Boosting the Tech Sector in Burundi and Cameroon: Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

Executive Summary

This article offers a comparative analysis of the technology sector in Burundi and Cameroon, highlighting opportunities, challenges, and prospects. Both countries benefit from a large, digitally connected youth population, rapid adoption of mobile money, and the opportunity offered by the AfCFTA to expand digital markets. However, structural constraints limit their potential: insufficient funding for startups, irregular access to electricity, weak internet connectivity, and incomplete infrastructure. Cameroon has a more mature ecosystem, while Burundi needs to strengthen its regulatory framework and diversify its operators.

Authors

HAIWANG DJAMO
National Coordinator, CEPI.

Henri Kouam
Executive Director

ELISHAMMAH NYABA
Research Analyst, CEPI.

BARAKANA GUY EUDÈS
Co-founder, Free Tech Institute.

ADVAXE NDAYISENGA
Co-founder and Director of Information.
Free Tech Institute

HENRI KOUAM FOUNDATION

Table of Contents

Introduction

Burundi and Cameroon, two African countries undergoing rapid digital transformation, illustrate both the promises and challenges of technological development on the continent. Located in East Africa, Burundi is a small, landlocked country of approximately 13 million inhabitants. Over 60% of its population is under 25, making it a decidedly young nation. Despite this potential, its technological ecosystem remains fragile due to poor connectivity and inadequate infrastructure. Cameroon, the largest economy in Central Africa with nearly 28 million inhabitants, benefits from a more structured network and increasing investment in electricity and submarine cables. Nevertheless, the country continues to face persistent challenges related to financing, regulation, and effective market access.

In this context, technology and digital innovation are emerging as true drivers of economic and social development. By 2025, Africa has nearly 1.4 billion inhabitants and more than 600 million internet users (Worldometters, 2025). The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) thus offers startups a single continental market, reducing the costs of importing technological equipment and harmonizing the regulatory framework for digital trade and data protection.

This article offers a comparative analysis of the technology sector in Burundi and Cameroon. ***Section 1*** examines the points of convergence between the two countries, including youth as a driver of innovation, the rapid adoption of mobile money, and common obstacles related to finance, energy, and connectivity. ***Section 2*** highlights the divergences by analyzing the gaps in infrastructure, startup ecosystems, regulatory framework, and public policies. Finally, in the ***Section 3,*** policy recommendations tailored to each context are proposed to stimulate technological development and take advantage of the opportunities offered by the AfCFTA.

Section I. Convergences: Common Factors of Dynamism and Blockage

1. Demographic advantage: a majority of young and connected people

Burundi and Cameroon both benefit from a particularly favorable age pyramid: over 60% of their population is under 25. This youth represents significant potential for innovation and entrepreneurship, but the reality is that its distribution remains uneven. Urban areas are progressing faster than rural areas, where access to the internet and technology remains limited. Even in the most privileged communities, this potential is hampered by persistent structural challenges, particularly regarding connectivity and infrastructure. It is important to emphasize, however, that youth is only an asset if it is accompanied by sustained investment in human capital development, especially education and healthcare. A young but under-educated population, on the contrary, risks becoming an obstacle to development.

2. Rapid adoption of mobile money: a driver of inclusion and innovation

Burundi and Cameroon are experiencing rapid adoption of mobile money, which is becoming a powerful driver of financial inclusion and innovation. In Burundi, 55% of the population, or more than 7 million people, use services such as Lumicash, Ecocash, or Bancobu e-noti. This dynamism partially compensates for low internet coverage (23%) and insufficient infrastructure by facilitating payments, savings, and access to digital services, even in rural areas. In Cameroon, Orange Money and MTN Mobile Money dominate the market, particularly in the informal sector, supporting e-commerce, money transfers, and microfinance despite irregular access to electricity and high internet costs.

In both countries, mobile money is paving the way for fintech innovations, online education, and digital health. It strengthens the participation of women and youth and prepares for integration into the AfCFTA by reducing payment barriers and expanding markets for local startups. However, the impact on regional integration remains limited by a low level of interoperability: transactions between different platforms, and from one country to another, remain difficult in Central Africa.

