

17th Quarterly Regional eConference of AfICTA



AfICTA
Africa ICT Alliance

17th
eConference

AI-Powered SMEs:
Unlocking New Opportunities for Growth

8th April, 2025 10am UTC Virtual

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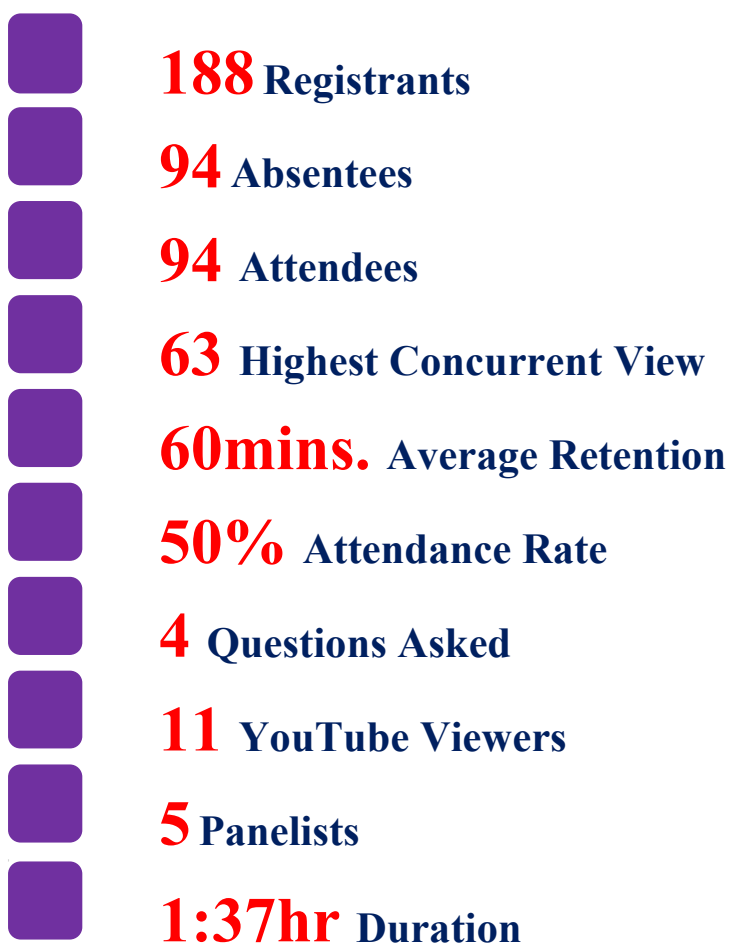
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About the Event:

The African continent, particularly Central Africa is home to a dynamic and expanding community of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), yet many face obstacles in accessing markets, finance, and technology. These challenges limit their growth and competitiveness, making it difficult to scale. However, the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers a transformative opportunity, enabling SMEs to overcome these barriers and unlock new possibilities for expansion.

AI-powered solutions can help SMEs streamline operations, improve customer engagement, and enhance decision-making. Chatbots, for example, provide 24/7 customer support, while machine learning algorithms analyze market trends for data-driven insights. Additionally, AI-driven platforms can simplify access to finance, talent, and new markets, creating a more level playing field for SMEs in the region...

[Read more](#)



General
Statistics

Table 1: Attendance Statistics

| S/N | Description | Details |
|-----|------------------------|---------|
| 1. | Total Viewer | 94 |
| 2 | Max. Concurrent Viewer | 63 |
| 3 | Total Duration | 97mins. |
| 4 | Average Retention | 60mins |

