

Leveraging Technology and Political Dialogue for Economic, Social, and Environmental Sustainability: Building a Better Africa

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to explain as to how technology and political dialogue could be leveraged to achieve the economic, social and environmental sustainability. This study used the qualitative research methodology, involving 15 interviews determined by purposive sampling with content analysis being employed on the collected data, to look at how to leverage technology and political dialogue for economic, social, and environmental sustainability in the endeavor to build a better Africa. This study shows that Technology through digital technologies such as online platforms, could serve as an effective tool in enabling democratic processes such as political dialogues to take place for the wellbeing of the society. Meaningful and effective online political dialogue fosters political stability, peace, security, and cohesive society which in turn, are ingredients necessary in the enhancement of the achievement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability. In this study, it is confirmed that the connectedness of technology and political dialogue could be leveraged to achieve economic, social, and environmental sustainability for building a better Africa. It has been found that the significant importance of literacy and skill in the connectedness of technology and political dialogue cannot be undermined. Appropriate infrastructure and facilitation to enable accessibility and an inclusive participation is necessary, while the leadership authority has an important role to ensure that the dialogue is facilitated and managed in a meaningful way. The importance of the people's affordability of the costs involved is essential and is not be undermined. All these enable for an effective leveraging of technology, specifically digital technology and political dialogue for the enhancement of the achievement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability for building a better Africa.

Keywords: technology, political dialogue, economic social environmental sustainability

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses on the importance of leveraging technology and political dialogue for economic, social, and environmental sustainability, with the focus on building a better Africa. This paper looks at Africa as a whole, as Africa, though characterized by cultural diversity, yet experiences shared values, cultures, and heritage, and similarities in the various activities and initiatives as far as sustainable development is concerned (AU, 2021, pp.1-7). African nations like many other nations of the world, face the challenge of building cohesive societies which enhance collective efforts through genuine and civilized engagements that foster peace and the conducive environment for the enhancement of sustainable economic, social, and environmental processes. Efforts of building cohesive societies in Africa could be fruitful through strong political dialogues that work basing on the common vision of sustainable peace, unity, and the achievement of sustainable development (Mukunto, 2022, pp.1-19).

Africa as to date is experiencing the emerging of new technologies and the rapid advance of the existing technologies. The ongoing massive improvements in digital technologies, and the increasingly use of digital technologies are transforming Africa's major sector and boosting digital platforms, social interactions, digital economies, economic developments, and all such like which could be used as tools in a meaningful way to enhance the economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Indeed, technological developments in Africa could serve to bring revolutionary changes that foster building a better Africa by having an impact that enhances the economies, as well as the social and environmental dimensions of societies (Jean-Claude et al, 2022, pp.1-34; Pillay, 2022, pp.1-3; Singh, 2022, pp.17-26; Tafese, 2022, pp.1-14).

Moreover, the connectedness of technology and political dialogue in the enhancement of the economic, social, and environmental sustainability is undeniable. Digital technologies such as social networks are proving to be useful for political purposes. The digital technologies can be leveraged for political purposes, and indeed, online platforms have increasingly become key venues for political action and dialogue. Technological developments, can effectively facilitate democracy processes in countries such as political dialogue which is necessary for political stability and for building a cohesive society. With stability and cohesiveness, a society is able to live in unity, peace, and security such that the efforts for achieving economic, social, and environmental sustainability are not jeopardized or impended (James and Cotnam-Kappel, 2020, pp.129-150; Nguyen et al, 2022, pp.187-200; Serrano-Contreras et al, 2020, pp.63-72).

In the perspective of the connectedness of technology and political dialogue, this paper looks into how should Africa leverage technology and political dialogue to enhance the achievement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability. It is the pursuit of looking into how technology and political dialogue are leveraged in the pursuit of building a better Africa through the achievement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Economic, social, and environmental sustainability has actually to do with sustainable development. This is due to the fact that the economic, social, and environmental dimensions are considered as the three core interrelated dimensions or pillars of sustainable development (Baum, 2021, 9-29). It is in this manner that this paper may opt to use the term sustainable development at some point meaning the economic, social, and environmental sustainability. In fact, it is an undeniable fact that the ongoing economic, social, and environmental changes in the world, and therefore Africa in this case, are a real challenge for the achievement of sustainable development, not only currently, but also for the future generations. In the today's constantly evolving world, the economic, social, and environmental sustainability will remain to be a consistently diligently pursued goal (Baum, 2021, 9-29).

