# Moustapha Cissé shifts AI focus from Google to healthcare innovation in Senegal



Moustapha Cissé is at the forefront of a transformative vision for artificial intelligence (AI) in Africa. Rather than viewing AI as a potential menace, he perceives it as a powerful tool to address the continent's most pressing issues, from healthcare shortages to agricultural inefficiencies and educational barriers. Cissé’s journey has evolved from his leadership role at Google’s AI Centre in Accra, Ghana, to spearheading a healthcare startup in Senegal, all while pushing for the development of AI solutions that are not only effective but also culturally and contextually relevant.

Cissé’s academic credentials are impressive. He earned his Ph.D. in machine learning from Université Pierre et Marie Curie in Paris, which laid a solid foundation for his focus on ethical AI practices. His tenure at Google, which began in 2018, was marked by significant initiatives that saw the establishment of partnerships with local universities and businesses, creating tailored AI solutions such as diagnostic tools for clinics with limited staff and forecasting platforms for smallholder farmers. These projects exemplified his commitment to ensuring that AI serves African needs.

However, in September 2022, Cissé made a pivotal decision to leave Google. He now directs his efforts towards Kera Health, a startup aimed at enhancing healthcare accessibility in Senegal. This change reflects his belief that AI should primarily resolve local challenges rather than merely support multinational corporations. Cissé aims to develop innovative AI tools designed to improve medical care in regions often plagued by resource shortages, reinforcing his view that the true value of technology lies in its ability to impact everyday lives.

A critical aspect of Cissé’s work is his focus on the distinctiveness of the African context. Africa is a continent of immense diversity, featuring over 2,000 languages and varying climates, all of which pose challenges for AI deployment. At Google, Cissé and his team sought to combat data scarcity by developing AI models that perform well with limited inputs—a vital advancement for regions with underdeveloped data infrastructure. Their research also included enhancing natural language processing capabilities for major African languages, ensuring that AI technologies resonate with local communities.

Cissé’s commitment to healthcare is particularly noteworthy. With many African nations facing severe deficits in medical personnel, AI could play a crucial role in augmenting service delivery. Initiatives during his time at Google included AI systems capable of diagnosing diseases like tuberculosis more efficiently, particularly in rural areas. Through Kera Health, Cissé is likely to expand these efforts, focusing on creating tools that improve diagnostic accuracy and healthcare access at the community level.

Agriculture, too, remains a focal point for Cissé. He has overseen the development of AI solutions that forecast weather patterns and identify plant diseases, empowering farmers to make informed decisions that safeguard their livelihoods. These innovations highlight how technology can align with and advance Africa’s foundational economic sector.

Beyond functionality, Cissé is deeply invested in the ethical dimensions of AI. He has consistently warned against the dangers of biased algorithms, which can exacerbate existing socioeconomic divides, particularly in a culturally diverse continent like Africa. His research emphasis on inclusive AI models intends to ensure equitable outcomes across demographic groups. This commitment to equity traces back to his initiatives at Google and continues to influence his current projects.

Cissé’s influence extends to nurturing local talent. Throughout his career, he has dedicated efforts to empower emerging African researchers, fostering an environment where innovation can flourish on the continent. His current startup is expected to maintain this mission, elevating homegrown technologists capable of steering Senegal towards a robust digital future.

His legacy at Google was significant, positioning Africa squarely within the global AI conversation. The Accra centre became a nexus for connecting local challenges with sophisticated technological solutions, showcasing the potential for African researchers to shape their own destinies in the tech sphere. Cissé’s departure from Google marks a strategic pivot, but not an exit; instead, it reflects a renewed focus on grassroots-level impacts. By championing healthcare advancements in Senegal, Cissé is betting on AI's potential to effectuate profound changes in everyday lives, creating a model that other African nations might seek to emulate.

Cissé maintains a pragmatic view regarding the role of AI in Africa. He acknowledges that while AI possesses transformative potential, it cannot single-handedly resolve the continent's myriad challenges. Significant improvements are also necessary in data governance, infrastructural development, and educational opportunities. Cissé advocates for regulatory frameworks that harmonise innovation with privacy concerns, a principle that is likely to inform his approach at Kera Health.