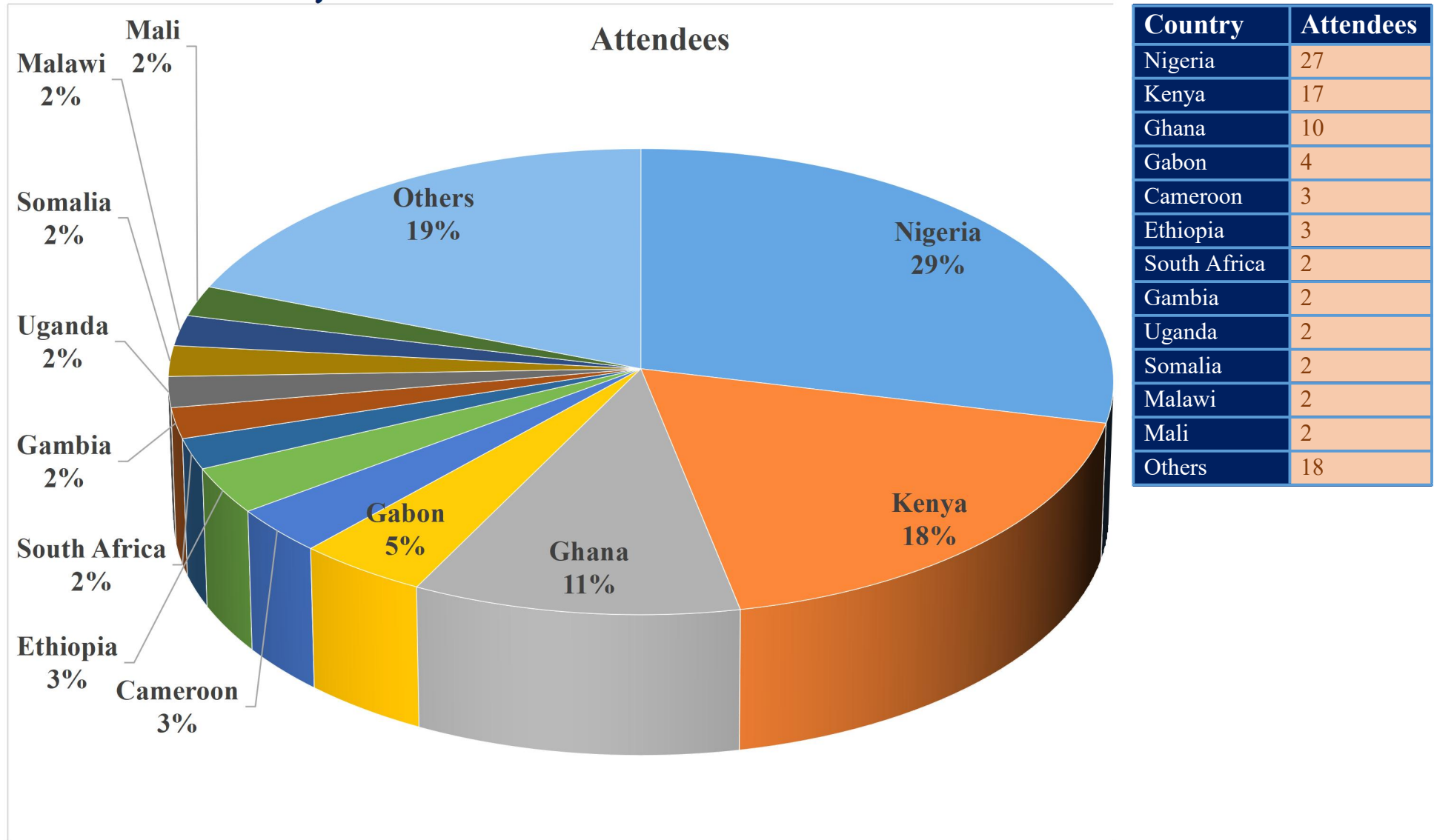
| S/N | Countries | Registered | Attended | Absent |
|-----|------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | Angola | 2 | | 2 |
| 2 | Benin | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 3 | Burkina Faso | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 4 | Cabo Verde | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| 5 | Cameroon | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| 6 | Canada | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 7 | Chad | 3 | | 3 |
| 8 | Congo | 1 | | 1 |
| 9 | Congo DRC | 1 | | 1 |
| 10 | Cote d'Ivoire | 1 | | 1 |
| 11 | Egypt | 5 | 1 | 4 |
| 12 | Equatoria Guinea | 1 | | 1 |
| 13 | Ethiopia | 6 | 3 | 3 |
| 14 | France | 1 | 1 | |
| 15 | Gabon | 14 | 4 | 10 |
| 16 | Gambia | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 17 | Ghana | 16 | 10 | 6 |
| 18 | India | 1 | 1 | |
| 19 | Jamaica | 1 | 1 | |
| 20 | Kenya | 30 | 17 | 13 |
| 21 | Liberia | 1 | | 1 |
| 22 | Malawi | 2 | 2 | |
| 23 | Mali | 2 | 2 | |
| 24 | Mauritius | 1 | 1 | |
| 25 | Namibia | 1 | 1 | |
| 26 | Niger | 1 | 1 | |
| 27 | Nigeria | 54 | 27 | 27 |
| 28 | Rwanda | 1 | | 1 |
| 29 | Senegal | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| 30 | Sierra Leone | 1 | 1 | |
| 31 | Somalia | 2 | 2 | |
| 32 | South Africa | 5 | 2 | 3 |
| 33 | South Sudan | 3 | | 3 |
| 34 | Tanzania | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 35 | Togo | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 36 | Uganda | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 37 | United Kingdom | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 38 | United States | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 39 | Yemen | 1 | 1 | |
| | | 188 | 94 | 94 |

