

AFRICA REGIONAL ADVOCACY BRIEF FOR CPD59

Population, Technology and Research in the
Context of Sustainable Development



Acknowledgement

This paper was developed by Lisa Jehaan Adams, African Social Impact Technologist on behalf of the Africa International Sexual and Reproductive Rights Coalition (Africa ISRRC) Co-Convenors. It reflects the collective priorities, experiences, and contributions of members of the coalition and is intended to support ongoing advocacy and engagement on sexual and reproductive health and rights across the African continent.

Africa Regional Brief to UN-CPD59

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I. Introduction and Mandate

The fifty-ninth session of the Commission on Population and Development takes place at a time when population trends, technological change and development pathways are intersecting in ways that are both promising and deeply complex. The special theme for CPD59, population, technology and research in the context of sustainable development. This reflects an acknowledgement that the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action must now be considered within a world shaped by digital systems, data infrastructures and emerging technologies.

Since the ICPD Programme of Action was adopted in 1994, technology has reshaped how people access information, services and opportunities. Mobile phones, digital platforms and data-driven systems now play a role in health, education, employment and social participation across all regions. At the same time, these systems have introduced new risks, including exclusion, surveillance, misinformation and harm, particularly for populations that already face structural inequalities.

The Secretary-General's report prepared for CPD59 recognises this dual reality. It highlights the contribution of technology to development progress, while also drawing attention to widening divides and new forms of vulnerability where access, governance and safeguards are uneven. The report further emphasises the importance of research in ensuring that technological change supports sustainable development outcomes rather than undermining them.

This Africa-focused contribution is intended to support CPD59 discussions by situating the Commission's theme within African demographic realities, policy priorities and lived experiences. It does not seek to restate the Secretary-General's report. Instead, it aims to deepen and regionalise its analysis by drawing on African civil society perspectives, applied research and programme evidence from digital health, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and gender-responsive technology initiatives.

The contribution is guided by three core considerations. First, Africa's demographic trajectory, characterised by a young population and rapid urbanisation, makes the relationship between population and technology particularly consequential for global sustainable development. Second, technology in African contexts must be assessed not only in terms of access and innovation, but also in terms of equity, safety, governance and trust, especially for women, adolescents and young people. Third, research must play a practical role in shaping policy and implementation choices, providing decision-makers with evidence grounded in real-world conditions rather than idealised assumptions.

Sources: UN Secretary-General's Report to the Fifty-Ninth Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD59); Substantive Briefing on Population, Technology and Research in the Context of Sustainable Development (CPD59).

II. Africa's Demographic Moment and the Development Crossroads

Africa continues to play a central role in shaping global population dynamics. The continent is home to the world's youngest population, with a rapidly expanding cohort of adolescents and young adults. This demographic profile is frequently framed as a potential demographic dividend, offering opportunities for economic growth and social development if investments in health, education, skills development, and employment are sustained and inclusive (African Union Commission, 2017; Perlotto, 2019).

African civil society has consistently cautioned that this dividend is not automatic. It depends on deliberate and coordinated policy choices that prioritise human capital development, gender equality and the protection of rights across the life course. Without these investments, demographic pressures risk translating into unemployment, inequality and social strain rather than shared prosperity.

Technology and research are increasingly positioned as tools to support this demographic transition. Digital systems have the potential to extend health and education services to underserved populations, improve the availability and use of population data, and create new pathways to employment and participation. These opportunities are particularly significant in contexts where physical infrastructure and service delivery systems remain under strain.

At the same time, African civil society has raised concerns about narratives that present technology as a substitute for structural investment. Civil society priorities articulated in preparation for CPD59 emphasise that technology must complement, rather than replace, public systems, social protection and rights-based approaches. When introduced without attention to affordability, accessibility, safety and governance, technology risks reinforcing existing inequalities instead of addressing them.

The Secretary-General's report reflects similar concerns at the global level, noting that the benefits of technological change have not been evenly distributed. From an African perspective, these disparities are shaped not only by income and geography, but also by gender, age, disability, language and social norms. Young people, and particularly adolescent girls and young women, often experience the consequences of these divides.