In an era where AI is often perceived as a Western enterprise, Moustapha Cissé’s journey from Accra to Dakar underscores Africa’s capacity to leverage technology tailored to its unique context. His healthcare startup represents the next chapter in a career characterised not by hype, but by tangible contributions to society. Amid growing global trepidations regarding AI, Cissé posits a hopeful narrative: technology, crafted with intention and understanding, can heal, empower, and unify.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.techinafrica.com/moustapha-cisse-pioneering-ai-for-african-progress/), [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/business-48139212)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.techinafrica.com/moustapha-cisse-pioneering-ai-for-african-progress/), [[2]](https://www.theafricareport.com/320182/moustapha-cisse-african-states-disconnected-from-ai-discourse/), [[5]](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s43681-024-00650-z)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2023/12/18/in-africa-the-priority-is-developing-artificial-intelligence-aligned-with-the-continent-s-challenges_6353015_124.html), [[6]](https://businessday.ng/technology/article/domesticating-knowledge-of-ai-to-solve-african-problems/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.theafricareport.com/320182/moustapha-cisse-african-states-disconnected-from-ai-discourse/), [[7]](https://www.cio.com/article/220495/what-africas-approach-to-ai-can-teach-the-world.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.techinafrica.com/moustapha-cisse-pioneering-ai-for-african-progress/), [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/business-48139212)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.theafricareport.com/320182/moustapha-cisse-african-states-disconnected-from-ai-discourse/), [[3]](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2023/12/18/in-africa-the-priority-is-developing-artificial-intelligence-aligned-with-the-continent-s-challenges_6353015_124.html)
* Paragraph 7 – [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/business-48139212), [[2]](https://www.theafricareport.com/320182/moustapha-cisse-african-states-disconnected-from-ai-discourse/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.techinafrica.com/moustapha-cisse-pioneering-ai-for-african-progress/), [[2]](https://www.theafricareport.com/320182/moustapha-cisse-african-states-disconnected-from-ai-discourse/)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.techinafrica.com/moustapha-cisse-pioneering-ai-for-african-progress/), [[5]](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s43681-024-00650-z)
* Paragraph 10 – [[6]](https://businessday.ng/technology/article/domesticating-knowledge-of-ai-to-solve-african-problems/), [[7]](https://www.cio.com/article/220495/what-africas-approach-to-ai-can-teach-the-world.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.techinafrica.com/moustapha-cisse-pioneering-ai-for-african-progress/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theafricareport.com/320182/moustapha-cisse-african-states-disconnected-from-ai-discourse/> - In this article, Moustapha Cissé, former head of Google's AI research lab in Ghana, discusses the disconnect between African states and the global AI discourse. He advocates for Africa to harness AI to address its unique challenges and eliminate potential sociocultural and economic biases. Cissé highlights the need for AI solutions tailored to Africa's specific needs, emphasizing the importance of local involvement in AI development to ensure relevance and effectiveness.
3. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2023/12/18/in-africa-the-priority-is-developing-artificial-intelligence-aligned-with-the-continent-s-challenges_6353015_124.html> - This article emphasizes the importance of developing AI solutions that align with Africa's unique challenges, such as improving agricultural yields and managing water resources. It highlights the need for AI systems trained on datasets collected within the continent to ensure their effectiveness in addressing local issues. The piece underscores the significance of integrating an understanding of African values and contexts into AI development to achieve meaningful progress.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-48139212> - The BBC article profiles Moustapha Cissé, a Senegalese AI researcher who has worked at Facebook and Google. It discusses his journey from studying mathematics and physics in Senegal to becoming a leading figure in AI. Cissé advocates for better AI education across Africa and emphasizes the continent's potential to leverage AI for societal benefits. He highlights the importance of developing AI solutions tailored to Africa's specific needs and challenges.
5. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s43681-024-00650-z> - This scholarly article examines the ethical considerations of deploying AI in Africa's healthcare sector. It discusses the need for AI tools that function well in areas with limited internet connectivity and are tailored to detect diseases prevalent in Africa. The piece also addresses the importance of considering African cultural beliefs in health when developing AI solutions, advocating for inclusive datasets that reflect the realities of African patients.
6. <https://businessday.ng/technology/article/domesticating-knowledge-of-ai-to-solve-african-problems/> - This article discusses Moustapha Cissé's efforts to bring AI education and research to Africa. It highlights his role in developing graduate programs in machine learning and his vision for empowering young Africans to use AI to solve local problems. Cissé emphasizes the importance of developing AI solutions tailored to Africa's unique challenges, including those in agriculture, education, and healthcare.
7. <https://www.cio.com/article/220495/what-africas-approach-to-ai-can-teach-the-world.html> - This article explores how Africa's unique challenges provide opportunities to develop AI solutions that address problems not typically encountered elsewhere. It discusses Moustapha Cissé's perspective on the potential of AI to solve issues like crop degradation and healthcare inefficiencies in Africa. The piece highlights the importance of context-specific AI development and the lessons the world can learn from Africa's approach to AI.