**Table 2:
Represented
Countries**

Table 3: Gender Statistics

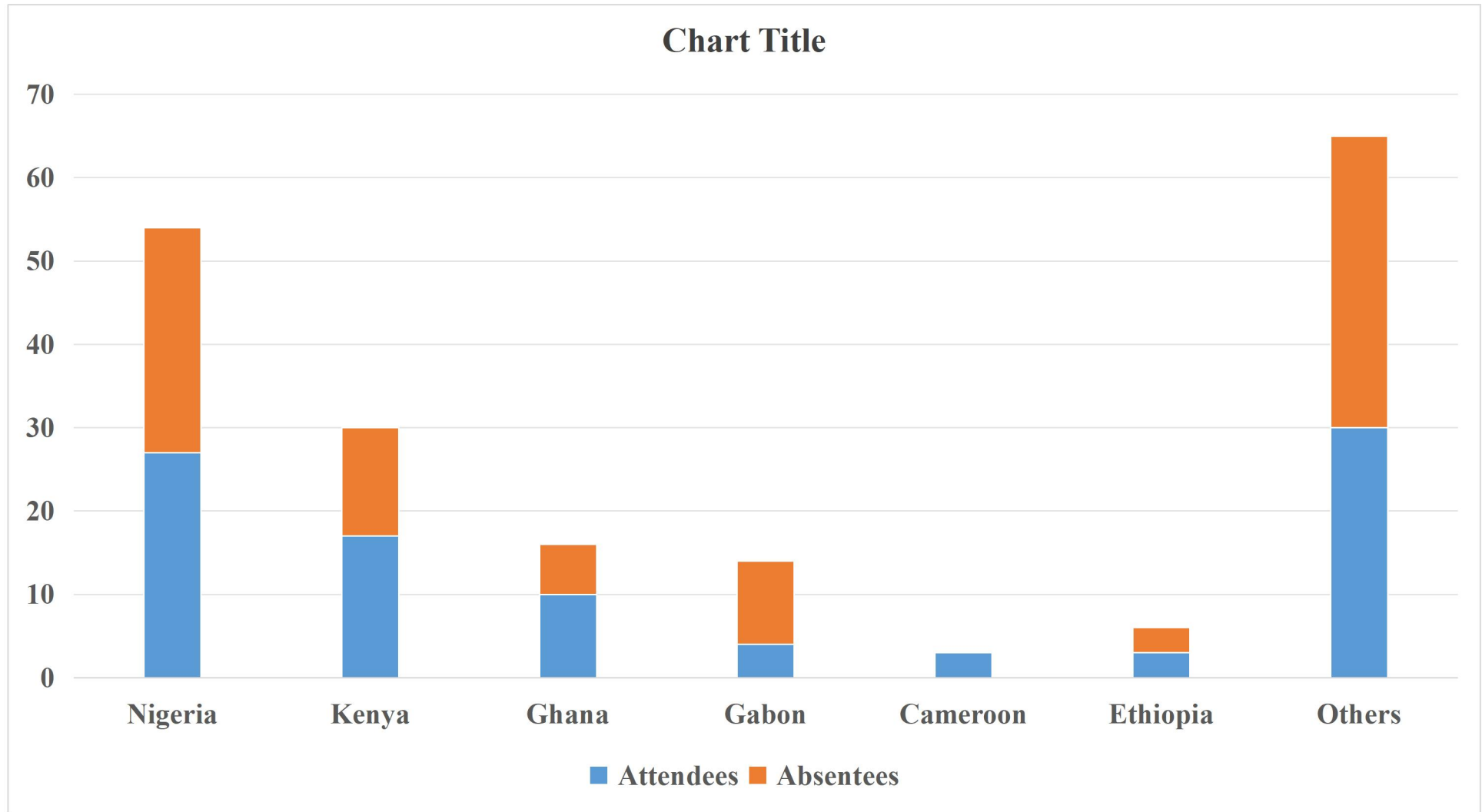
| Gender | Register | Attended | Absent |
|-------------|----------|----------|--------|
| Male | 143 | 72 | 71 |
| Female | 44 | 21 | 23 |
| Undisclosed | 1 | 1 | 0 |