Africa's demographic moment therefore represents a critical crossroads. The continent's youthful population could benefit significantly from technologies that expand access to information, services and economic opportunity. However, without evidence-informed policy choices and effective governance, the same technologies could deepen exclusion, expose vulnerable populations to harm and erode trust in public institutions.

Sources: UN Secretary-General's Report to CPD59; Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Population, Technology and Research in the Context of Sustainable Development (CPD59 EGM Report); African Civil Society Priorities for CPD59. African Union Commission. (2017), AU Roadmap on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth. Perlotto, S. (2019), Africa's Future: Youth and the Data Defining Their Lives (Policy Brief). African Union Commission and Population Reference Bureau

III. Technology, Research and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Across the Life Course

Sexual and reproductive health and rights remain foundational to sustainable development outcomes across the life course. Access to accurate information, confidential services and respectful care influences educational attainment, economic participation, health outcomes and gender equality. In many African contexts, SRHR continues to be closely linked to broader development challenges, including adolescent pregnancy, maternal health, gender-based violence and intergenerational poverty.

Digital technologies have become an increasingly visible part of how people access SRHR information and support in Africa. Mobile phones, messaging platforms, websites, chatbots and voice-based systems are now used alongside traditional health services to reach adolescents and young people who face barriers to in-person care.

Research from African and global SRHR programmes indicates that adolescents and young women actively seek information through digital channels, particularly where face-to-face conversations are constrained by stigma, judgement or fear of disclosure. Digital spaces can offer a degree of privacy and autonomy that is difficult to achieve in households, schools or clinics.

At the same time, this body of research makes clear that digital access does not automatically translate into safe or effective use. Many young people engage with digital tools under conditions of limited privacy, shared device use and unequal power relations within households. Concerns about being monitored, having search histories exposed or being questioned about phone use can discourage engagement with sensitive SRHR content or limit follow-up action.

These realities complicate simplified assumptions about digital inclusion. For adolescent girls, the decision to seek SRHR information online often involves weighing potential benefits against real risks. Research highlights that fear of exposure, uncertainty about credibility and the prevalence of misinformation can undermine trust, even where content is technically available.

The Secretary-General's report acknowledges that technology has expanded access to health information and services, while also cautioning that these gains are uneven and can exacerbate inequalities where digital divides persist. In African contexts, this unevenness is shaped by intersecting factors, including gender norms, affordability, literacy, language and safety.

Applied research on digital behaviour change reinforces the importance of understanding these pathways. Evidence suggests that digital SRHR interventions are most effective when they are designed with a clear theory of change linking information exposure to shifts in knowledge, attitudes, confidence and help-seeking behaviour. Importantly, this research also cautions against over-claiming long-term outcomes where evidence remains limited, highlighting the need for ongoing learning and adaptation.

Experience from African SRHR programming also shows that digital interventions work best as part of a broader ecosystem rather than as standalone solutions. Digital information is more likely to translate into positive outcomes when it is connected to trusted referral pathways, youth-friendly services and, where appropriate, human support. This integration is particularly important in contexts where digital tools may surface sensitive disclosures related to violence, coercion or mental distress.

African civil society has therefore emphasised that SRHR technologies should be understood as extensions of health systems rather than substitutes for them. This perspective aligns with ICPD commitments to comprehensive, rights-based SRHR and with CPD59's focus on sustainability. Technologies that operate without accountability or integration risk fragmenting care and weakening long-term trust.

Research plays a central role in this space by informing design choices, identifying unintended harms and guiding policy decisions. In African contexts, locally grounded research is especially important to ensure that SRHR technologies reflect linguistic diversity, cultural norms and lived realities. Without such research, interventions risk being scaled without sufficient adaptation, reducing effectiveness and increasing risk.

*Sources: UN Secretary-General's Report to the Fifty-Ninth Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD59); Going Online for Sexual and Reproductive Health (Girl Effect, 2020); From Browsing to Behaviour Change (Girl Effect); Girl Effect programme research and learning on digital SRHR interventions; African Civil Society Priorities for the Fifty-Ninth Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD59). Tazinya, R.M.A., Hajjar, J.M. & Yaya, S. Strengthening integrated sexual reproductive health and rights and HIV services programs to achieve sustainable development goals 3 and 5 in Africa. *Reprod Health* 19, 223 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-022-01535-2>*

IV. Closing the Digital Divide: Access, Equity and Safety

The digital divide remains a central concern for CPD59, but it is increasingly clear that this divide cannot be understood solely in terms of connectivity. The Secretary-General's report documents persistent disparities in internet access between urban and rural areas, across income groups and among women, older persons and persons with disabilities. In sub-Saharan Africa, these gaps are further shaped by infrastructure constraints, energy insecurity and language exclusion.