The achievement of sustainable development requires a lot of efforts and the inclusion of various elements helpful to foster the achievement of the economic, social, and environmental objectives. Focus in this paper is on two elements, namely technology and political dialogue, and how their interlinkage play role in economic, social, and environmental sustainability. As for the political aspect, a look is on the political dialogue that fosters political stability and prevents instability. Political stability and political instability do have significant effect on sustainable development. It has been observed that political fosters sustainable development whereas political instability impedes sustainable development (Khan and Farooq, 2019, pp.56-83). On the other hand, technology, especially through digital technologies, have shown to have the consequences from great opportunities to major risks for economic, social, and environmental progress. However, digital technologies could be still used with risks being mitigated in advance and steering the innovation in favor of economic, social, and environmental progresses for sustainability (Kottmeyer, 2021, pp.17-23).

It is in this manner that we look at two aspects, political dialogue and technology in the perspective as to how their connectedness could be leveraged to achieve the economic, social and environmental sustainability. With the advances of technology and specifically digital technologies, and the impact it does have in our everyday life, the issue is on how should technology be useful for political purposes in the pursuit of the achievement of sustainable development. The argument is in leveraging on the two elements, technology and political dialogue for a meaningful course ((Baum, 2021, 9-29; Kottmeyer, 2021, pp.17-23; Nguyen et al, 2022, pp.187-200).

The Need to Leverage on Political Dialogue

It has been observed globally on how the political affects significantly the achievement of sustainable development. Whereas political stability is a conducive environment for enhancing the achievement of sustainable development, political instability is said to adversely affect and impede sustainable development. It is said that sustainable development, that bears the economic, social and environmental dimensions, discourages political instability. Political instability leads to negative and destructive occurrences like political disorder, ethnic conflicts, civil war, mass violence, destruction of physical capital, displacement of human capital, polarization, regime change, coup d'état, and all such like negatives that all may consequently reduce production activity and investment, jeopardize economic performance, disrupt peace, and impede sustainable development. Political instability may disrupt economic, social, and environmental policies favorable for the achievement of sustainable development (Khan and Farooq, 2019, pp.56-83).

It is argued that general consensus exists that political stability through political dialogue is an important ingredient of democratic life in society. In fact, political interaction through political dialogue is essential for democratic societies, as through them people present and clarify their points of view, come into contact with the opinions of others, contribute to solutions of the prevailing problems in the society (James and Cotnam-Kappel, 2020, pp.129-150; Serrano-Contreras et al, 2020, pp.63-72). Constructive political dialogue could serve as a tool to stabilize the society through dynamics such as solving the people's problems more quickly, and thereby reducing the levels of discontent and conflicts. Political dialogue could replace the existing negative ways citizens and other non-state actors use to express their will such as protests, meetings that disrupt peace and stability, and instead build a constructive dialogue that will actually increase the level of moderation in the country, help to smooth out conflicts and increase the influence of the government (Bogatyrev et al, 2019, pp.1-7).

A political co-existence characterized by competent dialogue between political parties, and between parties and the government, and the involvement of citizens in politics, could serve to develop strong democratic participation in politics which is instrumental in providing benefits such as strengthening legal relations, improve the quality of citizens' life, develop a stronger apparatus that could strengthen the civil society, and enhance the achievement of sustainable development for the wellbeing of society. It is a fact, lack of meaningful and peaceful political co-existence fuels political violence, conflicts, and all such like negatives, and hence political leaders find themselves focusing their attention on the advancing their own political interests instead of pursuing the common good for all (Bogatyrev et al, 2019, pp.1-7; Gubazire, 2022, pp.1-7).

