DIGITAL LEADERSHIP & CYBER GOVERNANCE ASSOCIATION

UGANDA'S NATIONAL DATA STRATEGY

AN ENTERPRISE AGENDA FOR GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION

Perspectives for enterprise digital transformation leaders and innovators

OCTOBER 2026

PREAMBLE

The Ministry of ICT and National Guidance recently unveiled the Uganda National Data Strategy 2026/27–2030/31.

The Strategy sets a common direction for governing, protecting and using data to advance socio-economic transformation. Its scope covers government and private-sector information in digital and analog forms. The three pillars shaping the strategy include data governance, data infrastructure and strategic data utilization. In addition, the Strategy provides for People and culture, along with research, innovation and entrepreneurship as capabilities to support implementation.

In our view, the timing matters.

Artificial intelligence is opening new possibilities for businesses and public institutions, and data is a major input into its development and use. The strategy reflects this by linking emerging technologies to stronger infrastructure, technical skills, and responsible information practices. It gives Uganda a foundation for pursuing AI opportunities alongside the data capabilities that support them.

In our view, this brings enterprise leadership and data readiness into the same conversation. Organizations need to understand where their information comes from, how it may be used, and whether it is reliable for the intended purpose. They also need clear accountability when that information informs important decisions. These are both business questions and technology considerations.

This perspective paper covers five strengths and their contribution to Uganda's development ambitions as noted below:

a) Part I examines the strengths for national socio-economic development

b) Part II looks at implications for enterprise leaders

c) Part III explores innovation and entrepreneurship opportunities

d) Part IV considers Uganda's alignment with the EAC's shared direction on digital interoperability.

e) Part V sets out what we look forward to over the next five years.

PART I

FIVE STRENGTHS FOR UGANDA'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

We consider five aspects of the strategy especially valuable for national development. Each connects data capability with an economic or social opportunity.

a) A clear connection to national growth priorities

The strategy links its agenda to Uganda's ambition to expand the economy tenfold, from about US$50 billion in 2023/24 to US$500 billion over 15 years. Its priority areas reflect the ATMS growth agenda, covering agro-industrialization, tourism development, mineral-based industrial development, and science, technology, and innovation. It provides for implementing and evaluating data use cases in these sectors.

That connection extends to the Fourth National Development Plan, covering FY2025/26 to FY2029/30. NDP IV's Digital Transformation Program seeks to expand connectivity, improve business processes and public service delivery, increase digital uptake, strengthen cybersecurity and privacy, and improve coordination and regulatory enforcement. The Data Strategy supports these objectives through common standards, interoperable infrastructure, enterprise sharing and stronger information protection.

The relationship with science, technology and innovation is equally important. NDP IV emphasizes technology development, transfer, industrialization, and commercialization, supported by specialized skills, infrastructure, and institutional arrangements to bring ideas to market. The Data Strategy contributes research capabilities, access to information, technical skills, commercialization support, and the proposed big data/AI sandbox. These complementary foundations turn knowledge into useful technologies and enterprise opportunities.

The National Digital Transformation Roadmap adds an operational connection. Its Digital Services pillar promotes digital and electronic government services. Registries, standards, and trusted exchange under the Data Strategy will help coordinate and strengthen those services. The Roadmap's Innovation and Entrepreneurship pillar promotes research, development and startup incubation. Data-driven research, local solutions, and commercialization initiatives support that direction.

The relationship is visible. NDP IV establishes development priorities, the Roadmap sets the digital transformation direction, and the Data Strategy strengthens the information capabilities that support delivery. Better information can guide investment and production. Trusted exchange can improve services. Local innovation can create businesses and skilled jobs.

These contributions support the longer journey towards tenfold growth. The strategy's five-year implementation period is one part of that wider national ambition, which depends on progress across many sectors and investments.

b) Shared foundations for more productive services

Common standards, primary registries, enterprise sharing and interoperable infrastructure are central to the strategy. Public datasets, catalogs and application programming interfaces are intended to make information easier to discover and access appropriately.

We see an opportunity to simplify everyday transactions. When reliable information is reusable, institutions can streamline verification and coordinate services more effectively. Citizens and businesses can spend less time submitting the same details.

Those improvements have economic value. Resources freed from repetitive processes can support productive activity, while more dependable services improve operating conditions for enterprises. This gives practical expression to NDP IV's business-process objectives and the Roadmap's Digital Services pillar.

c) Stronger pathways for local innovation and enterprise growth

The strategy brings research, entrepreneurship and commercialization into a connected agenda. It provides open data, government uptake of local solutions, innovation support and a big data/AI sandbox. Its measures include investment, revenue, employment and savings from locally developed innovations.

This gives Uganda's innovation ecosystem a role across the journey from idea to useful product. We see scope for enterprises to develop solutions for priority sectors, build specialist capabilities and establish commercial partnerships.

The connection to NDP IV and the Roadmap is direct. Research, incubation and market development can work together to support technologies that reach users and become sustainable businesses.

d) Trust that supports a stronger digital economy

The strategy's principles and initiatives embed security, privacy, ethical use, and accountability. Its governance agenda also includes appropriate access, secure cross-border transfers, and collaboration.