African civil society has consistently framed digital access as a development issue rather than a purely technical one. From this perspective, meaningful access depends on affordability, reliability, relevance and safety, not simply on the presence of a network signal. This framing aligns with findings from UN expert consultations, which caution against narrow metrics of connectivity that fail to capture quality, usability and risk.

A critical dimension of the digital divide in African contexts is safety. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence, including harassment, surveillance, data misuse and non-consensual sharing of content, is increasingly recognised as a serious threat to women's and girls' participation in digital spaces. These risks are particularly acute in settings where devices are shared, privacy is limited and social norms constrain women's autonomy.

For many women and girls, the perception of risk is itself a barrier to access. Fear of being monitored or exposed can discourage engagement with digital services, including those designed to support health and wellbeing. In this sense, access without safety can become a form of exposure rather than empowerment.

Expert consultations feeding into CPD59 have underscored that digital safety must be treated as a core component of inclusion. This includes privacy protections, safeguards against abuse, and accountability mechanisms that allow users to report harm and seek redress. Without these elements, digital interventions risk undermining the very development outcomes they are intended to support.

From an African perspective, closing the digital divide therefore requires a shift in emphasis. Investments in infrastructure and skills remain essential, but they must be accompanied by governance frameworks that protect users' rights and dignity. Safety, trust and accountability are foundational to sustainable participation in digital societies.

Sources: UN Secretary-General's Report to the Fifty-Ninth Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD59); Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Population, Technology and Research in the Context of Sustainable Development (CPD59 EGM Report); African Civil Society Priorities for the Fifty-Ninth Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD59); From Human-Centered Technology Design to Women- and Girls-Centered Digital Products Addressing Gender-Based Violence (Girl Effect); Girl Effect Ethical AI Guidelines and safeguarding research.

V. Voice, Low-Data Systems and Sustainable Scale

Discussions of technology and development often assume a steady progression toward smartphone access, broadband connectivity and app-based services. While these assumptions may hold in some contexts, they do not reflect the lived realities of large segments of African populations, particularly women, adolescents, rural communities and people with low literacy. For CPD59, this gap between assumption and reality has direct implications for how technology is positioned as a tool for sustainable development.

In many African contexts, mobile phones are present but unevenly distributed. Device ownership is frequently shared within households, smartphones are not guaranteed, and access to mobile data is constrained by cost. These conditions shape not only whether people can access digital services, but how and when they do so. As a result, technology strategies that prioritise data-heavy, text-based or app-dependent solutions risk excluding precisely the populations most relevant to population and development outcomes.

Voice-based and low-data systems therefore warrant specific attention within CPD59 discussions. These approaches are not transitional or inferior alternatives. In many settings, they represent the most viable means of achieving population-level reach in the near to medium term.

Interactive voice response systems have a long history in African health and development programming. More recent evidence demonstrates their continued relevance, particularly for adolescents and young women. Programmes designed around voice channels have shown that it is possible to deliver sensitive SRHR information, support exploration of topics that may be difficult to discuss openly, and provide pathways to human assistance without requiring smartphones or sustained data access.

Evidence from large-scale IVR programmes targeting adolescent girls highlights several design principles that are especially relevant for sustainable scale. These include allowing users to access content anonymously, minimising call duration to reduce cost, designing for interrupted usage due to call drops or shared phone access, and offering clear options to repeat or skip content. Such design choices reflect an understanding of the constraints under which users operate and prioritise usability over technical sophistication.

The emergence of voice-based conversational systems, including those incorporating artificial intelligence, has renewed interest in voice as a delivery channel. Pilot initiatives combining IVR with conversational logic suggest that voice interfaces can offer more personalised and responsive experiences, even in low-connectivity environments. These developments have the potential to expand access for users with low literacy and to accommodate local languages and accents more effectively than text-based systems.