3. Shared weaknesses: financing, energy, and unequal connectivity

Burundi and Cameroon face three major obstacles that are slowing their technological development. First, the lack of funding for startups (Meungwe, 2025). In Burundi, venture capital is very limited and startups lack robust incubators. In Cameroon, even with networks like Cameroon Angels Network, most startups fail to raise the amounts observed in Kenya or Nigeria, because there are not enough public funds or guarantees to reassure investors (Mua & Kouam, 2025).

Next, electricity is a problem: in Burundi, power outages are frequent and affect the entire country. In Cameroon, despite over 400 billion FCFA invested and significant hydroelectric potential, load shedding remains a daily occurrence, hindering data hosting and continuous internet use. Finally, internet access is expensive and incomplete: only 23% of Burundians have internet access, 4G coverage is still limited, and 5G remains in the planning stages since the end of 2023 while in Cameroon, barely 16% of the capacity of submarine cables is used and rural areas remain poorly served.

4. The AfCFTA as a shared opportunity

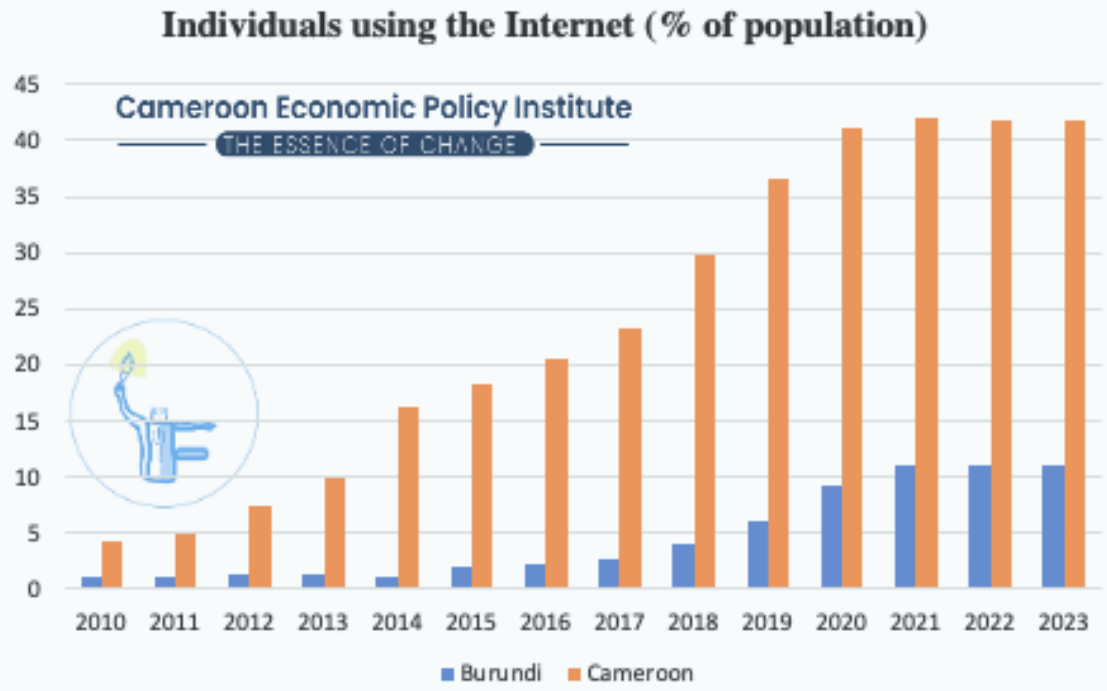
The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offers a shared vision for overcoming these constraints. By facilitating the movement of goods, services, and data, it expands potential markets for Burundian and Cameroonian startups. The gradual harmonization of regulations, the reduction of tariffs on technological equipment, and the establishment of common cybersecurity standards can lower access costs and stimulate cross-border investment. For both countries, the AfCFTA thus represents a catalyst capable of transforming local dynamism into regional competitiveness.