Chart 1: Attendees by Countries



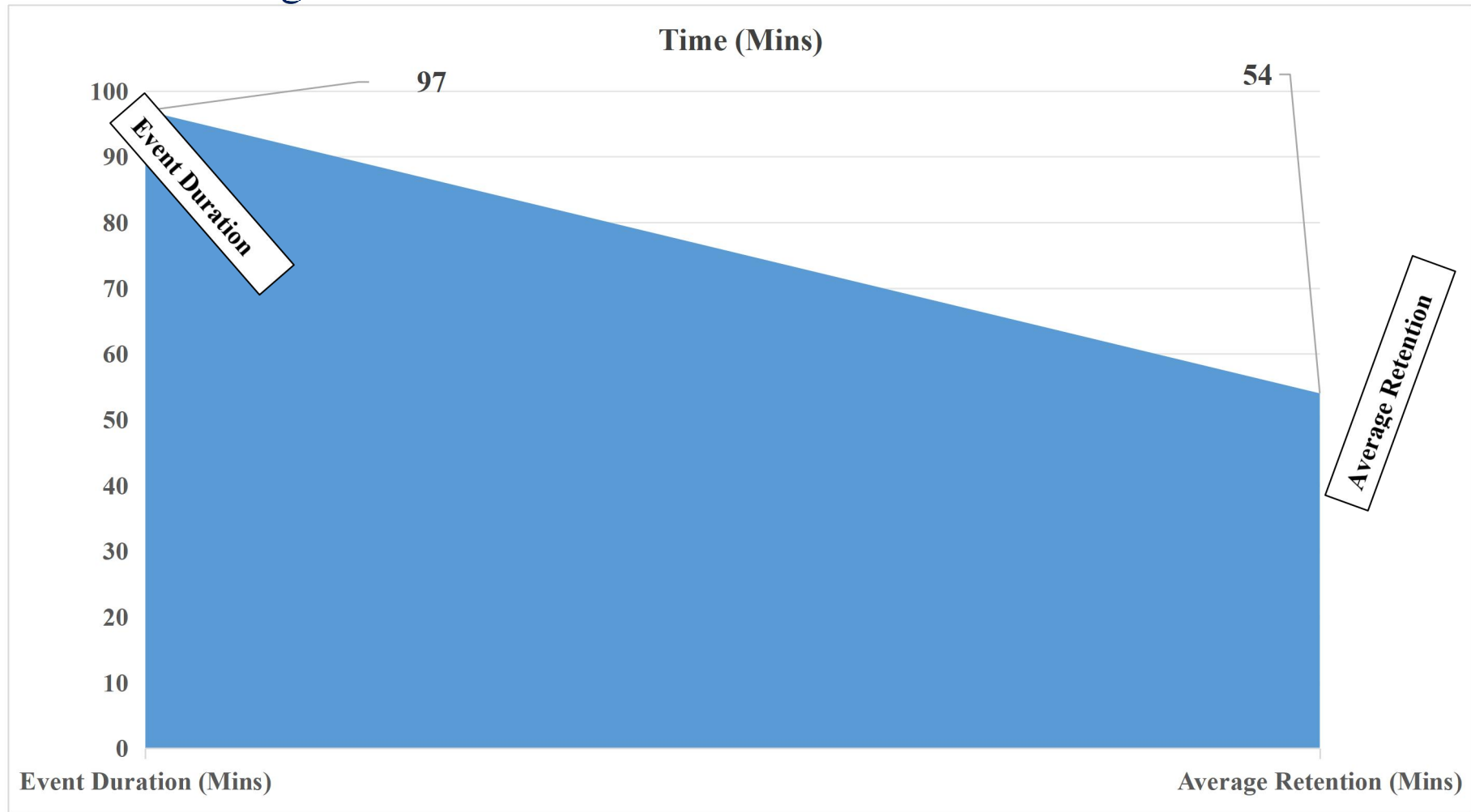
Nigeria had the highest attendance followed by Kenya and Ghana, showing strong regional engagement from West Africa and East Africa