However, the use of voice and low-data systems also raises important sustainability and governance questions. Voice services incur ongoing costs related to airtime, infrastructure and maintenance. They require partnerships with mobile network operators and careful planning to ensure long-term viability. From a governance perspective, voice interactions can surface highly sensitive information, particularly in SRHR and protection contexts, making data security, privacy and referral pathways essential.

For CPD59, the relevance of voice and low-data systems lies in their ability to bridge the gap between technological ambition and demographic reality. Sustainable development strategies that ignore these channels risk reinforcing digital divides rather than closing them. Conversely, recognising voice and low-data approaches as legitimate population infrastructure aligns technology choices with principles of inclusion, equity and reach.

Importantly, voice-based systems should not be framed as standalone solutions. Their greatest value emerges when they are integrated into broader service ecosystems that include community health workers, clinics, schools and referral services. In such ecosystems, technology supports continuity of care and information flow rather than replacing human relationships and institutions.

Sources: UN Secretary-General's Report to the Fifty-Ninth Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD59); Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Population, Technology and Research in the Context of Sustainable Development (CPD59 EGM Report); GSMA and Viamo, Voice-First and Low-Data Digital Systems for Impact (including voice-first and IVR evidence for underserved populations); Girl Effect programme evidence on IVR and voice-based SRHR delivery, including Empowering Girls through IVR and related learning on low-data systems.

VI. Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies: Governance, Risk and Opportunity

Artificial intelligence and data-driven systems are increasingly shaping how population-related services are designed and delivered. From health information provision and service triage to data analysis and targeting, AI is already influencing decisions that affect individuals and communities at scale. For CPD59, the question is not whether AI will play a role in population and development, but how that role is governed.

The Secretary-General's report notes that AI capacity, expertise and infrastructure are highly concentrated globally. African countries currently account for a small share of AI development and deployment, raising concerns about dependency, unequal benefit distribution and limited influence over system design. These concerns are particularly critical in domains such as SRHR, education and social protection, where technologies interact with sensitive personal information and vulnerable populations.

In African contexts, AI systems are often introduced through externally developed platforms or donor-funded initiatives. While such systems may offer efficiency gains or expanded reach, they can also carry risks if they are deployed without sufficient localisation, oversight or accountability. These risks include biased outputs, inappropriate responses to safeguarding disclosures, inadequate handling of sensitive data and a lack of clear responsibility when harm occurs.

SRHR and gender-based violence related services represent high-risk domains for AI deployment. In these contexts, inaccurate or insensitive responses can have serious consequences, including reinforcing harmful norms, discouraging help-seeking or exposing users to further harm. Evidence from ethical AI and digital safeguarding research highlights the particular vulnerability of adolescent users, especially in settings where privacy is limited and digital literacy is low.

African civil society has called for a rights-based approach to technology governance that centres human dignity, participation and accountability. This perspective emphasises that governance extends beyond formal regulation to include policies, standards, procurement practices and operational safeguards. From this viewpoint, the question is not only whether AI systems comply with laws, but whether they are designed and implemented in ways that protect users and align with development goals.

Operationalising responsible AI in population-facing services requires concrete measures. These include limiting data collection to what is strictly necessary, ensuring transparency about whether users are interacting with automated systems, building in escalation pathways to trained human support, and conducting regular evaluations to detect bias, errors or unintended consequences. In low-resource settings, these safeguards are often more difficult to implement, not less necessary.

Another challenge lies in the transfer of AI systems across contexts. Models trained on data from one region may perform poorly or dangerously in another, particularly where language, cultural norms and social realities differ. Without local testing and adaptation, such systems risk misinterpreting user intent or providing inappropriate guidance. Research and evaluation are therefore central to safe deployment, not optional add-ons.

At the same time, African perspectives on AI governance also emphasise opportunity. There is growing recognition that Africa can shape AI trajectories by investing in local research capacity, language resources and governance frameworks that reflect regional priorities. This includes developing AI applications that address local development challenges while adhering to ethical and rights-based standards.

For CPD59, the relevance of AI lies in its potential to influence population outcomes at scale. Decisions made now about governance, safeguards and research priorities will shape whether AI contributes to sustainable development or exacerbates inequality. A cautious, evidence-informed approach that prioritises safety and accountability is consistent with ICPD principles and with African civil society calls for technology that serves people rather than markets alone.