It should be taken in mind that the interests of all parties involved in the dialogue should be taken into account under a good representation, and the negotiation process should aim at seeking to achieve mutual understanding, mutual trust, and gain mutual beneficial results. The dialogue requires the atmosphere of trust, openness, and readiness. Political dialogue should be inclusive, and should not be confined by limited elites, but rather should involve all stakeholders. It should not allow a few powerful participants to dominate, but should function on the base of building a social cohesion that is characterized by national identity. It should take on board the participation of citizens, non-state, and state players, knowing that non-participation would negatively affect and impede efforts of seizing the opportunities for social cohesion. Needed is a genuine, sincere, and inclusive political dialogue that creates an inclusive platform and process for society's stakeholders to be able to work together to overcome political hurdles and deal with the root causes of conflicts and misunderstandings in the context of building a tolerant and peaceful society hence the achievement of economic, social, environmental sustainability (Bogatyrev, 2019, pp.1-7; Mukunto, 2022, pp.1-19).

It should be emphasized that political dialogue should avoid the phenomenon of elites hijacking the dialogue. Normally, groups of elites could seemingly act to represent the interests of citizens while actually they lobby for their own interests. Groups of elites could influence the state level and cause the general public have no access to participation in the government and political activities. However, the participation of all stakeholders fosters a stronger dialogue, with parties concerned being given room to bring in their differences, basing on the interest of the nation which must come first. Also, dialogue should be considered as a going concern phenomenon that enhances relationship, builds and maintains social cohesion. It should be based on effective communication and that participants should be facilitated to have constructive conversations in a environment that is safe for them physically and psychologically,

and which they can engage across differences and have their relationships transformed and built to be healthy (Bogatyrev et al, 2019, pp.1-7; Mukunto, 2022, pp.1-19).

On the other hand, the role of faith actors, mainly religious leaders and organizations, in political dialogue should not be undermined. The religious leaders' moral authority as leaders positions them to be listened and what they say to be heeded. They bear the responsibility to pass moral judgement on matters affecting the social and political order of the country. They can play a major role in fostering peace, reconciliation, and justice, and help parties come to agreement and implementation of the dialogue outcomes. Religious people and organizations could be used to act as mediators and assistants in establishing interactions for meaningful dialogues. They could be useful in establishing constructive dialogues between the involved parties (individuals, political parties, non-government organizations, the state) (Bogatyrev et al, 2019, pp.1-7; Mukunto, 2022, pp.1-19).

The Political Dialogue in African Context

African nations face the challenge of building cohesive societies which enhance collective efforts through genuine and civilized engagements that foster peace and the conducive environment for the enhancement of sustainable economic, social, and environmental processes. African nations need to act together and make interventions for the common goal, and overcome the negative issues and practices such as religious divides, ethnicism, tribal prejudices, hate speech, injustice, strained relations, social cleavages, negative tribal sentiments, perceived inequalities, elitist leanings, and all such like that serve to fuel polarization, political instabilities, and affect society's peace and prosperity. Efforts are needed to build a social cohesion that enhances citizen's willingness to individually or collectively contribute to a common vision of sustainable peace, unity, and the achievement of sustainable development (Mukunto, 2022, pp.1-19).

It is said that the African continent, for the last decade, apart from the peace and security threats from violent extremism, radicalism, and terrorism, has witnessed a growing concern and frustration with democracy among the many African nations. Democratic governance has been at decline, causing active conflicts, civil wars, and even coups d'état in some countries. There has been more of the use of protests and other grassroots activities aimed at putting pressure on the political leaders to abide by the will of the people (AU, 2021, pp.1-7). All such has only served to jeopardize the efforts to achieve the economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Here then comes the importance of carrying on board political dialogue in the processes of building democratic governance for a peaceful and developing Africa.

