



## WORLD KISWAHILI LANGUAGE DAY UNLEASHING KISWAHILI'S POTENTIAL IN THE DIGITAL ERA

7 July 2023, 10.00 am – 1.00 pm (EST)  
Conference room 4, UN Headquarters


In November 2021 at its 41st Session in Paris, the General Conference of UNESCO declared July 7th **World Kiswahili Language Day**. By Resolution [41 C/61](#), Member States recognized the critical role played by Kiswahili in promoting cultural diversity, creating awareness, and fostering dialogue among civilizations. The debate that took place at the General Conference invited all stakeholders to celebrate this day, in recognition of the global relevance of Kiswahili as a language of global communication in Africa and beyond.

### Background

Swahili, once a mere island dialect of an African Bantu tongue, has undergone a remarkable transformation to become Africa's most internationally recognized language. Standing alongside a select few languages with over 200 million users, Swahili has firmly established itself on the global linguistic stage. Throughout its two-millennia journey of growth and adaptation, Swahili has been shaped and molded by a diverse array of individuals and communities. Today, it proudly holds the status of an official language within prestigious organizations such as the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the East African Community (EAC).

Looking ahead, the youth in Africa are projected to represent a staggering 42% of the global youth population by 2030. This demographic presents an immense opportunity in the digital era, accompanied by the imperative to promote the widespread usage of the Kiswahili language. Harnessing the demographic dividend offered by Africa's youth becomes a fascinating prospect, particularly in light of the transformative impact of the fourth industrial revolution. The potential lies in empowering the youth and leveraging their capabilities as a catalyst for progress, while simultaneously elevating the prominence of Kiswahili as a language of communication and innovation. By tapping into the energy and digital fluency of Africa's youth, a path can be forged towards inclusive development and bridging the digital divide. This approach ensures that Africa's future is characterized by connectivity, empowerment, and the preservation of its rich cultural heritage.

Kiswahili, recognized as the most widely spoken African language, holds a crucial position among the top 10 languages accepted for use in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) worldwide. Embracing Kiswahili as an ICT language not only ensures broader accessibility but also fosters technological advancements and facilitates global connectivity.



Kiswahili's popularity, ease of learning, recognition, and extensive usage throughout Africa have contributed to its integration into ICT systems across the continent. Software developers, including notable industry leaders like Microsoft and Linux, have recognized the value of incorporating Kiswahili into their platforms and products. By embracing Kiswahili, software developers and ICT stakeholders not only bridge the language gap but also empower African users to access technology in a language that is familiar and meaningful to them. This pioneering step reinforces the value of embracing linguistic diversity and cultural inclusivity in the digital age, fostering advancements in local language adoption in ICT.

Despite ongoing efforts in this domain, significant progress is still needed to effectively integrate Kiswahili into ICT systems. Currently, a substantial number of Kiswahili speakers acquire ICT knowledge through foreign languages they do not fully comprehend, resulting in their limited ability to reap the full benefits of technological advancements. To address this pressing issue, it is imperative to prioritize and emphasize the utilization of Kiswahili in the dissemination and implementation of ICT. This approach actively contributes to the reduction of the digital divide and the narrowing of the gap between those who have access to ICT and those who do not. The integration of Kiswahili into ICT serves as a response to the critical imperative of making technology accessible to a larger population of Kiswahili speakers, fostering inclusivity and ensuring equitable participation in the digital realm.

### Objectives

The second commemoration of the World Kiswahili Language Day under the theme "Unleashing Kiswahili's Potential in the Digital Era" aims to highlight the important role played by Kiswahili as a language of unity, even in the context of the digital landscape. This event will draw attention to how Kiswahili can act as a bridge, connecting diverse communities and facilitating inclusive participation in the digital world. By acknowledging the significance of Kiswahili in the digital era, the objective is also to leverage its power to promote cultural exchange, knowledge sharing, and economic development among Kiswahili speakers worldwide. The commemoration serves as a platform for discussing strategies and initiatives that empower Kiswahili as a vital language for communication, innovation, and digital literacy, ultimately unlocking its full potential in the ever-evolving digital era.

### Event format

The commemoration is organized by the United Republic of Tanzania to the United Nations and UNESCO, in cooperation with the State Members of the Southern African Development Community and East African Community to the UN. The event will take place in person at UN Headquarters in New York, Conference Room 4. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided from Kiswahili to English. The event will also broadcast live at the UN Web TV.

**Kindly RSVP here** [bit.ly/3JZeyd](https://bit.ly/3JZeyd)