Section II. Divergences: Ecosystem Trajectories and Differences

1. Infrastructure and energy

Cameroon has achieved progress to achieve better internet connectivity to support development. For example, the deployment of WACS submarine cables (to increase connectivity with the rest of West Africa) and the SAT3 cable (to improve connectivity with Europe). Furthermore, over the past decade, ENOE (Énergie du Cameroun), the state-owned electricity company (formerly a public-private partnership), has invested approximately 400 billion CFA francs (US$710 million) to increase the country's electricity supply (Africa First Club, 2025; Kouam et al., 2025). Despite these advances, access remains a major problem. According to this report, Cameroon uses only 16% of its submarine cable capacity for internet connectivity (Kouam, 2020; Mua et al., 2025). This is partly due to the lack of internet access in areas such as rural communities. Furthermore, despite the enormous potential of hydropower, power outages remain a major concern for most residents. This significantly limits technological growth.

Conversely, Burundi is starting from a much lower but progressive level. Indeed, the Burundian executive, through the ARCT (Telecommunications Regulatory and Control Authority), announced in the second quarter of 2024. The statistics also revealing significant growth in the adoption of digital services in Burundi. Mobile phone penetration has reached 60.98%, with a total of nearly 8 million active subscriptions. Meanwhile, access to ***the internet continues its growth, reaching a rate of 23.36%*** thanks to over 3 million mobile internet subscriptions. Mobile financial services are also joining its peers, with a ***penetration rate of 55%,*** This represents more than 7 million registered users. These figures reflect a growing enthusiasm among the Burundian population for information and communication technologies, although efforts are still needed to improve coverage and digital inclusion nationwide.



2. Startup Ecosystem

Cameroon has seen the emergence of a genuine entrepreneurial ecosystem, embodied by hubs such as Silicon Mountain in Buea, ActivSpaces in Douala, and KmerTech. These hubs offer coworking spaces, training, and a minimum level of support, even if access to venture capital remains limited (Mua, Kouam & Kouam, 2025). The country also attracts international competitions (Seedstars, Orange Fab), which stimulates local innovation. Furthermore, start-ups are subject to various incentives and initiatives that have allowed a few start-ups like Agrix Tech, Tagus Drones and Buyam to emerge as important actors providing agriculture and E-commerce services.

Burundi, on the other hand, has a still-developing ecosystem. Unlike neighboring countries such as Kenya or Rwanda, Burundi does not yet have large-scale regional technology hubs. Its technological landscape has several weaknesses: rural areas remain exposed to unstable and expensive connectivity; a digital divide limits access to smartphones, computers, and digital services for the small urban minority; and, despite the growing global internet community, young Burundians lack the skills needed for web development, cybersecurity, cloud computing, and complex systems management.

3. Regulatory framework and governance

Cameroon has adopted a set of laws aimed at securing, regulating, and boosting the digital economy. Law No. 2010/012 on cybersecurity regulations require companies to implement mechanisms for protecting personal data and securing information systems, which is essential for user trust (Kouam, 2020). Law No. 2010/021 on e-commerce recognizes the legal value of electronic signatures and contracts and provides for the creation of a national platform for aggregating electronic communications to strengthen the interoperability and security of online transactions (Mua & Kouam, 2025). In addition to these provisions, the 2017 and 2019 finance laws respectively introduced a customs tariff on imported software ***and a 19.25% tax*** on goods and services sold online via local or foreign platforms, a measure strengthened in 2020 to broaden the tax base. These instruments reflect a desire for regulation and modernization, but their scope remains limited by persistent structural constraints such as the high cost of internet access, frequent power outages, and a shortage of specialized skills, which reduce the overall competitiveness of the digital ecosystem.

Burundi has a more rudimentary regulatory framework. Digital-specific laws are still under development, and the sector remains dominated by a telecom monopoly that limits competition and hinders price reductions. Only three operators control access to internet and mobile telephony resources, resulting in high prices for insufficient quality, a lack of innovation and improvement in offerings due to insufficient competition, and local dependence on centralized infrastructure, which is vulnerable to sudden outages.

