

Smart Government Summit 2026

Building the Continental Digital Governance Stack

Thursday, 23 July 2026 · Iconic Plaza, Nairobi

The Moment

Africa has spent a decade putting government online. Services that once required a queue, a paper form, and a lost morning now sit behind a login. Kenya has been among the leaders. Thousands of public services consolidated onto a single national platform, and a citizenry that increasingly expects to meet the state through a screen. The digitisation battle, in large part, has been won.

Yet the citizen still meets the seams. A birth, a business, a title deed, a day in court, each crosses agencies that do not share data, do not share accountability, and were not designed to work as one. The state has digitised its services without yet governing digitally as a coherent whole. That is the frontier this Summit addresses: not more digitised services, but the harder architecture beneath them; the layers that turn a collection of online counters into a government that works as one for the citizen, and does so securely, sustainably, and on infrastructure it can call its own.

The Idea: A Digital Governance Stack

A functioning digital state is best understood the way engineers understand any serious system; as a stack. Layers, each depending on the one beneath it, none sufficient alone. At the base sits sovereign infrastructure: where a nation's data physically lives and who ultimately controls it. Above it, the machinery of coordination and delivery, the tedious work of making a decision taken at the centre actually land across dozens of agencies. Above that, the layer that is the entire point: the citizen, and the seamless journey through the state that they are owed. And running through every layer, four concerns that cannot be bolted on afterwards: trust, security, capacity, and sustainability.

Framed this way, the familiar failures of digital government become legible. A dazzling citizen app on rented foreign infrastructure is a house without foundations. Flawless infrastructure with no coordination layer is a fast road to nowhere. Any layer left weak compromises the whole. And, crucially, no single African country can build every layer alone. The economics of sovereign cloud, the scarcity of scarce skills, the shared nature of the threats and the shared opportunity of the continent's markets all point the same way: the stack must be built to be interoperable, sovereign, and shared. Hence continental.

This Summit is a working session on building that stack, with Kenya as the anchor and proving ground.

Why Kenya, Why Now

Kenya arrives at this conversation with unusual credentials on almost every layer. It has one of the most mature citizen-service platforms on the continent and a live reform agenda for coordinating government delivery. It holds a rare energy endowment — one of the cleanest, most geothermal-anchored grids in the world — which reframes the global scramble for compute as, for Kenya, a potential advantage rather than a liability. And it feels the urgency acutely: the country recorded 4.56 billion cyber-threat events in a single quarter, a 441 per cent surge that the regulator links partly to adversaries weaponising AI. The layers are not abstractions here; they are being built, tested, and attacked in real time. That makes Nairobi the right room, and 2026 the right year, to build the stack in the open.

What the Summit Sets Out to Do

- Move the conversation from digitisation to digital governance: from putting services online to making the state work as one coherent, accountable system for the citizen.

- Interrogate each layer of the stack honestly: sovereignty, coordination, the citizen journey, trust, security, capacity, and sustainability — through the people actually building and defending it.
- Surface concrete commitments, not slogans: named owners, real timelines, and curriculum, procurement, and coordination actions that outlast the day.
- Position Kenya's assets: its clean grid, its platform maturity, its reform agenda — as the foundation of a continental, interoperable, sovereign digital governance stack.
- Convene the whole room: government, regulators, counties, development partners, private sector, and civil society, in a format that requires them to engage one another rather than talk past each other.

The Stack in Session

The programme is deliberately architected as the stack itself. Each layer is opened by those who own it and pressed on by those who depend on it:

The Sovereign Foundation: Where the state's data lives and who controls it. What “cloud-smart” rather than merely “cloud-first” demands, and where sovereignty is a genuine requirement rather than a reflex.

Fireside — Sovereign in the Cloud: Can Government Let Go of the Server Room?

Coordination & Delivery: The machinery that turns a Cabinet decision or a citizen's documentary journey into something that actually lands across every ministry and agency.

Keynotes — From Directive to Delivered; Governing Across the Seams.

The Citizen Layer: The seamless experience the citizen is owed, and who is accountable for the outcome when no single official is, from civil registration to the full chain of justice.

Birth to Death: Who Owns the Citizen's Journey?; The Broken Chain: the End-to-End Justice System.

The Trust Layer: The legitimacy on which everything else rests — whether citizens, regulators, and platforms can be brought to trust the systems, and each other.

Beyond Vision 2030: AI, Planning, and the Trust Deficit — with the Trust Barometer released live.

The Security Layer: Defending the state when phishing, reconnaissance, and deception run at machine speed and the attacker wields the same AI as the defender.

When the Machines Attack; AI v AI: Rebuilding the SOC When the Attacker Has the Same Tools.

The Capacity Layer: The human at the centre of the stack, turning “human in the loop” from a slogan into a trained, capable public service, and settling whose job it is to build that capacity.

Human in the Loop: AI Capacity for Public Service; Whose Job Is It Anyway?

The Sustainability Layer: Powering the digital state without pricing the planet out — turning Kenya's clean grid into a compute advantage while government reckons with its own footprint.

The Clean Digital State; The Green Machine: Can Government Go Digital Without Growing Its Footprint?

The Stack, Applied: The whole stack tested against a life-or-death problem — whether integrated intelligence can close the gap between an accurate early warning and a population still going hungry.

Feeding the Nation: Spatial Intelligence for Food Security; The Data Saw It Coming.

A Different Kind of Room

This is not a conference of back-to-back monologues. The Summit is built to make its delegates work. A live Trust Barometer forces 10 minutes with the data before anyone is allowed to respond. Mixed-nation seat technology platforms, regulators, and civil society together and require them to engage. National Innovation Zones and an Innovation Showcase put working solutions, one challenge solved, one transferable answer, directly in front of those who could adopt them. Facilitated bilateral meetings turn corridor conversations into

scheduled outcomes. And a Continental Welcome Area frames the day for what it is: a pan-African working session hosted in Nairobi, not a national showcase.

Who Convenes in the Room

Principal Secretaries and the leaders of the delivery machinery of government; regulators across data protection, communications, and cyber; national and county digital and ICT leadership; the heads of national data-centre, innovation, and public-service-training institutions; development partners and diplomatic missions; the private sector building and defending the stack; and the civil-society and research voices that keep it honest, convened across government, the technology ecosystem, and the wider continent.

What Delegates Leave With

A shared language for digital government as a stack rather than a scatter of apps, and a clear-eyed reading of which layers Kenya and the continent have built, which are weak, and which are exposed. A set of concrete commitments, on curriculum, procurement, coordination, and security, with names and timelines attached. New bilateral relationships turned into scheduled follow-through. And a thesis the sector can carry forward: that Africa's next decade of digital government will be won not by digitising more, but by building the sovereign, coordinated, trusted, and sustainable stack beneath it — together.

Convened by CIO Africa by dx5

A pan-African technology media and events company convening the leaders shaping the continent's digital transformation across West, East, and Southern Africa. The Smart Government Summit is its flagship platform for the public sector, the room where policy, delivery, and technology meet to build the government the citizen actually experiences.