Chart 2: Attendees / Absentees According to Countries



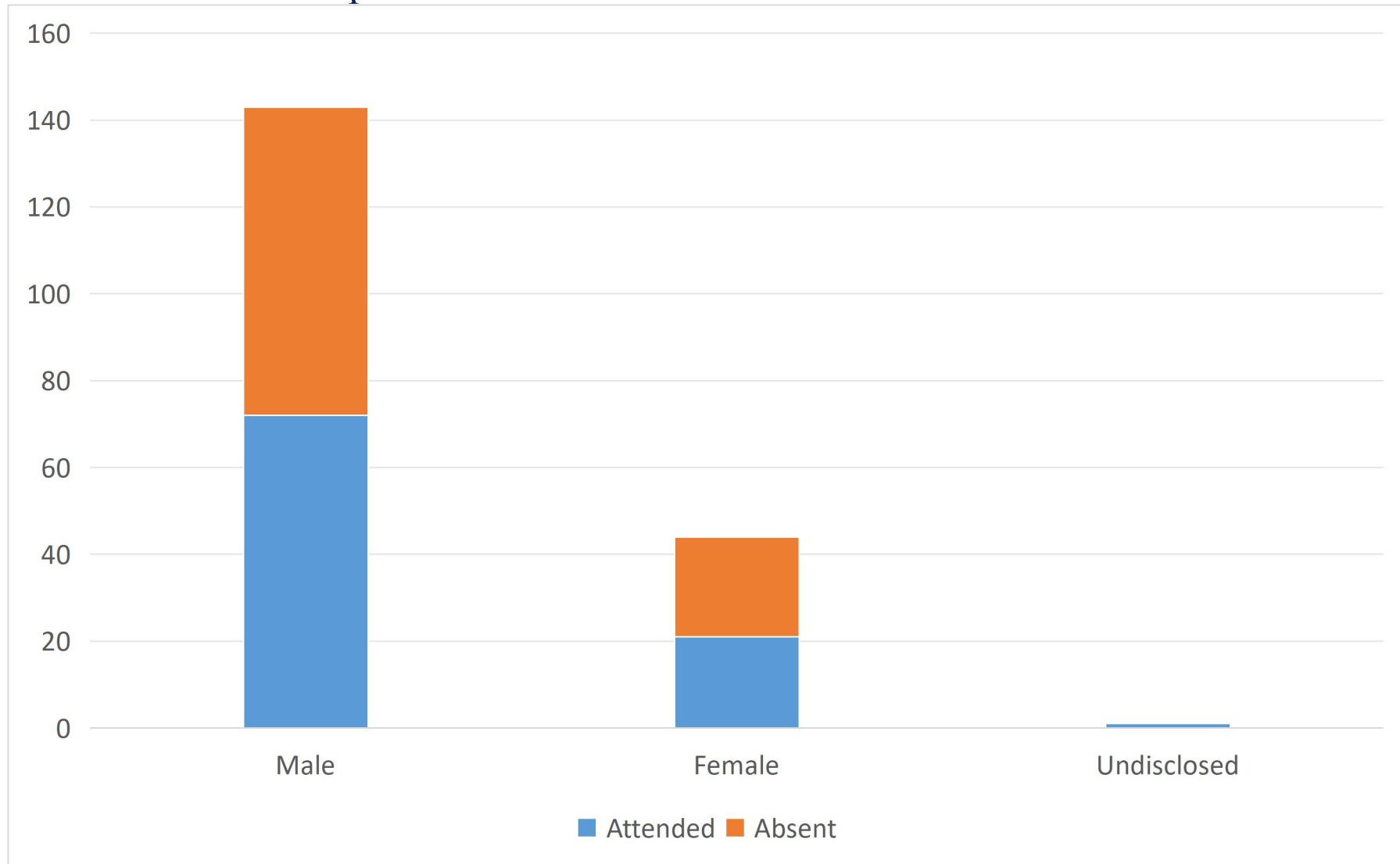
Exactly a half of all the registrants attended with highest attendance from the West Africa followed by East Africa.