Political dialogue should be seen in the light of aiming to improve democracy and governance in the continent and therefore get rid of all such negatives as mentioned above that are jeopardizing the processes for economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Political dialogue in Africa could face hardship and be a painstaking process due to the difficulties faced by political leaders in forging partnerships with their opponents. This is even made to be more difficult by the lack of national identities in the African countries. Moreover, political systems in Africa have been poorly designed in such a way that they do not support multi-party democracy (AU, 2021, pp.1-7).

It is suggested that the political dialogue should involve several things that include, a skilled facilitator that all parties accept and feel comfortable, political will (commitment), and capable leaders to go

through the process and implement the decisions made through the dialogue process. The aim of political dialogue should be to achieve practical and peaceful solutions to problems. Conflicts drivers are to be addressed and foster reconciliation, and build a greater national consensus, trust and social cohesion. The political dialogue should define a shared vision of the future. Any political dialogue, in its content and process, should place the wellbeing of the people at the center. Also, preventive measures should as well be taken to address vulnerability to the spread of extremist ideologies, and misinformation online (Dubow, 2017, pp.1-23; Mukunto, 2022, pp.1-19).

A people-centered political dialogue will motivate citizens of all backgrounds, gender, ethnicities, religion, and professions to buy into the dialogue interventions without coercion. Citizens and all other stakeholders involved should be facilitated to contribute freely, speak freely about their problems, ask questions, and contribute in coming up with solutions. Common problems should be solved and common goals achieved that affect their quality of life for the better, as well as foster a cohesive society. A cohesive society is normally characterized by resilient social relations, positive emotional connectedness, common sense of identity, respect to fellow citizens, upholding the citizens' dignity, and acting together in solidarity even with those marginalized (Mukunto, 2022, pp.1-19). However, with all these in view, the issue that remains to be at hand is as to how should Africa leverage technology and political dialogue to enhance the achievement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability for a better Africa. That is, how is the connectedness of technology and political dialogue and how can the two be leveraged for the achievement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

The Need to Leverage on Technology

It is an undeniable fact that Africa is experiencing the emerging of new technologies and that existing technologies are advancing rapidly. In fact, African countries, just like other developing countries are almost always adopters of technical advancements emerging from developed countries. Although there is the existence of connectivity gaps between and within African countries, however, Africa is increasingly connected. It is argued that there are massive improvements in digital technologies, and the increasingly use of digital technologies is boosting digital platforms, social interactions, digital economies, economic developments. Digital technologies are transforming Africa's major sectors (Pillay, 2022, pp.1-3; Tafese, 2022, pp.1-14).

Technological developments in Africa could serve to bring revolutionary changes that will foster the building of a better Africa both for now and the future generations. Technologies, such as digital technologies are showing to have impact on the economies, as well as the social and environmental dimensions of societies. Technologies, and specifically digital technologies, have become integral in personal lives, professional lives, businesses, and government activities. For instance, it is said that digital technology has caused the financial inclusion in Sub Saharan Africa to arise over the years. An example are the effects of digital technology is evident in internet banking, mobile-banking, automated teller machine services (Jean-Claude et al, 2022, pp.1-34; Singh, 2022, pp.17-26).

The adoption of technologies such as artificial intelligence, social media, blockchain, gene editing, robotics, and all such like have gained attention and could revolutionizing in the achievement of sustainable development. Moreover, African countries are encouraged to increase investment in green technological innovations and renewable energy projects, and are encouraged to use new technologies such as reduction of greenhouse gas emission, as well as technologies for sustainable agriculture, green

technologies in electric power, and technologies of blue economy in Africa, which all are said to be green technologies that catalyze sustainable economic growth as well as environmental sustainability, preserving Africa's unique ecosystem, hence enhancing the achievement of sustainable development (Kalinichenko et al, 2022, pp.1-6; Singh, 2022, pp.17-26). It is argued that among the strongest enablers of green growth in Africa are innovation and technology. Green growth in the society seeks to protect the environment while accelerating the pace of economic growth. Green technology and innovation is considered as a tool to diminish carbon emissions and a critical support for countries worldwide to combat climate change, is seen to better the ecological environment and hence develop productivity (Chuku and Ayayi, 2022, pp.1-36; Gao et al, 2022, pp.1-12).

