Africa Wired: Artificial intelligence offers benefits for Africa

By Hugo Bourhis

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When some people think of artificial intelligence (AI), they think of humanoid robots turning against their creators in an apocalyptic science fiction movie. In reality, AI is already playing an increasing role in many existing and evolving technologies, from driverless cars to translation software, virtual assistance devices and monitoring agriculture and biodiversity.
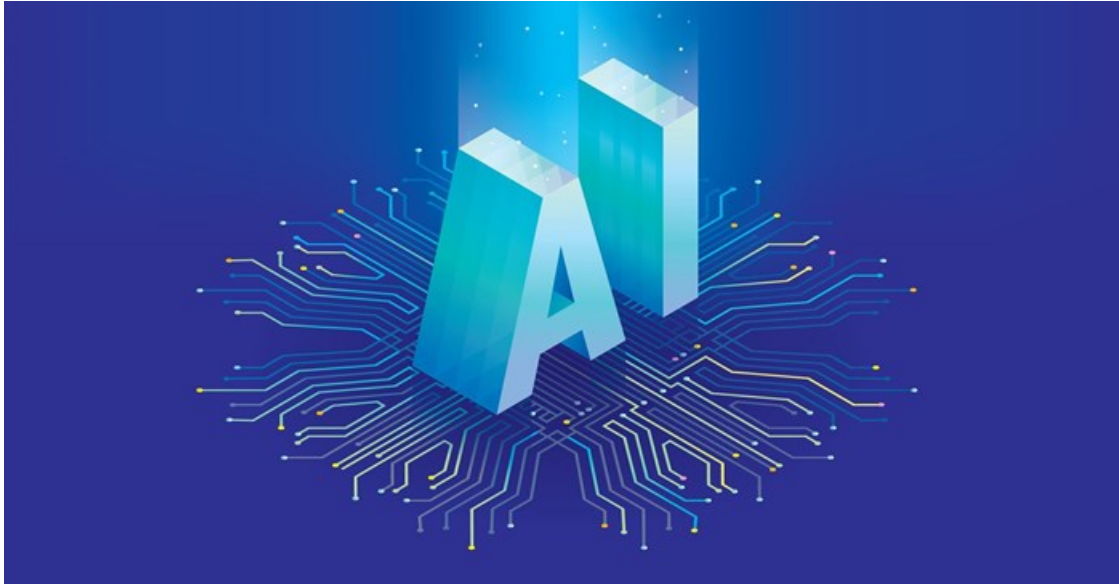

Image source: Gallo/Getty.

Satellite images provided by AI can assist policymakers in finding solutions to problems of hunger, drought and climate change, to name only a few.

Audrey Azoulay, director-general of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), says that promoting AI in Africa is a top priority for the organization.

"Artificial intelligence can help us advance more rapidly towards the achievement of the SDGs by allowing better risk assessment, enabling more accurate forecasting and faster knowledge sharing, by offering innovative solutions in the fields of education, health, ecology, urbanism and the creative industries and by improving standards of living and our daily well-being," Azoulay explains.

Currently, most AI experts and innovations are in North America, Europe and Asia; however, Africa is potentially a fertile ground - the continent has the youngest and fastest-growing population on earth, financial resources are becoming available to investors and international corporations are showing interest in the continent.

Last April, tech giant Google opened its first African AI research laboratory in Accra, Ghana, to address the many economic, political and environmental challenges of the continent.

"Africa has many challenges where the use of artificial intelligence could be beneficial, sometimes even more than in other places," said Moustapha Cisse, Google's head of AI in Accra, during the opening of the laboratory.

UNESCO organiSed its first-ever major international conference on AI in Morocco in December 2018.

At that conference over 400 participants, including experts and high-level representatives from the public and private sectors, examined ways to use AI to catalyze development in Africa. To reduce the current gap between developed and developing countries, they explored the opportunities and challenges presented by AI.

Despite rising expectations for the diffusion of AI in Africa, a lack of adequate, readily available technological infrastructure holds back progress. Also, most colleges on the continent do not offer AI-related courses.

Still, given the importance of technology in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, experts believe African states will soon begin to invest in the development and application of AI.

Source: [Africa Renewal](#).