Chart 3: Average Retention



The retention was a little bit above the average with indication that 54% of attendees stayed through the event.

Chart 4: Gender Representation



There were more male attendees than the female's. However, compared with the past events, the percentage of absented female and attended female was almost 50:50

Notable Organizations

| S/N | Organizations |
|-----|--|
| 1 | Ministère de l'économie et des finances |
| 2 | Ministère de la santé |
| 3 | IKEN |
| 4 | ISOC Ethiopia Chapter |
| 5 | PLO Lumumba Foundation |
| 6 | IPv6 Forum |
| 7 | Afralo |
| 8 | University of Professional Studies, Accra |
| 9 | Internet Society Ghana Chapter |
| 10 | Tony Blair Institute |
| 11 | University of Cape Coast |
| 12 | Proxy Innovation Systems |
| 13 | University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS) |
| 14 | University of the Commonwealth Caribbean |
| 15 | Open University of Kenya |
| 16 | Computer Society of Kenya |
| 17 | Ministry of Education Nigeria |
| 18 | Muranga University of Technology |
| 19 | Kenya Wildlife Service |
| 20 | Elegant Telekom |
| 21 | Centre d'Expertise et Recherche en Télémédecine et E-Santé |
| 22 | JCI Mauritius |
| 23 | Federal Ministry of Industry Trade & Investment Nigeria |
| 24 | Golden Women Initiative |
| 25 | DigiSphere Investment Ltd |
| 26 | UNICCON Group/Omeife Technologies |
| 27 | Kontemporary Konsulting Ltd |
| 28 | TLDS and Plus Element Solutions |
| 29 | Nigerian Communications Commission |
| 30 | National Veterinary Research Institute Vom |
| 31 | National Open University of Nigeria |
| 32 | CompSoftNet Technologies Limited |
| 33 | Uaisiezor Resources Enterprises (UaRE) |
| 34 | Dotengee Ent. |
| 35 | AFRINIC |
| 36 | Internet society Sierra Leone |
| 37 | Sahal University |
| 38 | African Solidarity Network |
| 39 | Makerere University |

Poll Results

| Poll Questions | Ans. 1 | Ans. 2 |
|---|-------------|----------|
| Do you believe AI can significantly enhance the productivity of SMEs in Africa? | Yes 100% | No 0% |

| | | | |
|--|------------|-----------|---------------------------------|
| Has your organization already started using AI tools in any of its operations? | Yes 63% | No 21% | Not yet, but planning to 16% |
|--|------------|-----------|---------------------------------|

| | | | |
|--|--------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| In your opinion, what is the biggest barrier SMEs face in adopting AI? | Lack of awareness 32% | Limited technical skills 47% | High cost of implementation 21% |
|--|--------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|

| | | | |
|--|------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| How familiar are you with AI technologies like ChatGPT, machine learning, or data analytics? | Very Familiar 55.5% | Somewhat Familiar 44.5% | Not Familiar 0% |
|--|------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|

| | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| Do you think AI will create more jobs or displace more jobs for SMEs in the next 5 years? | Create More Jobs 67% | Displace More Jobs 11% | No Sure 12% |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|

| | | |
|---|------------|----------|
| Would you be interested in AfICTA hosting AI training or capacity-building programs for SMEs? | Yes 95% | No 5% |
|---|------------|----------|

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| How did you learn about AfICTA? | Social Media 33% | Past Event/ Webinar 17% | Email/ Newsletter 28% | Friends 22% |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|

| | | | |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|----------------|
| This session helped improve my understanding of how AI can empower SMEs. | Strongly Agree 13% | Agree 87% | Disagree 0% |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|----------------|

| | | |
|--|-------------|----------|
| Would you recommend AfICTA events to others in your network? | Yes 100% | No 0% |
|--|-------------|----------|

| | | |
|--|------------|----------|
| Are you interested in joining AfICTA as a member or partner?network? | Yes 94% | No 6% |
|--|------------|----------|

| | | |
|--|------------|----------|
| Are you interested in joining AfICTA as a member or partner? | Yes 94% | No 6% |
|--|------------|----------|