There could be negative implications of technology as well. These may include significant job loss in certain sectors and therefore hinder new employment opportunities, breach privacy and personal security, spread of false news, and threatening of security, and wastes from computer devices. However, efforts should be done to mitigate all these negative consequences and take advantage of the economic, social, and environmental development opportunities. Technology should still be used to increase productivity, efficiency, and innovation. Moreover, potential risks could include the capacity to reshape world orders and to disrupt global stability. They also pose ever-evolving national security risks and have become the source of tensions across the world. However, emerging technologies could serve to platforms with the potential to solve national and global problems (Pillay, 2022, pp.1-3; Singh, 2022, pp.17-26).

There could be some negative uses of digital technologies such as social networks, such as radicalism and extremism, or instigation of conflicts or political unrest. However, benefits from technological advances surpass the negatives. For instance, the utilization of digital platforms such as social media could be a meaningful tool for enhancing changes, especially political for the better by employing it in political processes such as political dialogue (AU, 2021, pp.1-7; Serrano-Contreras et al, 2020, pp.63-72). The issue then is on how should technology and political processes such as political dialogue be leveraged for sustainable development. The issue is on how should the connectedness of technology and political dialogue enhance the economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

The Nexus of Technology and Political Dialogue

As far as digital technologies are concerned, social networks are showing to have a crucial impact on everyday life in communication, as well as in the other aspects such as the political dialogue between the public and the government. It is well known in the African countries how governments have put a system in which websites, applications, and all such like are subject to censorship and strict scrutiny, which makes the public be fearful of giving alternative political views and criticizing the established political regime. However, governments need to understand the importance for instance of social networks regarding political communication between society and government structures. Governments need to look into meaningful ways and mechanisms for establishing relevant connections with the public (Nguyen et al, 2022, pp.187-200).

Technology, namely digital technology, could be useful in facilitating participatory democracy in which citizens, political parties, non-state actors and the state directly participate in the discussion of important state matters and decisions. Innovative communication processes that directly contribute to enhance the dialogue, and modern interactive media through specialized online resources could serve as a worthy

alternative to the existing sources or traditional sources of the government's influence on citizens and the public or society in general to establish positive communication that involves all parties in joint activities (Bogatyrev et al, 2019, pp.1-7).

Digital technologies such as social networks are proving to be useful for political purposes. The digital technologies, such as online spaces, that were created for non-political purposes can be leveraged for political purposes. Digital and social media platforms have increasingly become key venues for political action and dialogue. These are posing to be new venues for political expression and dialogue, proving that the barriers to online participation are low. Through these venues, all voices can participate and, in that way, lowering down the odds of being heard and responded to. People can as well weigh in on political issues, give direct feedback to political leaders and decision-makers (James and Cotnam-Kappel, 2020, pp.129-150; Nguyen et al, 2022, pp.187-200).

Technological developments, namely digital technologies such as online platforms, could effectively facilitate democracy processes in countries in which people are facilitated to participate in dynamics such as political deliberations, political interactions and discussions among citizens or the public in general, people giving views, opinions, and present problems, hence achieving greater political inclusion and participation. Online facilities such as online spaces could facilitate information exchange, and even be potential spheres for political dialogue. In fact, these online facilities have a very high potential to provide the perfect environment to foster dialogue around important policy and political issues (Serrano-Contreras et al, 2020, pp.63-72).