Sources: UN Secretary-General's Report to the Fifty-Ninth Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD59); Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Population, Technology and Research in the Context of Sustainable Development (CPD59 EGM Report); Girl Effect Ethical AI Guidelines; Girl Effect AI/ML Vision and AI/ML White Paper; African Civil Society Priorities for the Fifty-Ninth Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD59); Rachel Adams, Global Center on AI Governance research on AI in Africa, governance, and global power asymmetries.

VII. Assessing Global and Regional Policy Frameworks Relevant to CPD59

CPD59 discussions are shaped by several overlapping policy frameworks that together inform how population, technology and research are understood at global and regional levels. For an Africa-focused contribution, it is important not only to reference these frameworks, but to assess how they align with African priorities, where they provide useful guidance, and where additional specificity or adaptation may be required.

The Secretary-General's Report on Population, Technology and Research

The Secretary-General's report provides the authoritative global framing for CPD59. It offers a comprehensive overview of how technological change intersects with population dynamics, human capital development and sustainable development outcomes. The report recognises that advances in digital technology and data systems have supported progress in health, education and service delivery, while also contributing to new forms of inequality and vulnerability where access and governance are uneven.

From an African perspective, the report's emphasis on foundational infrastructure, digital inclusion and research capacity is particularly relevant. Its recognition that technology can both reduce and reinforce inequality reflects realities observed across African contexts. The report also appropriately highlights the importance of governance, including data protection, privacy and ethical considerations, as technology becomes more deeply embedded in population-facing systems.

At the same time, the global nature of the Secretary-General's analysis means that implementation challenges specific to low-resource settings are necessarily treated at a high level. Issues such as shared device use, affordability constraints, language diversity and uneven regulatory capacity are acknowledged but not explored in depth. This Africa-focused contribution therefore complements the Secretary-General's report by offering greater granularity on how these challenges shape real-world outcomes, particularly for women, adolescents and young people.

Overall, the Secretary-General's report provides a strong normative foundation for CPD59. Its framing aligns well with African priorities around equity, rights and sustainability, while leaving space for regional contributions to deepen the analysis and inform practical policy considerations.

African Civil Society Priorities for CPD59

The African Civil Society Priorities for CPD59 articulate a clear and coherent set of expectations entering the Commission's deliberations. These priorities reaffirm commitments to the ICPD Programme of Action while emphasising the urgency of addressing youth wellbeing, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and protection from harm in an increasingly digital world.

A central contribution of the civil society priorities is their insistence that technology be treated as a means to advance development goals rather than as an end in itself. Civil society actors stress that digital transformation must be anchored in human rights, affordability and inclusion, with particular attention to populations at risk of exclusion or harm. This framing resonates strongly with evidence from African SRHR and digital safety research, which shows that access without safeguards can undermine trust and deter engagement.

The civil society priorities also underscore the importance of meaningful participation. This includes the involvement of young people, women and marginalised communities in the design, governance and evaluation of technology-enabled services. From an African perspective, this participatory emphasis is critical to ensuring that research and innovation reflect lived realities rather than imported assumptions.

In relation to CPD59, the African civil society priorities strengthen the case for integrating SRHR, digital inclusion and safety considerations into discussions of population and technology. They provide a clear signal that African stakeholders expect the Commission's outcomes to address not only innovation and efficiency, but also rights, protection and accountability.

W20 Recommendations and Global Gender Policy Alignment

The Women20 process associated with the G20 has emerged as an influential platform for articulating global gender equality priorities. The 2025 W20 recommendations highlight several issues that intersect directly with CPD59 themes, including digital inclusion, women's participation in science and technology, access to sexual and reproductive health services, and the prevention of technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

From an African perspective, the relevance of the W20 recommendations lies less in their specific policy prescriptions and more in the global consensus they signal. The emphasis on gender-responsive digital transformation, ethical use of emerging technologies and investment in women's skills and leadership aligns with long-standing African advocacy on gender equality and development.

At the same time, African contexts require careful translation of these global priorities into locally appropriate strategies. Issues such as affordability, infrastructure gaps and regulatory capacity mean that pathways to digital inclusion may differ from those assumed in higher-income settings. This reinforces the importance of regional contributions to CPD59 that interpret global gender frameworks through the lens of African realities.

