Research Ecosystems

Strong AI development typically emerges from collaboration between universities, research institutions, and private companies. Somalia currently lacks large-scale AI research centers and structured research funding programs that could support innovation in this field.

VII. Why AI Literacy Matters for Somalia

AI literacy is becoming increasingly important for both individuals and institutions. Businesses that understand how to use data and analytics effectively can improve decision-making, optimize operations, and better understand market dynamics. Without broader awareness and training in AI-related technologies, Somali businesses may struggle to compete with companies in neighboring economies where digital transformation is progressing more rapidly. For example, companies in countries such as Kenya are gradually integrating AI-powered systems into banking services, e-commerce platforms, logistics networks, and customer analytics. If Somali companies do not begin adopting similar technologies, the competitive gap between regional markets could widen over time.

VIII. The Role of Data, Analytics, and Decision Supprt Systems

Artificial intelligence relies heavily on data. Organizations that collect, analyze, and interpret data effectively gain powerful insights that can guide strategic decisions. Advanced analytics platforms and decision-support dashboards allow institutions to monitor operations, track performance indicators, and predict future trends. In sectors such as healthcare, finance, and public administration, these tools can significantly improve efficiency and service delivery. AI-driven dashboards and analytics platforms allow organizations to move beyond reactive and intuitive based decision-making toward predictive, data-driven strategies.

X. Opportunities for Future Growth

Although Somalia currently faces structural challenges in AI adoption, the country also possesses several advantages that could support future technological development.

One of Somalia's most notable structural strengths is the relative development of its telecommunications sector. Major telecommunications providers, including Golis, Hormuud, and Somtel, have built extensive network infrastructure that delivers reliable and increasingly high-speed internet connectivity across many urban areas. In several major cities, modern fiber-optic technologies have expanded broadband access, providing an important digital foundation for emerging technological ecosystems. This level of connectivity creates a platform capable of supporting cloud-based services, data infrastructure, and digital innovation environments that are essential for the adoption of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence. As digital infrastructure continues to improve, these networks may play a critical role in enabling businesses, institutions, and entrepreneurs to experiment with data-driven tools and AI-enabled platforms.

In addition to infrastructure advantages, Somalia also possesses a significant demographic opportunity. The country's young and increasingly technology-aware population represents a potentially valuable source of future digital talent. With targeted investments in education, technical training, and digital skills development, this emerging workforce could contribute meaningfully to the growth of technology-driven sectors.

Taken together, these factors suggest that despite existing structural challenges, Somalia

retains a meaningful opportunity to participate in the evolving global AI economy.

XI. Conclusion

Artificial intelligence is reshaping global economic and technological landscapes. For Somalia, the ability to participate in this transformation will depend on how quickly institutions, businesses, and policymakers begin to prioritize digital innovation and data-driven technologies.While the country currently faces important challenges including limited research ecosystems, infrastructure constraints, language accessibility barriers, and the absence of a national AI strategy, it also possesses emerging opportunities rooted in connectivity, entrepreneurial energy, and growing interest in technology. The coming decade will likely determine whether Somalia becomes primarily a consumer of technologies developed elsewhere or begins to build its own capabilities within the evolving global AI economy.

Disclaimer

The analysis presented in this article reflects independent research and publicly available information at the time of publication. It is intended to contribute to discussions on digital transformation and artificial intelligence development in Somalia.

XII. References

African Union. (2024). *Continental artificial intelligence strategy for Africa*. https://au.int

Federal Government of Somalia, Ministry of Communications and Technology. (2019). *National communications act of Somalia*. https://moct.gov.so

Federal Government of Somalia, Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Technology. (2021). *National ICT policy and strategy 2019–2024*. https://moct.gov.so

GSMA. (2023). *The mobile economy Sub-Saharan Africa 2023*. https://www.gsma.com

National Communications Authority of Somalia. (2023). *Annual report on telecommunications sector development*. https://nca.gov.so

Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence. (2024). *Artificial intelligence index report 2024*. https://aiindex.stanford.edu

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. (2023). *Artificial intelligence for Africa: Opportunities and challenges*. https://www.uneca.org

World Bank. (2022). *Somalia digital economy diagnostic: Africa digital economy initiative*. https://www.worldbank.org

World Economic Forum. (2023). *The future of jobs report 2023*. https://www.weforum.org