Rapporteur report

Seminar 2 — K-Partnership for Shared Growth in Africa

Day 2 KOAFEC Ministerial Conference 2026
Thursday 10 September 2026 ·15:30–17:30 · Grand Hall 4+5, Grand Walkerhil, Seoul

1. Introduction

Seminar 2 was held on 10 September 2026 under the theme *K-Partnership for Shared Growth in Africa*. It examined cooperation models through which Korean companies can enter the African digital government market, drawing on practical cases of e-government development and AI-based public service innovation, and explored how large enterprises and SMEs can work together in expanding into African markets in AI and digital infrastructure. The seminar brought together development institutions, academics, private sector representatives and technical experts from Korea and Africa, and comprised a presentation, a panel discussion and a question-and-answer session.

2. Opening presentation

2.1 Ms Yunjeong Lee, Specialist, LG Consulting and Solutions (CNS)

Presentation: Building Africa's Digital Government Future Together

Digital government is a broader effort to improve access, strengthen transparency, build trust and create opportunities for people and businesses. LG CNS, with more than thirty years in digital, AI and robotic transformation, has delivered over 40 global e-government projects across finance, taxation, mobile identity, education, land registration, justice and public safety. Three were presented as lessons for African governments:

- G-ONE (Jiwon-i). The Gyeonggi Provincial Office of Education's AI and big-data platform, bringing school communication, education administration and data-driven services into a single trusted portal with AI search, multilingual communication and document drafting. The lesson is to adopt AI through one high-impact use case, then expand using local data and local-language models.
- KICS. The Korea Information System of Criminal Justice Services connects investigation, prosecution, trial, execution and citizen services in one secure, paperless workflow, modernised since its 2004 launch with mobile access, remote video investigation and AI-assisted search. The lesson: institutional integration through a common workflow reduces duplication and strengthens accountability.
- EGIMNS. An EDCF-funded maritime safety network in Bangladesh integrating distress communication, vessel monitoring, navigation aids, coastal radio stations and command centre operations. Comparable systems could strengthen maritime safety, disaster response, border management and national resilience in African countries.

Korea's own journey, from basic systems in finance, taxation and public safety, through land and corporate registration, e-passports and postal logistics, to integration through government data centres, smart schools and the Minwon 24 platform, was offered as a source of adaptable principles. Each country needs its own nationally owned roadmap backed by governance, infrastructure, skills and financing. The returns are measurable, with a National Tax Service big data platform contributing to the detection of more than USD 100 million in tax evasion and a land registration system reducing manpower by 34 percent and service time by 95 percent. Delivery depends on partnership, since national projects require both large-scale integration and specialised innovation. A lead partner coordinates systems, data and stakeholders, SMEs contribute specialised solutions, and local partners adapt them to each environment, with networks such as WeGO connecting companies to international opportunities. None of the projects presented would have succeeded without SME collaboration. Success ultimately requires more than technology. A clear national vision, trusted data governance, capable stakeholders, sustainable financing and long-term public–private cooperation. LG CNS is ready to work with African governments, local stakeholders and SMEs on practical implementation roadmaps.

3. Panel discussion

Mr Junhyun Hong, Researcher, Institute for Euro-African Studies, Hanyang University. He identified four structural reasons why joint technology projects often fail to generate lasting local impact. First, path dependency in how cooperation is approached: technology is neutral, a tool, and the flaw lies in assuming that transferring technology and experience is enough for partner countries to adopt it on their own terms. Second, political change: when administrations change, policy priorities, budgets and the direction of public diplomacy shift with them, raising the question of whether African countries can regard Korea as a reliable long-term partner. Third, the limits of a technology-centric approach, which can serve an objective but cannot explain why those objective matters, why a particular technology suits a partner country, or why cooperation should be sustained. Fourth, insufficient attention to the social, cultural, philosophical and humanistic dimensions of the partner country, which is what allows projects to contribute to development beyond the implementation phase.

Ms Hyejeong Lim, Director, National Information Society Agency (NIA). She identified data as the foundation of mutually beneficial digital partnerships, noting that data appears in the first article of the letter of intent signed that day between NIA and the African Development Bank on cooperation in AI and digital development. The performance of AI models and the public services built on them depend heavily on data, which is why Korea has invested substantially in AI training datasets reflecting its own language, social norms and culture, including Korean-language dialogue, image and video data. NIA is ready to share its experience in data development, preprocessing, quality control and utilisation, and is extending to African countries, in partnership with the Bank, the AI data cooperation it began with ASEAN countries last year. Sharing datasets on climate change and natural disasters in particular could open joint research, AI model development and data-driven decision-making.

Dr Simon Lee, Senior Vice President, Satcom Terminal Business Unit, Intellian Technologies. He argued that successful cooperation begins with clearly defined roles. Large Korean companies can act as anchors, planning large-scale projects and leading intergovernmental coordination, business structuring and financing, while SMEs supply specialised hardware, software and solutions in areas such as satellite communications, networking and cybersecurity. African partner companies should not be treated as

customers: they understand the local regulatory system, culture, market and operating conditions best, and should be involved from the early planning stage and help lead implementation and operation rather than joining once a project is already defined. Cooperation should extend beyond one-off deployment to long-term operation and maintenance and to training local personnel, with intergovernmental cooperation, policy financing and private sector delivery capacity connected organically. Trust and long-term commitment are decisive, and neither can rest on one side's sacrifice: Korean companies need continuing business opportunities and tangible results, and African partners need real gains in technology, human resources and industrial capability.