Taken together, the Secretary-General's report, African civil society priorities and W20 recommendations provide a coherent policy environment for CPD59 discussions. They converge on the need for inclusive, rights-based and well-governed technological change, while leaving room for regional specificity and contextual adaptation.

Sources: UN Secretary-General's Report to the Fifty-Ninth Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD59); Substantive Briefing on Population, Technology and Research in the Context of Sustainable Development (CPD59); African Civil Society Priorities for the Fifty-Ninth Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD59); Women20 (W20) 2025 Official Recommendations and Communiqués.

VIII. Forward-Looking Priorities and Recommendations for CPD59

For African contexts in particular, technological change is unfolding alongside rapid demographic shifts, urbanisation, youth population growth and persistent inequality. This convergence presents opportunity, but also risk. CPD59 therefore offers a critical moment to reaffirm principles and articulate priorities that ensure technology supports sustainable development rather than undermining it.

The following priorities are proposed for consideration in CPD59 deliberations:

1. Reaffirm Human-Centred Technology in Population Policy

Technological innovation should strengthen, not replace, investment in people, institutions and rights-based systems. Population policy must remain anchored in human dignity, equity and accountability.

Digital tools can enhance access to SRHR, education and social protection. However, they cannot substitute for functioning health systems, trained professionals or public infrastructure. CPD59 outcomes should clearly position technology as an enabler of human-centred development rather than a standalone solution.

2. Expand the Definition of Digital Inclusion

Connectivity alone is an insufficient measure of inclusion. In African contexts, meaningful digital participation depends on affordability, safety, relevance, language accessibility and trust.

CPD59 deliberations should recognise that digital inclusion must address structural barriers such as shared device use, gender norms, limited privacy, disability access and uneven regulatory enforcement. Access without safety or trust can reinforce exclusion rather than resolve it.

3. Strengthen Legal Frameworks Addressing Technology-Facilitated Violence

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence remains inadequately addressed in many legal systems. General cybercrime provisions are often insufficient to capture the realities of online harassment, image-based abuse, digital surveillance and coercive control.

CPD59 discussions should encourage Member States to update legal frameworks to explicitly criminalise technology-facilitated violence, while ensuring survivor-centred enforcement mechanisms. Without legal clarity and accountability, digital participation remains unsafe for many women and girls.

4. Support Responsible and Collaborative Data Governance

Population policy increasingly relies on data systems. However, data collection and governance remain uneven across contexts. In some settings, governments express caution or reluctance regarding sensitive data collection, particularly in relation to SRHR and gender-based violence.

Stakeholders, including civil society and technical experts, can play a constructive role in supporting responsible data generation, analysis and protection. CPD59 outcomes should encourage collaborative data ecosystems that strengthen evidence-informed policymaking while safeguarding privacy and rights.

Responsible data governance includes transparency about data use, clear consent mechanisms, minimisation of unnecessary data collection and robust cybersecurity measures.

5. Recognise Voice and Low-Data Systems as Population Infrastructure

Development narratives often assume progression toward smartphone-based and data-intensive systems. However, in many African settings, voice-based and low-data systems remain essential for reaching women, adolescents, rural communities and persons with low literacy.

CPD59 should acknowledge that voice channels, interactive voice response systems and low-bandwidth services are not transitional tools but core population infrastructure. Recognising these modalities supports equitable access and aligns technological ambition with demographic realities.

6. Embed Safeguards in Artificial Intelligence Deployment

Artificial intelligence is increasingly being integrated into population-facing services, including SRHR information provision, service triage and data analytics.

AI deployment in high-risk domains requires clear safeguards. These include transparency about automated systems, escalation pathways to human support, bias monitoring, local testing and context-specific adaptation.

CPD59 deliberations should reinforce that AI governance is not a separate technical issue but a core sustainable development concern, particularly where systems affect vulnerable populations.

7. Invest in Applied, Locally Grounded Research

Research must inform not only whether technologies are effective, but how they function across different populations and contexts. African realities, including language diversity, shared device use, uneven connectivity and distinct social norms, require locally grounded evidence.