The lack of a clear framework for data protection and electronic payments increases the legal risk for foreign investors. Burundi still needs to strengthen its legal frameworks regarding cybersecurity, data protection, and e-commerce. Furthermore, although the education system is evolving, it remains poorly aligned with the needs of the digital market, and many young talents lack specialized training that meets the demands of today's tech jobs.

4. Public policies and taxation

Policies supporting the technology sector in Cameroon are primarily structured around the General Tax Code and various finance laws, with the aim of creating an environment conducive to the emergence of startups and innovation. The General Tax Code provides substantial incentives. During the incubation phase, startups are exempt from duties, taxes, and fees (excluding social security contributions) for five years and benefit, over a total period of ten years, from a 15% reduction in corporate income tax, a 10% reduction in capital gains tax, and a 30% tax credit for research and development. Recent finance laws supplement this system: the 2024 law restricts the deductibility of certain payments made to foreign service providers and imposes a 5% tax on work visas for experts, in order to increase tax revenue but at the risk of hindering skills transfer, while the 2025 Finance Law grants subsidies and tax reductions on equipment related to renewable energy and clean technologies, thus supporting the spread of green solutions.

These measures reflect the desire to modernize the digital economy and stimulate investment, but they mainly benefit formal businesses, leaving a large segment of informal actors on the sidelines and remaining dependent on infrastructure improvements and human capital training.

Burundi has undertaken some initiatives to support its technology sector, but these remain largely declaratory and insufficiently implemented. The government has adopted national strategies for digitalization and digital economy development aimed at modernizing public services and encouraging innovation, but their implementation is hampered by inadequate monitoring, bureaucratic delays, and a lack of transparency. The Telecommunications Regulatory and Control Authority (ARCT) plays a role by collecting and publishing data on telephony, internet, and mobile money, thus providing a basis for future digital inclusion policies.

Section III. Policy Recommendations

- **Modernize and strengthen infrastructure:** We need to increase hydroelectric capacity and ensure stable broadband internet coverage in major cities. To achieve this, we will need to rehabilitate hydroelectric power plants, maintain existing submarine cables, and develop public-private partnerships for the deployment of digital infrastructure.

- **Knowledge sharing:** We have seen how knowledge sharing among diplomatic bodies in the Global North, such as NATO, has driven innovation and technological advancements. It is important for countries like Cameroon and Burundi to strengthen South-South cooperation to share knowledge and resources in order to achieve further technological progress. This also has the potential to lead to greater regional integration, a key factor in boosting the technology sector.

- Facilitating market access through networking, export and participation programs at regional and continental trade fairs, particularly through the AfCFTA.

- **Simplify administrative procedures** for tech companies, including business creation, patent registration and digital tax compliance.

- **Promoting Cameroonian startups on the continental market** through support and subsidy programs for digital export.

- Further reduce barriers to importing technological equipment to facilitate access to the infrastructure and tools needed for digital development.

- **Strengthening the protection of property rights:** Data must be treated as property rights to promote security and integrity while fostering innovation. Current regulations remain merely indicative and do not provide sufficient direct support for job creation. The failure to localize data deprives the Cameroonian economy of secondary benefits.

- **Digitizing education:** We need to stop teaching computer science solely through books. Hands-on training will prepare the next generation of tech entrepreneurs to design local solutions tailored to Cameroon's needs.

- **Accelerating the adoption of the Start-up Act:** Policymakers should finalize this legal framework to support startups, facilitate access to financing beyond venture capital, and offer

new incentives for individual entrepreneurs. We will write to the ministers and directors in charge of this to expedite the process.

- **Require verifiable local content:** A local content rate of 40 to 60% for technological products and services would guarantee real benefits for the Cameroonian economy, which is currently dependent on massive imports.

- **Reduce internet costs:** Regulatory authorities and communications companies should define a clear roadmap with a timetable for lowering tariffs, which would stimulate entrepreneurship and accelerate the development of the sector.