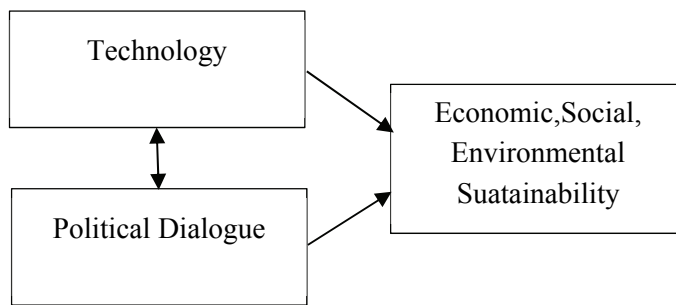
It is argued that traditional ways could still remain in use, and continue to be effective, however, online facilities show greater potential for achieving greater political inclusion and participation. Online facilities show to have a very high potential to provide the perfect environment to foster political dialogue, and as well as important policy issues. For instance, social networks could help to facilitate the political discourse to become more pluralistic, facilitate a greater public involvement and allow people to monitor and control power and participate in decision-making (Serrano-Contreras et al, 2020, pp.63-72). Moreover, the facilitation should be in way that digital technologies are accessible. They should be potentially attractive to a wider range of learners and users, and at the same time be helpful in transferring knowledge in new and more effective ways, and enable effective interactions, as well relations, accessibility to consume and share information. This is meant to allow for citizens' direct participation in democratic processes such as political dialogue (Dubow, 2017, pp.1-23).

In all matters pertaining the connectedness of technology and political dialogue, there should not be an undermining of building digital skills for citizenship so that they are able to effectively use the online platforms. In addition to that building people soft skills such as empathy and thinking skills like critical thinking is essential. All these are essential in political matters in helping to have meaningful political dialogue. It is argued that empathy is fundamental in interactions, relationships, and in building cohesiveness. Thinking skills such as critical thinking could serve as an effective mitigation against misinformation, provocative and extreme views (Dubow, 2017, pp.1-23). What has been discussed so far suffices to say that technology, through digital technologies such as online facilities, could be very useful for political dialogue, hence foster political stability which is necessary for the achievement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

In the light of the phenomenon to be studied, this paper worked on three research questions. These include:

- (1). How can (technology) digital technologies underpin political dialogue in Africa?
 - (2). How can online political dialogue be best leveraged to achieve economic, social, and environmental sustainability in building a better Africa?
 - (3). What mechanisms (ways) should be in place for a strong nexus of technology and political dialogue for the enhancement of economic, social and environmental sustainability in building a better Africa?
- The model of relationships between the concepts under research are as presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The model of relationships between the concepts under research



Source: Researcher, 2023.

As pointed out earlier in the introduction, the aim of the study is to look on how to leverage technology and political dialogue for the enhancement of the achievement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability, for building a better Africa.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this paper was to analyze on how to leverage technology and political dialogue for economic, social, and environmental sustainability, in the context of building a better Africa. Qualitative methodology was used in this study. The study involved 15 participants who were determined by using purposive sampling and had a variation of a representation from public organizations, mainly the government officials, political officials, non-government organizations officials, corporate private organizations officials, religious leaders, academicians, and citizens. The 15 participants proved to reach the saturation point. Participants were taken who showed to be highly educated, knowledgeable, and who are conversant with the situation and context in Africa, and showed to have insights enough to give in-depth information pertaining the phenomenon to be studied. An in-depth interview was conducted on the 15 participants and thereafter a content analysis was conducted. The interviews were made into transcripts, from which categories and themes were identified, and hence the compilation (Bengtsson, 2016, pp.8-14; Cobern and Adams, 2020, pp.73-79; Mohajan, 2018, pp.23-51).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The significance of technology and political dialogue in the achievement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability is undeniable nor undermined. Findings show that technology, through digital technologies, specifically the online facilities or platforms can be used in a meaningful way as an effective tool to facilitate political dialogue that fosters the economic, social, and environmental sustainability, or rather sustainable development. These online facilities can facilitate the political

dialogue that fosters political stability and the building of cohesive African societies for the enhancement of the pursued economic, social, and environmental sustainability. From the findings four issues resurfaced.

First, is the significant importance of literacy and skill. There was the concern that the generally illiteracy is still high in many African societies, leave alone technological literacy such as the use of computers, software, and others such as app in mobile phones. Although many people are having mobile phones in African societies, but many in the rural areas are not having the touch mobile phones that can be useful in the online platforms. Together with this problem, is the inadequacy in the skills to use the online platforms among the majority especially the illiterate, and especially in the rural areas. This could prove to be a barrier in the online political processes. As one participant would comment saying, “Literacy and skill are important factors when it comes to the use of technology. Many people in our African societies are not so much conversant with technology, how do you expect them to effectively participate in online political discussions and dialogue?”