Mr Lacina Koné, Chief Executive Officer, Smart Africa. He introduced Smart Africa as a pan-African organisation working towards a single digital market by 2030 through greater connectivity and policy harmonisation across more than 50 countries. Harmonisation matters because differences in regulation and systems create uncertainty for companies entering the market; the aim is an environment in which a product introduced in one country can operate across others. On governance models, the traditional approach — a large company securing a contract through procurement and then working separately with Korean SMEs or local resellers — does not produce shared growth; all parties should be brought to the same table as genuine partners, with governments and development institutions creating the conditions for it. In the era of AI, Africa needs capability transfer rather than technology transfer, with development agencies, the public and private sectors, SMEs and local partners connected within a common framework. The emphasis should be on building an ecosystem, not on procurement.

Ms Anna Ekeledo, Executive Director Emerita, AfriLabs. She introduced AfriLabs as a pan-African network of technology and innovation hubs across 53 countries and more than 200 cities, connecting African innovation ecosystems to each other and to global networks, building the capacity of startups and SMEs, and advocating for the digital and innovation economy. A central vulnerability for SMEs is that their access to funding, technology and markets shifts with government and foreign policy priorities; priorities should instead be private-sector-driven and ecosystem-facilitated, as in AfriLabs' partnership with the Korea-Africa Foundation connecting Korean and African startups. For SMEs and startups to participate in large projects they must be involved from the outset, in defining the problem, designing solutions and setting project scope, supported by procurement policies that encourage collaboration between large corporations, SMEs and startups. Financial requirements in procurement are often too stringent for smaller firms, and mechanisms such as advance payments and guarantees would enable more equitable participation. Existing innovation ecosystems should be used to help companies navigate regulatory and market environments and connect with local talent.

Mr Moustapha Cissé, Chief Executive Officer and Founder, Kera Health Platforms. He argued that framing Korea–Africa collaboration as technology transfer creates an inherently unsustainable relationship, because the concept assumes a one-way flow between a provider and a recipient, when innovation moves in both directions and technologies developed in Africa are already exported globally. The focus should be knowledge exchange rather than technology transfer. The technology Korea exports today rests on knowledge built through collaboration with other countries and on an industrial foundation that domestic institutions and government trusted and used before it was exported, and in the same way, innovation built in Africa must be trusted by local entities and governments if it is to gain wider adoption. Cooperation should therefore build bridges between Korean and African businesses within a framework of two-way exchange in which both sides can independently develop new products and value, supported

by deeper R&D collaboration, in which Korean companies have a strong long-term interest given Africa's growing share of the global workforce.

4. Q&A session

A ministerial participant observed that high debt levels across African countries make additional borrowing for digital projects difficult, and that digital infrastructure is harder to justify politically than visible infrastructure such as roads, even where digital public services, AI and data centres would generate significant efficiency gains. Public-private partnerships were proposed as an alternative structure, including financing packages involving Korean companies and institutions such as the Export-Import Bank of Korea, and can in some cases be easier to approve than direct borrowing because they may be authorised at cabinet level rather than requiring parliamentary approval; Korean partners could offer these as structured packages tailored to government needs.

Panellists recognised the potential of such structures while stressing that they must be designed so that local companies take part in project design and implementation. Mr Koné argued that digital projects should not be seen as a drain on budgets, since they generate savings and economic returns over time, citing Rwanda's experience with digitalised public services and that working through PPP structures could build local capability rather than simply transfer technology. Ms Ekeledo added that private African capital should play a greater role, drawing on AfriLabs' angel investor networks and the Catalytic Africa model, where private investors validate the commercial potential of businesses and markets before larger development finance is mobilized. A broader mix of sources would help SMEs and startups participate in data centre and other large-scale projects. Mr Cissé argued that technology should be treated as infrastructure and that decisions should weigh the risk of not investing alongside the risk of investing, even where immediate returns are unclear. The ministerial participant noted in response that governments still find it difficult to prioritise digital investment over visible projects under tight debt ceilings, and that PPP structures could offer flexibility while ensuring local participation and reflecting project risk in the financing model. The discussion pointed overall towards a shift from funding individual digital projects to ecosystem-wide investment.

5. Key messages

The seminar converged on a critique of technology transfer as the organising idea of Korea–Africa digital cooperation. Panellists argued in different ways for capability and knowledge exchange instead. Technology is a tool that cannot by itself explain why an objective matters or why cooperation should endure; innovation already moves in both directions and what sustains a partnership is whether local institutions trust and use what is built. The practical corollary was consistent across speakers. African partners should be engaged from the definition of the problem and the design of solutions, not after a project has been scoped, and should help lead implementation and operation. The same argument was made for SMEs and startups on both sides, together with procurement reform and instruments such as advance payments and guarantees to make participation feasible.

Two enabling conditions ran through the discussion. The first is data and the legal architecture around it: the performance of AI models and public services depends on data that reflects local language and context, and Korea's own transformation rested on e-government, data-sharing and open-data legislation, a clear division of roles between state and market, and private sector participation in governance itself. The

second is financing structured for ecosystems rather than projects: with debt ceilings constraining borrowing and digital investment competing against visible infrastructure, PPP structures, private African capital and blended sources were presented as the routes to participation at scale, provided they are designed from the outset to include local firms. Underlying both, speakers pointed to trust, long-term commitment and continuity across political cycles as the conditions on which any of it depends, with value having to accrue to both sides for cooperation to be sustained.