

Call for Stories

Title: Reimagining Africa's Digital Economies: Sociotechnical Systems, Human–Technology Interactions, and the Stories We Live

Across African societies, stories have always been a powerful way of making sense of change. Around evening fires, in markets, in courtyards, and in community gatherings, stories have helped communities interpret new realities, share wisdom, and imagine futures together. Storytelling has long been a way to understand how people live with shifting social worlds—whether those changes come from migration, new crops, new political systems, or new technologies.

Today, Africa is experiencing another profound moment of transformation. Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital platforms, automated decision systems, and data-driven technologies are rapidly becoming part of everyday life across the continent. From mobile lending apps and digital identity systems to AI-assisted agriculture, automated hiring tools, ride-hailing platforms, and algorithmic content feeds, digital systems are shaping how people work, move, communicate, and access opportunities. Yet technology is never only about machines. It is about **people, relationships, power, and the meanings we make in everyday life.**

Across Africa, individuals and communities are interacting with digital technologies in ways that reflect the continent's complex social realities: vibrant informal economies, communal forms of living, diverse knowledge systems, histories of colonial infrastructures, and ongoing struggles for economic and social justice. These encounters create moments of possibility, but also moments of tension.

Accepting terms and conditions of a digital application or social media platform may promise you privacy but may also plunge you into digital surveillance and algorithmic driven biases and misogynistic attacks. A digital ID system may promise efficiency, but what are the experiences of different categories of workers e.g. teachers, students, pensioners, middle-class professionals, domestic workers, people in the informal economies? For instance, Gogo's receiving their social security based on digital identification. What about workplace surveillance – how does it compromise privacy?

At the heart of these experiences are human–technology interactions—the everyday encounters between people and the digital systems that increasingly shape social and economic life. These interactions influence how people see themselves, how they are recognised by institutions, and how they navigate opportunity, dignity, and belonging.

Scholars sometimes call this the sociotechnical relationship—the idea that technology and society shape one another. Technologies carry values, assumptions, and power relations within them. At the same time, people and communities constantly adapt, reinterpret, resist, and repurpose these technologies in creative ways.

But while African societies are deeply engaged with digital technologies, many of these lived experiences remain invisible in global conversations about AI and digital economies. Much of the global discourse on AI governance, innovation, and risk continues to reflect perspectives from the Global North, leaving African realities underrepresented. This Call for Stories seeks to change that.

We invite storytellers, community members, youth, activists, workers, creatives, technologists, journalists, and civil society actors across Africa to share stories from lived experience about how AI and digital technologies intersect with everyday life.

Rather than academic papers, we are looking for human-centred narratives—stories that capture the voices, emotions, humour, creativity, struggles, and resilience that shape African digital experiences.

Your story might describe a personal encounter with a digital system. It might tell the story of a community navigating new technologies. It might explore how digital tools form or change relationships, work, identity, or belonging. It might highlight moments where technology empowered people—or moments where systems failed them.

We are especially interested in stories that reflect African traditions of storytelling—stories grounded in observation, lived experience, memory, dialogue, and collective reflection.

Possible themes may, for example, include:

- **Everyday Encounters with AI** - Stories about interacting with digital platforms, automated systems, mobile apps, or algorithmic decisions.
- **Work and Digital Economies** - Experiences of gig work, platform labour, online entrepreneurship, or informal economic activities shaped by digital systems.
- **Identity, Recognition, and Dignity** - Encounters with biometric systems, digital identity platforms, or algorithmic classification systems.
- **Communities and Collective Life** - How communities adapt to, negotiate, or collectively respond to digital technologies.
- **Gender, Power, and Inclusion** - Stories highlighting how digital systems affect women, youth, or marginalised groups.
- **Creativity and Resistance** - Moments where people creatively repurpose technology, resist systems, or build alternative digital practices.
- **Emergent Uses** – Unexpected or unintended hacks, experiments, and even surprises when tech encounters every-day needs, conditions and uses.

