

CONCEPT NOTE

Tech sovereignty in practice

A research roundtable for policymakers designing the rules and business leaders who have to live with them

Date	Monday 28 September 2026
Time	16:00 GMT · 17:00 WAT · 18:00 CAT / SAST / CEST · 19:00 EAT
Duration	90 minutes, online, held under the Chatham House Rule
Convened by	Analytics for Africa with Maastricht University and The African Centre for Technology Studies
Outputs	• A book chapter authored by Juliana Imam (JIIPCC) and Dr. Prince C. Oguguo (A4A) and edited by Prof. Kalpana Tyagi, Department of European and International Law, Maastricht University • A policy brief led by Dr. Eunice Omwoyo, African Centre for Technology Studies
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1. WHY THIS ROUNDTABLE

Almost every African government now has a position on technology sovereignty. Strategies have been adopted, data protection laws passed, localisation requirements written into sector regulation and national AI frameworks launched. What is much harder to establish is which of these instruments moved the needle, under what conditions, and at what cost.

The backdrop is well described in the literature. While the twentieth century saw the end of political colonialism, the twenty-first has produced a form of dependence in which control over data and cloud infrastructure substitutes for control over territory. African states host some of the fastest digital growth in the world while the infrastructure that supports that growth, the platforms running on it and the models trained from it remain largely foreign-owned. The route out of that position runs through research, development and domestic capability yet African countries are effectively absent from the global patenting record in the key enabling technologies where industrial advantage accumulates. The result is a cycle where the capability gap forces reliance on external finance and technology, and the conditions attached to that assistance tend to entrench the gap.

What the literature does not yet supply is a grounded account of implementation. Published sources record what was adopted, not what has been enforced, or what was quietly waived. There's even less about what it cost the firms that had to comply, or what a ministry would do differently given the chance. That knowledge sits with the people who drafted, enforced, complied with or worked around these rules, and it is the reason for convening this roundtable.

2. THE OUTPUTS

The roundtable is the primary evidence-gathering exercise for a book chapter comparing how technology sovereignty is being operationalised in five African countries: Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Egypt and Côte d'Ivoire. These five span the range of approaches currently in use, from Egypt's treatment of cyberspace as an extension of physical borders and its Cloud First policy, to Kenya's local-ownership approach to AI systems, South Africa's draft data and cloud policy, Nigeria's hybrid regulatory model, and Côte d'Ivoire's early codification of in-country data processing.

The chapter asks which of these approaches works, under what circumstances, and whether all of them work at all. A literature review across the five countries has already been completed. The roundtable exists to test its preliminary findings against practitioner experience and to capture what the published record currently omits.

The chapter is authored by Juliana Imam of JIIPCC and Dr. Prince C. Oguguo of Analytics for Africa, and edited by Prof. Kalpana Tyagi of the Department of European and International Law at Maastricht University.

In addition, findings from the webinar will be published as a policy brief led by Dr. Eunice Omwoyo of the African Centre for Technology Studies.

3. OBJECTIVES

1. Establish what has measurably changed in each country since its principal sovereignty instruments came into force, as distinct from what was announced.
2. Identify the conditions under which a given approach works, including institutional capacity, enforcement, market size, power, skills and political continuity.
3. Document the costs and trade-offs the policy discussion tends to leave unstated, and establish who has borne them.
4. Test the preliminary findings of the literature review against the experience of those who drafted, enforced or complied with the rules.
5. Surface design choices and contractual terms that other countries could adopt, and failure modes they could avoid.

4. GUIDING QUESTIONS

Discussion will be organised around three decisions so that participants leave with something they can act on and the chapter gains material of practical use.

Data.

What does data localisation or residency actually require, who enforces it, and what has physically moved as a result? Does in-country hosting by a foreign-owned provider constitute sovereignty? Where is the distance between the rule as written and the rule as practised, and what explains that distance?

Public procurement.

Do local content thresholds, preference margins and technology transfer clauses build domestic capability, or do they raise prices while the contract goes to the incumbent? What is counted as local, and what should be? How do procurement rules connect, if at all, to research, patenting and the commercialisation of university work?

Technology and compute.

Who sets the terms in acquisitions of infrastructure, compute and models, and what is retained locally: data ownership, intellectual property, skills transfer, jobs, revenue share, exit rights? What conditions come with external finance?

5. TENTATIVE FORMAT

Ninety minutes, online, moderated, with a small panel drawn from government, regulation, the private sector and research across several African countries. No presentations and no papers are required of participants. The session runs under the Chatham House Rule.

Welcome, framing and introductions	5 min
Opening round: what has actually changed in each country	20 min
Q&A	7 min
Discussion one: data	20 min
Discussion two: procurement, capability and the terms of acquisition	20 min
Closing Q&A: what is the one change that would matter most?	12 min

6. PARTICIPANTS

The roundtable convenes two groups: the first is policymakers: officials and regulators from ministries, data protection authorities, technology acquisition and promotion bodies and national AI or digital agencies. The second is practitioners: executives, compliance leads and investors in firms that have had to change where they host, what they bid for, or what they sign. Researchers working on digital governance in Africa and Europe will complete the group.

7. HOW CONTRIBUTIONS WILL BE USED

- The session is held under the Chatham House Rule. Participants are free to use what they hear; no remark will be attributed to a named individual or institution without written permission.
- The session will be recorded for transcription only. The recording will not be published or circulated.
- Any direct quotation in the chapter or brief will be cleared in writing with the speaker beforehand, including the wording and the form of attribution.
- Participants may choose to be acknowledged in the chapter or brief, to be acknowledged by institution only, or not to be named at all.
- The policy brief resulting from the discussion will be circulated to participants and registrants within a fortnight of the session.

8. CONVENORS

Analytics for Africa builds dashboards, models and data platforms so that African businesses, governments and institutions can make evidence-based decisions, and works across Abuja, Nairobi and Paris. Maastricht University joins through the Department of European and International Law, bringing a comparative perspective from a jurisdiction that has run its own sovereignty programme for the better part of a decade. The African Centre for Technology Studies contributes through its Green and Digital Innovation Hub, drawing on decades of science, technology and innovation policy research on the continent.

9. CONTACT

For invitations, participation and any question about the research, write to hello@analyticsforafrica.org.

Prepared by Analytics for Africa, September 2026.