Conclusion

A comparative analysis of the technology sector in Burundi and Cameroon reveals a dual pattern of convergences and divergences, illustrating the diversity of digital development trajectories in Africa. Both countries share common advantages: a large, connected youth population, the growing adoption of mobile money, and the opportunity offered by the AfCFTA to expand markets and stimulate innovation. However, these potentials remain hampered by persistent structural constraints, including insufficient funding for startups, limited access to electricity and the internet, and incomplete digital infrastructure.

The differences between the two countries are also striking. Cameroon has a more mature ecosystem, with technology hubs, a structured regulatory framework and incentive-based tax policies, but still faces limitations in access to rural areas and the reliability of infrastructure.
Burundi, despite a growing enthusiasm for technology, is struggling to structure its digital market, diversify its operators, and secure foreign investment. To transform these challenges into opportunities, an integrated and contextualized approach will maximize the benefits of the AfCFTA and position these countries as competitive players in the African digital economy.

Reference List

1. Africa First Club (AFC). (2025). Electricity: Eneo invests XAF 400 billion over a decade.https://www.africafirstclub.com/read/electricity-eneo-invests-xaf-400-billion-over-a-decade#:~:text=Eneo%20invested%20400%20billion%20FCFA%20between%202014,to%20modernize%20and%20extend%20the%20distribution%20network
2. ARCT. (2023). Roadmap for the deployment of fifth generation mobile (5G) in Burundi.https://arct.gov.bi/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Top-fin-Feuille-de-route-5g-du-BDI_version-final-1.pdf
3. ARCT. (2024). Market observatory for voice, SMS, Internet and mobile financial services in Burundi – second quarter 2024.https://arct.gov.bi/2024/11/20/observatoire-du-marche-des-services-de-communications-voix-sms-internet-et-services-financiers-mobiles-au-burundi-deuxieme-trimestre-2024/
4. Dayspring Law. (nd). Tax Incentives for Innovative Startups in the Digital Industry. Dayspring Law.https://dayspringlaw.com/tax-incentives-for-innovative-startups-in-the-digital-industry/
5. Kingsly, K., CFI, C., Engineer, F., & Henri, K. (2020). Coronavirus and carbon transition for developing economies. SSRN.
6. Kouam, H. (2020). The Interplay of ICT, Innovation, Per capita GDP and Chinese Tech Policy. International Journal of Applied Business and Management Studies, 5(2).
7. Kouam, Henri, A systematic review of Knowledge spillovers from renewable energy technologies (Rets) in Cameroon. (January 26, 2021). Available at SSRN:https://ssrn.com/abstract=3773412goldhttp://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3773412
8. Kouam, Henri, Do Central Banks' repo Transactions and Liquidity Infusions Increase Financial Stability Risks? A Case for Circular Monetary Economics (December 19, 2018). International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS), Vol. 4; issue 2. Pg. 337-386 (July 2020), Available at SSRN:https://ssrn.com/abstract=3677529goldhttp://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3677529
9. Law No. 2010/012 of December 21, 2010 relating to cybersecurity and cybercrime in Cameroon.https://www.art.cm/sites/default/files/documents/loi_2010-012_cybersecurite_cybercriminalite.pdf