Trust supports adoption. Consumers, enterprises and investment partners need confidence in how information is handled. For AI-enabled services, that confidence grows when organizations understand their data and can explain the safeguards surrounding consequential decisions.

We regard this as an economic strength. Reliable information practices support lasting partnerships and sustained participation in digital services across Uganda's growth sectors.

e) Skills and inclusion that widen participation

The strategy addresses data literacy, advanced technical skills, leadership commitment and a culture of evidence-based decision-making. It recognizes the participation needs of women, youth, persons with disabilities, local-language users and other groups.

We see opportunities to expand skilled work and improve management decisions while making services useful to more people and enterprises. This complements NDP IV's emphasis on specialized science, technology and innovation skills.

Advanced expertise matters. So does broad participation. Building both will help Uganda extend the benefits of transformation across the economy.

PART II

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENTERPRISE LEADERS

The strategy gives CEOs, CIOs, CTOs, and digital transformation providers a common direction to strengthen their organizations. The following five implications translate that direction into leadership priorities. They combine action with a clear focus on business and service outcomes.

a) Strengthen business ownership of data

The strategy provides for institutional policies, defined responsibilities, common standards and stronger quality monitoring. It also promotes leadership commitment across government, business and civil society.

At enterprise level, we recommend clear business ownership of the information that supports important decisions and services. When customer, supplier or asset records differ, business leaders should agree which information to rely on and who maintains it. Technology teams can then support those decisions through appropriate systems and controls.

Keep responsibility practical. Business leaders should own the quality and use of critical information, supported by teams that maintain it. The CIO or CTO should provide technology, with security, privacy and legal teams advising on safeguards. Existing management and risk structures can provide oversight.

We advise enterprises to start where better information would create the greatest benefit.

b) Align investment with business and service outcomes

The strategy estimates five-year resource requirements of UGX 1,662.6 billion across governance, infrastructure, utilization, people and innovation. Its financing plan identifies roles for government, development partners, the private sector, and data-service revenue.

For enterprises, the opportunity is to connect investment with a defined improvement. We recommend identifying an accountable benefit owner and a sustainable operating model for each initiative. Business cases should include integration, skills, security, and ongoing support alongside the initial purchase.

Organizations can strengthen internal quality and staff capabilities now. Investments involving national platforms, external datasets or innovation support can follow as the relevant arrangements become available. Planning should confirm access, funding, and operational readiness for the initiative.

Providers have a clear opportunity to demonstrate value. Measurable improvements in productivity, service quality or revenue make the investment case more compelling and give buyers a sound basis for assessing delivery.

c) Design interoperability around a better transaction

The strategy provides for an enterprise-sharing framework, national integration infrastructure, public datasets, and marketplaces subject to ethical and privacy standards. Registries and use cases in the ATMS sectors are also priorities.

For enterprises in agro-industrialization, tourism, mineral-based development, and science, technology and innovation, these provisions create opportunities to turn data into business value. As relevant datasets become available, enterprises could combine them with their own information to improve production planning, understand markets and guide investment.

Data marketplaces also open new commercial channels for enterprises that develop analytics, sector insights and other value-added services. Technology firms, researchers and innovators can build solutions that help ATMS businesses improve forecasting, coordinate supply chains and identify emerging demand.

We encourage enterprises to identify the datasets most relevant to their growth plans and explore partnerships that turn authorized access into useful products and services. These opportunities will develop as datasets, access conditions and marketplace arrangements become available.

d) Make trusted access part of service design

The strategy combines greater utilization with security, classification, residency measures and compliant cross-border transfers. These provisions support appropriate access and confidence in how information is handled.

We recommend agreeing terms of use at the beginning. What information may be used? Who may access it, for what purpose and for how long? Sharing arrangements should also cover correction, onward disclosure and incident responsibilities, supported by access controls, monitoring and recovery.

Cloud and regional services bring additional planning considerations. Leaders should understand where information is stored, accessed and supported. For the public sector, the strategy provides data centre and cloud infrastructure. Its implementation plan targets two Tier IV data centres with the National Information Technology Authority – Uganda (NITA-U)

supporting delivery. The strategy also recognizes that government and private-sector players can establish data centres serving different stakeholders.

For private-sector organizations considering overseas cloud or regional services, compliance should form part of the investment decision. Under the Data Protection and Privacy Act, 2019, storing or processing personal data outside Uganda requires equivalent legal protections in the destination country or prior consent from the individual. These requirements also apply to public-sector organizations handling personal data.

e) Make data readiness part of responsible AI adoption

The strategy supports AI alongside stronger quality, registries, analytics skills and infrastructure. These capabilities provide a foundation for AI initiatives connected to national development priorities.

We recommend including data readiness in investment decisions. Leaders should understand the origin and permitted use of information, its accuracy and relevance, and the arrangements for reviewing outputs and monitoring performance.