Strengthening research capacity within African institutions and fostering cross-regional knowledge exchange can support more informed policy choices. CPD59 outcomes should emphasise applied research as a foundation for responsible technology integration.

Sources: UN Secretary-General's Report to the Fifty-Ninth Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD59); Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Population, Technology and Research in the Context of Sustainable Development (CPD59 EGM Report); African Civil Society Priorities for the Fifty-Ninth Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD59); Women20 (W20) 2025 Official Recommendations and Communiqués.

X. Key Insights from Regional Consultation

An Africa regional consultation was held on Thursday, 12 February 2026, to inform the finalisation of this contribution to CPD59. The session was open to public participation and included stakeholders from diverse civil society, research and policy backgrounds across the continent, with representation from Tunisia, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Mali and other countries. Participants contributed expertise spanning SRHR, technology, digital governance, gender equality, disability inclusion and data policy.

The consultation served to validate key themes, identify emerging concerns and strengthen alignment with regional priorities.

Stakeholders focused on key areas:

- Priority risks and opportunities in technology-enabled population systems.
- Gaps between policy ambition and implementation realities.
- Regional governance needs in relation to artificial intelligence and data systems.

1. Data Governance and State Support

Participants highlighted ongoing sensitivities among some governments regarding population-related data collection, particularly in politically sensitive areas such as SRHR and gender-based violence. At the same time, there was strong agreement that stakeholders, including civil society and technical experts, can play a constructive role in supporting governments to strengthen ethical data systems, research methodologies and evidence translation. Building trust, transparency and collaborative data governance frameworks emerged as essential for sustainable policymaking.

2. Legal Reform and Technology-Facilitated Violence

Consultation participants emphasised that legal and policy frameworks in many contexts have not kept pace with digital transformation. While cybercrime legislation exists in several countries, it often lacks specific recognition of technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

There was clear support for:

- Explicit criminalisation of technology-facilitated violence, including online harassment, non-consensual image sharing and digital surveillance.
- Alignment of cybersecurity policies with gender equality and protection frameworks.
- Survivor-centred reporting and enforcement mechanisms.

These insights underscore the need to treat digital safety as foundational to sustainable development rather than as a secondary regulatory issue.

3. Inclusion of Rural Women and Persons with Disabilities

Participants stressed that digital inclusion strategies must go beyond infrastructure metrics. Women in rural areas, women with disabilities and other marginalised populations remain at heightened risk of exclusion. Policy responses must prioritise affordability, accessibility standards, voice-based systems and community-integrated approaches to ensure meaningful participation.

4. Research as a Policy Enabler

The consultation reaffirmed that research must actively support governments in evidence-informed decision-making. Reliable, context-sensitive data is necessary to guide legal reform, budget allocation and programme design. Strengthening collaboration between governments, researchers and civil society can enhance the quality and legitimacy of population-related policy interventions.

These consultation insights will inform refinement of the recommendations and strengthen alignment with regional priorities.

XI. Conclusion

The fifty-ninth session of the Commission on Population and Development takes place at a moment when demographic change and technological transformation are unfolding simultaneously and at speed. For African countries, this convergence is particularly consequential. A young and rapidly growing population is navigating a digital environment that increasingly shapes access to information, services, employment and civic participation.

Technology is now embedded within population and development systems. However, its expansion does not automatically translate into equitable or sustainable outcomes. The direction it takes will depend on governance choices, legal frameworks, research capacity and the strength of public institutions.

This Africa-focused contribution has aimed to ground CPD59 deliberations in regional realities and applied evidence. It has highlighted that inclusion must extend beyond connectivity, that safety must be treated as foundational to participation, and that emerging technologies require deliberate safeguards when deployed in population-facing domains.

Insights from the regional consultation reinforced the urgency of updating legal protections, strengthening cybersecurity and data governance, and ensuring that rural women, women with disabilities and low-income communities are not left behind in digital transitions.

CPD59 offers an opportunity to align technological transformation with sustainable development commitments in a way that is practical, evidence-informed and grounded in lived realities. The integration of population, technology and research must remain anchored in dignity, accountability and inclusion.

Africa's demographic trajectory is frequently framed in terms of potential. Realising that potential will require deliberate policy choices that ensure technological systems serve people, strengthen rights-based development and contribute to long-term social and economic stability.