Through these stories, we hope to begin to document (and learn from) how digital systems are experienced in everyday African contexts—and how people actively shape the meaning and impact of these technologies. These narratives will contribute to broader conversations about the future of Africa's digital economies, helping ensure that the voices of those living with these technologies are heard in discussions about their design, governance, and impact.

Most importantly, this initiative recognises that Africa's digital future is not only being shaped by engineers, corporations, or policymakers—it is also being shaped by the everyday decisions, creativity, and resilience of people and communities across the continent.

Submission Guidelines

Kindly submit via this [google form](#).

Who can submit

Submissions are welcome from:

- Community members
- Youth and students
- Informal workers and entrepreneurs
- Artists, writers, and storytellers
- Journalists and activists
- Technologists and designers
- Civil society organisations

You do **not need to be an academic or researcher**. But you must meet these minimum criteria;

- Be an African or of African Descent
- Be 18 years of age or older
- Be a legal holder of a bank account

Format

Stories may be submitted in the following formats:

- Written narratives or essays
- Personal reflections or storytelling pieces
- Community stories or collective narratives
- Creative nonfiction
- Interview-style narratives or oral storytelling transcript
- Multi-media outputs which include a supporting descriptive narrative (e.g. an artwork or video with a story-caption or script)

Length

- 800 – 1,500 words
- Stories should be written in clear, accessible language.

Language

Submissions are welcome in **English**, and we encourage storytelling styles that reflect local cultural expressions and narrative traditions. African language / multi-lingual inputs are also welcome, however English translation would also need to be provided.

Ethical considerations

- Stories should respect the privacy and dignity of individuals and communities.
- If describing real people, please obtain their consent or anonymise identifying details – unless you are talking about yourself.

Timeline and Terms

Successful contributors will be notified within a month and will be invited to participate in a fireside story-telling session, to help us refine the narratives. This schedule will guide our call:

28-Mar 2026	Launch Call for Stories
24-Apr 2026	Deadline for Stories form submission
31-May 2026	Adjudication and notification of successful stories
June 2026	<i>Engagement and contracting with Authors</i>
June 2026	Fireside story telling workshop
June 2026	Revisions
30-June 2026	Deadline for submissions of final stories

Selection Criteria

Our selection process will focus on assessing:

- Relevance to the Call for stories theme/s
- Originality and contribution to the field of African sociotechnical systems and Human Technology Interaction.
- Compliance to ethical requirements of POPIA, with emphasis on respect for privacy and dignity of individuals and communities.
- Potential for policy impact

We encourage submissions that bring new evidence and learnings based on African individuals and community's experiences that are not already or have been muted in the policy and practice debates. We need to see stories that talk about the risks and harms, as well as discuss potential opportunities and different ways of thinking for South Africa and Africa. As such, such stories can be used to make tangible policy recommendations for the continent and South Africa.

By focusing in the storytelling, we aim to stimulate critical thinking and policy-relevant narratives, not from the ivory tower point of view, but from people who experience technologies daily. That way, such knowledges can inform digital developments and governance practices in South African, Africa and the broader Global South.

What happens next

A dozen selected stories will be featured as part of an initial collection documenting African lived experiences with AI and digital technologies. Insights from your stories will also contribute to broader discussions on inclusive digital futures and responsible AI development in Africa.

Commitment and Remuneration

Selected story authors will receive an honorarium of \$300 (R5 000) (amount is to be shared if more than one author).

The selected contributors will be formally contracted confirming their commitment to:

- Author the approved story in accordance with an agreed schedule.
- Incorporate comments, recommendations and edits made by editors.
- Attend scheduled project / review meetings where progress reporting and presentations will be expected; and
- Enter an agreement under Wits' standard Terms of Contract, and fully comply with applicable university policies and formats in all drafts of the work provided.

**Through storytelling, we can begin to see technology not just as code and machines—
but as something deeply woven into the social fabric of everyday life.**

We look forward to hearing your stories.

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