These considerations should be part of the AI program from the outset. They help organizations move from experimentation to dependable, sustainable services.

PART III

INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Innovation deserves focused attention. The strategy combines access to information, research, local solutions, commercialization support, and the proposed sandbox. Together, these will help innovators and enterprises develop offerings for Uganda's productive sectors, complementing NDP IV and the Roadmap's Innovation and Entrepreneurship pillar.

a) Innovators and enterprises should prepare to benefit from the big data/AI sandbox

The strategy calls for regulatory sandboxes to facilitate innovative data use. It specifically provides for a big data/AI sandbox to support compliance with Uganda's data laws and the development of best practices. Its resource plan describes a virtual environment for AI, data, and application programming interfaces, along with awareness-raising and stakeholder engagement.

We see a prospective bridge between a promising concept and a solution ready for responsible deployment. Depending on operating arrangements, the sandbox could support experimentation, demonstrate safeguards, and provide practical learning on compliance.

Local entrepreneurs, startups and innovators are the clearest intended beneficiaries of the surrounding commercialisation programme. Established enterprises and providers can also prepare relevant use cases for consideration as participation arrangements develop. The strategy does not specify admission criteria, so eligibility and access will depend on those arrangements.

b) Connect research with enterprise demand

The opportunity extends beyond the sandbox.

On a positive note, the strategy provides for government uptake of local solutions, research access to data, intellectual-property protection, entrepreneurship support and commercialization. This complements NDP IV's idea-to-market emphasis and the Roadmap's support for research and startup incubation.

We encourage enterprises to clearly define their demand. Identify a production or service problem, work with innovators or researchers where appropriate, and define what a successful solution would demonstrate.

Clear participation rules, intellectual-property arrangements and pathways from testing to deployment will support these partnerships as implementation progresses. The aim is to connect technical capability with sustainable businesses, skilled jobs, and locally created solutions.

PART IV

EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY'S SHARED DIRECTION ON DIGITAL INTEROPERABILITY

The National Data Strategy strengthens alignment with the regional emphasis on connected services, trusted exchange and digital trade. This part considers that common direction and its significance for enterprises serving East African markets.

a) Shared foundations for regional services

East African Community (EAC) initiatives place interoperability within the ambition for a regional single digital market. The Eastern Africa Regional Digital Integration Project focuses on strengthening connectivity, harmonising data governance, enhancing cybersecurity, improving payment interoperability and supporting cross-border e-commerce. Regional discussions have also emphasised coordinated approaches to interoperable services and trusted digital ecosystems.

Uganda's provisions on integration, standards, public datasets, regional protocols and compliant flows reflect this direction. They provide a foundation for participation in a more connected regional digital economy.

Uganda has made these priorities part of an explicit agenda spanning public- and private-sector data. National implementation and regional cooperation can reinforce each other as permissions, standards and operational connections develop. This shared direction supports digital transformation.

Potential opportunities include coordinated supply chains, regional digital products, payment-enabled commerce and simpler verification. Each depends on applicable permissions, commercial terms and operational connections.

PART VI

LOOKING AHEAD

DLCGA welcomes the direction established by the National Data Strategy. We look forward to its translation into practical opportunities for citizens, enterprises and public institutions. The following five connected outcomes shape our expectations.

a) More connected and accessible services

We look forward to trusted exchange making everyday transactions simpler and services easier to navigate. Information reuse should become more dependable, with benefits visible to users across different locations, abilities and circumstances. This would advance NDP IV's service ambitions and the Roadmap.

b) Data-led productivity in Uganda's growth sectors

We look forward to applications in agro-industrialization, tourism, mineral-based development and science, technology and innovation. Stronger coordination and better-informed investment will show how data supports Uganda's longer-term tenfold growth ambition.

c) A stronger market for Ugandan innovation

We look forward to innovators accessing useful information, participating in the sandbox as arrangements are established, and developing solutions that progress towards commercial use. Partnerships among enterprises, researchers and implementing institutions will help turn ideas into sustainable businesses and skilled jobs.

d) Confident and responsible AI adoption

We look forward to organizations, especially Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies,s combining stronger data foundations with clear ownership, appropriate safeguards and capable teams. This will support services with clear benefits, monitored performance, and users confident in how it's trusted.

e) Deeper collaboration and wider participation

We look forward to cooperation among government, industry, academia, and civil society, along with growing skills and opportunities for women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other communities. We also look forward to Ugandan enterprises contributing to the EAC's increasingly connected digital economy.

The next five years offer an opportunity to make data a visible contributor to better services, productive enterprises and inclusive growth. Ultimately, we look forward to national coordination and enterprise initiatives reinforcing each other as Uganda builds the capabilities required for its wider economic transformation.

ABOUT US

The Digital Leadership and Cyber Governance Association is a professional platform committed to advancing digital transformation, cybersecurity, privacy, digital resilience, and inclusion.

Through partnerships, thought leadership, capacity building, public awareness initiatives, and professional engagement, the Association strengthens cyber governance culture and supports a safer digital ecosystem for institutions and communities.