Event Summary:

The 17th AfICTA Quarterly eConference brought together policymakers, industry leaders, and digital innovators to explore how artificial intelligence (AI) can transform Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) across Africa, with a special focus on Central Africa. Themed “AI-Powered SMEs: Unlocking New Opportunities for Growth,” the session emphasized the importance of fostering a supportive ecosystem for AI adoption in SMEs. Discussions covered digital infrastructure, policy support, capacity building, and scalable AI tools. The panelists highlighted regional opportunities, real-world applications, and the importance of localized solutions to ensure inclusivity and relevance.

Opening Remarks:

Ms. Christel Youbi, AfICTA Vice Chair Central Africa, opened the conference by emphasizing that SMEs are the backbone of Central Africa’s economy but face challenges in digital transformation. She highlighted AI as a tool for unlocking productivity, innovation, and competitiveness provided that the right ecosystem of skills, infrastructure, and supportive policy is in place.

While delivering her welcome speech, Ms. Ulandi Exner, AfICTA Board Chairperson, reiterated the Alliance’s commitment to supporting ICT growth in Africa. She pointed out that AI is reshaping business operations, enhancing decision-making, and boosting inclusivity, and encouraged participants to take full advantage of the insights and expertise shared during the session.

Panelist Highlights

1. Dr. Mactar Seck,

Chief of Section, UN Economic Commission for Africa

Dr. Mactar Seck emphasized the crucial role of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Africa's economic development, job creation, and poverty reduction. He highlighted the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to support SMEs in overcoming challenges such as limited technology, affordability, and resource constraints. Dr. Seck suggested that governments can support SMEs by creating AI-powered mobile customer relationship management (CRM) systems, providing accessible and affordable AI tools, and facilitating access to lightweight AI solutions like QuickBooks and satellite information for agriculture. He also emphasized the importance of government support in reducing the cost of AI applications and promoting the adoption of low-code AI tools to enable SMEs to build custom business applications.

2. Mr. Abib Iya,

Head of Representation, Autonomous Port of Kribi, Cameroon

Mr. Abib Iya shared a business-oriented perspective on how AI is being integrated at the Port of Kribi to support SMEs. He mentioned that Smart logistics systems are

being implemented to streamline operations and reduce delays for SME exporters and importers and that AI-driven data systems are being deployed to predict port traffic and optimize scheduling for SME clients. Emphasis was placed on digitally transforming logistics and customs clearance processes to increase efficiency and reduce bureaucracy. He called for investment in digital training and capacity building so SMEs can use new platforms confidently.

3. Ms. Isis Keto,

Authority for the Regulation of Posts and Telecommunications, DR Congo

Ms. Keto highlighted critical infrastructure barriers hindering the scalability of SMEs in Central Africa. She emphasized that low Internet accessibility across the sub-region significantly limits the potential for Artificial Intelligence (AI) adoption, as digital tools depend heavily on reliable Internet. Another key challenge is the lack of consistent and affordable electricity, which further affects technological growth. Ms. Keto also pointed out that national policies regulating AI use are often weak or non-existent, leaving SMEs without a clear framework for adoption. Moreover, SMEs face intense competition, particularly from foreign entities, making it harder to integrate AI. Lastly, while data centers exist in the region, they are underutilized due to fragmented and limited data availability, affecting research and innovation.

4. Mr. Djamo Dairu,

JCI Africa and the Middle East Area Manager / Operations Director ActivSpaces

Mr. Dairu reinforced the earlier points and stressed the transformative potential of AI in helping SMEs grow and become competitive. However, he noted that after initial adoption, businesses must evolve in their marketing and value delivery, areas where AI alone cannot suffice. He also addressed a major barrier, access to finance. Many investors are skeptical about funding AI-driven startups because AI appears intangible and its returns hard to predict. Additionally, some SMEs view AI as a threat rather than a tool, which hinders adoption. He called for better education and training on AI to ensure businesses understand its potential beyond basic applications. Mr. Dairu advocated for establishing government-backed funds to support tech innovation and proposed that regional policymakers help shift investor mindsets toward embracing AI.

