When my laptop was knocked off a table, I became part of majority of Africans without internet access. My files, work, ability to reach the digital community all vanished in an instant. The challenges and potential financial outlay for getting myself back to where I was moments before in my rural Kenyan setting suddenly loomed over me. While suppressing my panic, I resigned to the patience of my continent. Given the space to experience powerlessness to engage with the world in a way I had been accustomed to helped me experience how technology shapes what is possible. I revisited the fact that my privilege up until that moment was not normal for many others.

It is clear to me that development of digital economy can transform vital sectors finance, education, health, agriculture, transport, environment and therefore should be central to European-African partnership. Given the circumstances around Africa, it's clear that both sides can benefit from this focus, and this shouldn't be approached as 'business as usual'.

My first order of business in my above-mentioned was restoring connectivity. I bought data for my phone. Convenient enough for me, yet most have either basic or no access to internet because of cost or lack of infrastructure, as large service providers limit their scope to profitable regions. As such, we need to enable underserved regions to take ownership through innovations like community mesh networks, which are already present in parts of Europe and scaling this throughout Africa while reducing instructive issues in Europe.

With internet I not only had access to the world, but I could utilize digital financial services. Africa has the highest usage rate of e-money in the world owing to lack of access to traditional financial services but needs further expansion for wider financial inclusion to help families and small business generate income, manage cash flow, invest in opportunities, and work their way out of poverty. Approaching this in a data and community-centric way could reap benefits not just for Africa, but for the unbanked around Europe, and create interoperability innovations in services between the continents.

Now connected to my network, I could crowdsource options to remedy my situation. This knowledge is not all that common in my area, and the value of such technical literacy is far from the only education that an expanded digital economy could provide. I took advantage of educational opportunities online, including currently taking a short course with the Oxford School of Climate Change. While people like myself experience life-changing horizon expansion online, cultural exchange cuts both ways, global north can benefit from the perspectives of people like me to whom environmentalism is a fundamental matter of livelihood as a farmer. Further, the type of indigenous wisdom and community connection that is often bemoaned as lost in the industrialized world and vital for a just future for all could likewise be developed in similar forums and shared between continents.

My initiative, The Polly Foundation, is engaged in community education with a focus on agriculture. I know the digital economy could coordinate efficient payment and shared transport of crops for small farmers in a way yet to be fully utilized in Europe, and spread accessibility to environmentally-friendly agro-practices.

Of course, digitization also holds huge potential for modernizing and driving down costs of health care, as well as for a new era of citizen participation in and transparency of government

and associated services. It could even ameliorate migration and visa issues between our continents, as the triangulation needed for vetting applicants can be sped up and strengthened, leading to positive multipliers all around.

My computer is not yet destined to be e-waste, as only the screen is lost but all my work is intact on the hard drive. Yet any digital economy partnership must take stock of the fact that many of the key raw materials used in computer production come from Africa, and it's also the final resting place for a massive amount of e-waste. There must be a more developed economic, social, and environmental justice component to the world's digital transformation. Africa needs to have greater sovereignty over its own resources, the capability to manufacture and repair the electronic components necessary for the transformation outlined here, and greater agency in protecting its environment and its people from the toxicity of recent disposal practices.

In the era of climate change and COVID, the interconnectedness of the world is more apparent; what happens in one place can affect the entire globe. Therefore a renewed partnership between Europe and Africa focusing on digital economy must capitalize on existing strengths, conscientiously address challenges and exhibit visionary communality.

Patience and humility are also highly recommended which I write partly to remind myself as I hook up a TV screen to use my mangled laptop until a better solution presents itself.