10. Law No. 2010/021 of 21 December 2010 governing electronic commerce in Cameroon. Government of Cameroon.https://www.minpostel.gov.cm/index.php/en/les-textes/telecoms-tic/lois-telecoms-tic/274-law-no-2010-021-of-21-december-2010-governing-e-commerce-in-cameroon
11. Finance Law 2025. Cameroon.https://minfi.gov.cm/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/expose_DGI.pdf
12. Meungwe, C. F. (2025). Youth-led Entrepreneurship: Harnessing the Potential of Young People to Drive Economic Growth in Cameroon, Nkafu Policy Institute.https://afriquemagazine.com/energy-power-mega-project#:~:text=In%20addition%20to%20its%2043,fund%2025%25%20of%20the%20amount
13. Mua, Kelly Kingsley & Kouam Tamto, Henri, 2025."Industrial Enterprises in Cameroon are preparing for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4ir) – What are the Requirements, Opportunities, and Challenges?,"MPRA Paper124572, University Library of Munich, Germany, revised 07 Mar 2025.https://ideas.repec.org/p/pra/mprapa/124572.html
14. Mua, K.K., Kouam, S., & Kouam, H. (2025). Global Digitalization of Tax Administration: Lessons for Cameroon.
15. Subsea Cables. (2025). Cameroon's Gold Mine Under the Sea: Only 16% of Subsea Capacity in Use.https://www.subseacables.net/reports-and-coverage/cameroons-gold-mine-under-the-sea-only-16-of-subsea-capacity-in-use/
16. TechpointAfrica. (2025). Top African countries for startup funding in 2025: Q2 performance forecast.https://techpoint.africa/guide/top-african-countries-for-startup-funding/
17. The Guardian Post. (2024). CAMTEL Uses digital cooperation to boost sub-regional integration.https://theguardianpostcameroon.com/post/2750/en/camtel-uses-digital-cooperation-boost-sub-regional-integration#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20said%20submarine%20cables%20include,outlined%2C%E2%80%9D%20Achidi%20Judith%20added
18. Worldometer. (2025). Population of Africa (2025).https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/africa-population/
19. Mua, K.K. & Kouam, H. (2025). Industrial Enterprises in Cameroon are Preparing for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4ir) – What are the Requirments, Opportunities and Challenges?https://aytinpublications.com/Open-Access-Journal-of-Business-and-Economics/Files/v1-i2/BE010202.pdf
20. Mua, K.K. & Kouam, S. & Kouam, H. (2025).Global Digitalization of Tax Administration: Lessons for Cameroon, MPRA Paper124571, University Library of Munich, Germany, revised 25 Feb 2025.

Who are the authors?

ADVAXE NDAYISENGA is the Co-founder and Chief Information Officer at the Free Tech Institute, Advaxe oversees the organization's technical operations, leads web development, and guides digital strategies. He plays a key role in integrating emerging technologies such as blockchain, decentralized payments, and artificial intelligence into the Institute's educational and technological projects.

BARAKANA GUY EUDÈS is a young social entrepreneur passionate about leadership and digital innovation. Convinced that digital tools are essential catalysts for sustainable development, he actively works to democratize their access and responsible use. As co-founder of the Free TECH Institute and the organization's director of operations, he oversees programs aimed at promoting decentralized technology and finance, as well as technological innovation for social progress. A fervent advocate of Bitcoin as a tool for economic empowerment, he uses his expertise to build a global network of dedicated leaders while actively contributing to the development of his community.

ELISHAMMAH NYABA is a research analyst at the Cameroon Institute for Economic Policy (CEPI), where he focuses on inclusive finance, entrepreneurship, and public policies for youth empowerment. He holds a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from the American University of Beirut, specializing in finance and entrepreneurship. Before joining CEPI, he worked with several non-governmental organizations in the fields of education, migration, and youth empowerment.

HAIWANG DJAMO Ferdinang is the National Coordinator and Research Analyst at the Cameroon Institute for Economic Policy (CEPI). He was an Africa Liberty Fellow in 2025. At CEPI, he leads research and policy initiatives on trade, economic governance, and climate finance. Holding a Master's degree in Fundamental Private Law, Haiwang has authored several policy briefs on the AfCFTA, trade and gender, and climate adaptation finance. His work focuses on promoting evidence-based policies that foster inclusive growth, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development in Cameroon and across Africa.

HENRI KOUAM is the Founder and Executive Director of the Cameroon Economic Policy Institute (CEPI). He oversees CEPI’s Economic freedom advocacy by leading policy initiatives and policymaker engagement. He consults for international organizations ranging from the European Union, North American Treaty Organization (NATO) and London-based Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). His contributions to two policies win to improve the business environment has been acknowledged policymakers. He advances liberty through policy debates, youth empowerment and climate action with senior policymakers, civil society and international partners.