5. Mr. Béranger NSA,

Deputy General Director for the Promotion of Digital Economy in Gabon

Mr. Nsa proposed a broader, pan-African approach to AI development. Instead of fragmented national efforts, he called for regional collaboration to build shared infrastructure and knowledge bases. Citing the example of African leaders' unified stance on AI in Rwanda, he emphasized that durable infrastructure and policy support should be viewed from a collective perspective to align Africa with global standards. He advocated for cross-country cooperation, particularly for nations that lack the financial resources to individually invest in AI infrastructure.

He contributed by confirming the existence of legal frameworks relevant to AI and SMEs but noted that these laws often fail to serve their intended purpose. They stressed the importance of adjusting existing policies to suit the specific contexts and needs of SMEs across different countries. According to them, adopting foreign regulatory frameworks without contextualization is ineffective. Instead, countries should tailor laws to guide and support local innovation and entrepreneurship effectively.

Mr. Djamo Dairu,

JCI Africa and the Middle East Area Manager / Operations Director ActivSpaces

He addressed the next panel question on how young entrepreneurs and SMEs can adopt AI in low-resource environments. He emphasized the need to overcome fear and misconceptions about AI replacing human jobs. Instead, he encouraged a human-centered and inclusive approach to AI literacy, with contextualized and practical training programs. He suggested using AI for localized problems like labor market analysis and integrating AI literacy into existing workforce programs. Mr. Dairu also recommended that governments and development partners subsidize AI training, particularly for women-led SMEs and marginalized groups. He highlighted the power of certifications as incentives and called for empowering incubators and accelerators, which serve as key touchpoints for startups. Finally, he advocated for early AI exposure in schools to build foundational digital skills from a young age.

Dr. Jimson Olufuye,

AfICTA Founder, fmr. Chair and Advisory Council Chair

He emphasized the importance of African collaboration on AI, particularly in developing large language models that portray local environments and support businesses. SMEs in countries like Nigeria, Kenya, and potentially Cameroon are already working on these models. To leverage this, he suggested developing products tailored to local needs, such as agriculture, which can be applied across regions like East and North Africa, especially with the African Continental Free Trade Area. He also stressed the need for greater engagement in AI, given its advanced applications in daily life and its potential in the fifth industrial revolution.

Recommendations

Policy:

1. Develop a Central Africa AI Strategy for SMEs: Create a comprehensive strategy that includes regulatory guidelines, funding mechanisms, and ethical AI principles to empower SMEs. This strategy should focus on building digital literacy, promoting AI adoption, and ensuring inclusive participation of women and youth in the AI-driven SME ecosystem.

Infrastructure:

2.Enhance Digital Infrastructure and Access to AI Tools: Strengthen digital infrastructure, including broadband and data centers, to support AI deployment in underserved areas. Governments should subsidize AI platforms and cloud services, negotiate subsidized licenses for no-code/low-code AI tools like Microsoft Power Apps, and provide access to lightweight AI solutions such as QuickBooks and agricultural satellite data tools.

3.Foster AI-Powered Solutions for Key Sectors: Develop and promote AI-powered platforms for logistics, agriculture, and retail to support specific sectors vital to SME growth. This can include AI-powered CRM tools and mobile platforms to improve customer management and enhance business productivity.

Capacity Building:

4.Support Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing: Invest in training programs for SMEs to build digital literacy and confidence in AI tools. Facilitate knowledge sharing and regional best practices, including showcasing AI pilot projects from countries like Ghana, Rwanda, and South Africa. Support incubators and innovation hubs that empower SMEs with AI mentorship, funding, and resources.

Partnership

5.Encourage Cross-Border Cooperation and Public-Private Partnerships: Support cross-border cooperation and harmonized policy frameworks to allow SME scalability across Central African countries. Encourage public-private partnerships to reduce the cost of AI infrastructure and promote AI inclusion in agriculture and commerce. This can help create a more conducive environment for SMEs to adopt and benefit from AI technologies.

Conclusion

The 17th AfICTA eConference highlighted the transformative potential of AI for SMEs in Central Africa. To unlock this potential, governments, industry leaders, and development actors must collaborate to create enabling environments where AI can drive innovation, growth, and inclusive prosperity.

Panelist Group Picture



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