On the other hand, many people in Africa have no much understanding and knowledge in political matters. This is contributed by high rates of illiteracy. Much is known concerning voting processes, and focus is mainly is on that. This could be contributed by the high rate of illiteracy in the African societies. Again, this tends to be a barrier in the political dialogue participation. Participation with lack of political knowledge is a problem in itself. A participant commented on this saying, “Many people in Africa have little knowledge concerning politics, how do you expect them to participate fully in the dialogue. Many are active in political processes.”

Indeed, building digital skills for citizenship is necessary if people are to be conversant with the use of online platforms. On the other hand, empowerment to enhance literacy, and as well as capacity building in other soft skills such as empathy and thinking skills like critical thinking are essential. Literacy in political matters could produce meaningful political dialogue. Empathy is fundamental in interactions, relationships, and in building cohesiveness. Thinking skills such as critical thinking could serve as an effective mitigation against misinformation, provocative and extreme views (Dubow, 2017, pp.1-23).

All these are needful in having online dialogues that will foster for political stability, peace, and a cohesive society. These are necessary elements in building the right environment for the enhancement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability. In this case, the importance of literacy and skill should not be undermined in the dynamics of technology and political dialogue in the enhancement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

Second, is on the issue of appropriate infrastructure and facilitation. As for infrastructure, findings show that there is the need to ensure that appropriate infrastructures are in place in both the rural and the urban, while the existing ones should be improved for better services. All this is to ensure that all places in the society have access to the network. However, concern was raised concerning the difficulties of accessibility to network systems in the rural areas, and that many parts in Africa still face network problems. Such inadequacies may tend to jeopardize the efficiency in the online political processes. Regarding this, a participant commented saying, “A lot more needs to be done in Africa as we still face network problems in communications where the infrastructures are in place and also some parts especially the rural places still don’t have the infrastructures. Communication companies should speed up in putting up their infrastructures in the rural places.”

Also, findings show that there should be the appropriate facilitation in the countries to ensure the online political dialogue takes place. There is the need to have friendly policies specifically on that. Policies in place are to ensure that the participation is inclusive irrespective of ideologies and that those involved are ensured of their safety they exercise freedom of expression. On this matter, a participant commented saying, “People need to feel that they are safe in their freedom of expressions. Are there policies that safeguard the safety of the various stakeholders to be involved in the political dialogues? This is something we need to look at.”

This is in agreement with the argument that for the democratic processes to be effective, digital technologies should be accessible. They should be in place in a way that they are potentially more attractive to a wider range of learners and users, and as well as help to transfer knowledge in new and more effective ways. They should be in a way that they enable effective interactions, people relating to one another, and that people can access and consume and share information. This allows for citizens’ direct participation in democratic processes such as political dialogue (Dubow, 2017, pp.1-23). Indeed, intact digital technologies infrastructure could enabling an effective accessibility and a successful political dialogue thus leading to the achievement of peace, political stability and a cohesive society, which in turn facilitate the enhancement of the achievement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

Third, is on the Leadership’s role in facilitating the dialogue. Findings show that to have the online political dialogue authentic, it should be initiated and supervised by the authorities or rather the leadership. To be started by leadership in authority facilitates a healthy online political leadership. Findings show that leaders need to have the political will to see the political dialogue taking place and that they should not facilitate by carrying their personal interests forward, but rather put the national interests forward for the wellbeing of all in the society. The leadership in authority should ensure safety and freedom of expression to those participating in the dialogue, at the same time guide people into the right way of carrying out the dialogue. As concerning this matter, a participant commented saying, “It is not easy for an ordinary individual citizen to start the dialogue and be successful. However, when it is started by the leadership authorities it may be effective in getting many on board. When the leadership encourages people participate and ensure their safety, many will participate.”

