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# Artificial intelligence as a driving force for the African economy and society

Guest lecturer | [Dr. James Manyika](#)

**SPECIAL  
EVENT 2024**

**Adebayo Adedeji  
Memorial Lecture**



## **The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)**

launched the annual Adebayo Adedeji Lecture in March 2014 to honour and recognize the late Adebayo Adedeji for his intellectual and policy contributions to social and economic development in Africa. Now in its eleventh year, the lecture features distinguished personalities and scholars who have made notable contributions to Africa's development.

Prof. Adedeji was a visionary African leader with a strong pan-African perspective and a passionate believer in African integration and development. He was the Executive Secretary of ECA from 1975 to 1991 and served his country and the continent in various other capacities. During his long and distinguished academic, political and diplomatic career, he made immense contributions to African development, thinking, policy and practice. He pioneered and played a major role in the establishment of several of the continent's regional economic communities, and was a lead figure in the development of several regional integration initiatives, including the Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa

(1980–2000), the Final Act of Lagos and the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community. He also promoted the articulation of an alternative development paradigm for Africa.

The 2024 Adebayo Adedeji Lecture will be delivered by James Manyika on the theme "Artificial intelligence as a driving force for the African economy and society" during the fifty-sixth session of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, to be held in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, on 4 and 5 March 2024. Technological innovation has become the main driver of societal development and national progress. The use of modern technology, the latest of which is the Internet of things and artificial intelligence, is now a major determinant of the stage and pace of progress of countries around the world. Although the use of artificial intelligence remains limited and a majority of Africans are largely unfamiliar with it, the technology is relevant to the development of Africa. It can be deployed to accelerate economic growth, increase the productivity of small and medium-sized enterprises, and promote the

efficient delivery of public services in education, health, infrastructure and many other areas. In other words, Africa can use artificial intelligence to regain lost ground in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and fulfilment of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union, enabling the region to achieve prosperity as quickly as possible.

Despite its incredible potential to accelerate development, artificial intelligence also generates fear and anxiety among some people. For instance, there are concerns that artificial intelligence could displace human labour in the production and service sectors, with severe consequences for jobs and livelihoods.

In his lecture, Dr. Manyika will trace the history of the radical scientific and technological breakthrough that is artificial intelligence and discuss its growth, the opportunities it provides, the challenges it poses and the contributions it could make to development in Africa. Artificial intelligence can play a major role in the transition towards sustainability by accelerating social and economic development on the continent. Africa must harness the momentum in the global rise of artificial intelligence, adapt to the new circumstances and use the technology to drive the region's rapid transformation and development.

Dr. Manyika is a leading practitioner in the field of artificial intelligence. He holds a PhD in Artificial Intelligence, Robotics and Computation from the University of Oxford and is currently the Senior Vice-President of Research, Technolo-

gy and Society at Google, reporting directly to the Chief Executive Officer. As a Senior Partner Emeritus of McKinsey & Company and Senior Partner and Chairman Emeritus of the McKinsey Global Institute, he has advised the chief executives of many of the world's leading technology companies on technology and strategy and has led research on technology, the economy, competitiveness and other global economic trends. He was appointed by the former President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, to serve as the Vice-Chair of the President's Global Development Council and was appointed by former secretaries of commerce of the United States to the Digital Economy Board of Advisors and the National Innovation Board. Also in the United States, he is the Vice-Chair of the National Artificial Intelligence Advisory Committee, which advises the President on artificial intelligence. He serves on the boards of the Council on Foreign Relations and has co-chaired the Council's task force on the innovation strategy and national security of the United States. He has also served on national and international commissions related to technology and the economy.

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