It also emerged that the organizers should be open to the different views and opinions and in the way, they express themselves. They should exercise tolerance and know how to manage the dialogue so that it takes place in a meaningful way in the dynamics of respecting one another. A participant commented on this saying, “Are the organizers ready to receive the different views including the provocative ones? Are they going to be able bear the different personalities and be able manage and guide them for a meaningful dialogue? I do see that as an issue of concern.”

As seen earlier in the literature, a political dialogue should involve skilled facilitator that all stakeholders accept and feel comfortable. The facilitator should be able to manage the dialogue for meaningful solutions. Leaders should have the political will (commitment), and capable to go through the process and implement the decisions made through the dialogue process. The aim of political dialogue should be to achieve practical and peaceful solutions to problems, address conflicts drivers and foster reconciliation, build a greater national consensus, trust and a cohesive society. The political dialogue, in its content and process, should place the wellbeing of the people at the center, at the same ensure that preventive measures are taken to address vulnerability to the spread of extremist ideologies, and misinformation online (Dubow, 2017, pp.1-23; Mukunto, 2022, pp.1-19). All these prove to be

necessary and not undermined in the processes of achieving economic, social, and environmental sustainability through the effective use of digital technologies in facilitating meaningful political dialogues for peace, political stability, and cohesive society.

Fourth is the issue affordability of the costs involved. From the findings a concern was raised as to whether the online political dialogue might be sustainable due to the costs to be incurred by the dialogue participants. Poverty in Africa is still rampant, and this may contribute to people having not sufficient money in their pockets to cater for the online platform costs. It was argued that authorities need to ensure that communication companies and the government make sure that communication expenses are affordable and that the tax issues on the consumers' side is dealt fairly to enable the affordability. This will be useful in encouraging the participation of the many in the dialogue. As concerning this issue, a participant commented saying, "My concern is that how many people can afford in a sustainable way to cover the costs of communications such as the data and bundle expenses. The government as the main organizer of the online dialogue should look into that and facilitate for affordability."

This is in agreement with the argument that asserts that the technology or communication companies together with the government should be more proactive in shaping and regulating the digital environment, to foster regulatory solutions that facilitate community norms, accessibility, and affordability. While the technology companies are encouraged and given incentives by the government to invest, however, regulatory authorities should ensure that the citizens enjoy the benefits of the services in their usage in an accessible and affordable and safe manner (Dubow, 2017, pp.1-23).

In essence, digital technologies could serve as an effective tool in enabling democratic processes such as successful political dialogues to take place for the wellbeing of the society. It becomes beneficial for technology through the online platform to be used for effective political dialogue which fosters political stability, peace, security, and cohesive society, ingredients that are necessary in the enhancement of achieving economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Findings confirm that the connectedness of technology and political dialogue could be leveraged to achieve economic, social, and environmental sustainability for building a better Africa.

CONCLUSION

It is an undeniable fact that Africa needs to speed up a meaningful transformation process towards the achievement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability, aimed at building a better Africa now and for the future generations. It has emerged from the findings of this paper that leveraging technology and political dialogue are among key elements to be considered in the transformation trajectory towards a better Africa. Technology, specifically digital technology such as online platform, and political dialogue as among key potential elements to contribute significantly to the achievement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability in Africa. The two elements, technology and political dialogue are seen as drivers for the desired sustainability and having much to offer to it. Indeed, the connectedness of technology and political dialogue offer specific benefits for the enhancement of the achievement of the economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

Limitations in this study seem to be due to the fact that although the paper looked at Africa as a whole, yet the interview participants did not come from the various countries or societies in Africa. However, shared values, culture, heritage, and similarities in the various set ups in Africa in technology, political,

and development processes, made it suffice to trust that the chosen sample would give meaningful insights pertaining Africa, as far as the phenomenon to be studied is concerned.

It is suggested that further studies should be carried out in this area of study so that more inputs will emerge that will be helpful in advancing the efforts of building a better Africa. A better Africa is desired in which African societies will experience the achievement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability for the wellbeing for all.

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