# Moustapha Cissé pivots to AI-driven healthcare startup to tackle Africa’s medical access crisis



Moustapha Cissé perceives artificial intelligence not as an impending threat, but rather as a transformative tool capable of driving progress across Africa. This pioneering AI researcher has dedicated his career to demonstrating how technology can effectively address the continent's unique challenges, particularly in healthcare, agriculture, and education, while also confronting the biases that often plague AI systems. After leading Google’s AI Centre in Accra, Ghana, until September 2022, Cissé has shifted his focus to a healthcare startup in his home country of Senegal. His objective is clear: to ensure that AI serves as a resource for Africa rather than a tool for multinational corporations.

Cissé's career trajectory is purposefully aligned with his commitment to social impact. Originally from Senegal, he earned his Ph.D. in machine learning from Université Pierre et Marie Curie in Paris, establishing a solid foundation for his expertise in ethical AI. At Google, he led efforts to create applications tailored to Africa’s specific needs. His team developed AI diagnostic tools for clinics facing personnel shortages and predictive platforms for small-scale farmers, emphasizing the necessity of localized solutions for Africa's diverse populations and environments.

In September 2022, Cissé left Google to pursue his entrepreneurial aspirations. His focus is primarily on a healthcare startup aimed at leveraging AI to enhance medical accessibility and health outcomes in resource-limited areas. This strategic pivot underscores his belief that the true potential of AI lies in its ability to solve localized issues rather than merely enhancing the profits of large tech firms. His work directly aligns with the urgent need for improved healthcare delivery in regions plagued by a lack of medical personnel and facilities.

Cissé’s initiatives address the intricacies of Africa’s landscape, which boasts over 2000 distinct languages and varied climates. His previous efforts at Google tackled the challenge of data scarcity by creating models capable of functioning effectively with minimal inputs—a significant advancement for areas lacking extensive datasets. Additionally, his team explored natural language processing for various African dialects to ensure communication via AI resonates authentically with local communities.

A central tenet of Cissé’s vision is the potential of AI to bolster healthcare. He has highlighted that in regions facing critical shortages of healthcare providers, technology can significantly enhance the delivery of medical services. During his tenure at Google, he spearheaded the development of AI-driven diagnostic systems for diseases such as tuberculosis, enabling faster and more accurate diagnoses in remote locations. Now, through his Senegalese venture, Cissé is reportedly developing tools intended to enhance the reliability and accessibility of services in community clinics.

Agriculture is another critical focus area for Cissé. His previous projects involved crafting AI solutions that forecast weather and detect crop diseases, helping farmers safeguard their livelihoods. Such initiatives exemplify his skill in harmonizing technological advancements with Africa’s foundational economic sectors, although they also highlight the need for ongoing investment in infrastructure and capacity building.

For Cissé, AI represents more than simply technological capability; it embodies a commitment to equity. He has consistently warned against the risks posed by biased algorithms, which threaten to exacerbate existing socioeconomic disparities. His research has illuminated inadequacies within technologies like facial recognition, advocating for the creation of algorithms that inclusively serve all demographic groups. This dedication to combating sociocultural and economic biases has been a guiding principle throughout his career, extending from his time at Google to his current entrepreneurial venture.

He also prioritizes talent development, fostering local innovators who can shape a sustainable technological ecosystem within Africa. Cissé's leadership at Google included mentoring emerging African researchers, a commitment he is likely to carry forward with his new startup, thereby empowering the next generation of leaders in the tech space.

Cissé’s time at Google positioned the African continent as a significant player in the global AI narrative, with the Accra centre serving as a bridge connecting local challenges with advanced technological solutions. His departure marks not a retreat, but a reorientation towards grassroots impacts. By focusing on healthcare in Senegal, he champions the idea that targeted AI initiatives can enhance individual lives and set a precedent for neighbouring African nations.

Cissé advances a pragmatic perspective, acknowledging that AI alone cannot solve all of Africa's challenges. He stresses the necessity of robust data governance, improved infrastructure, and expanded educational opportunities as foundational for success. His advocacy for privacy-conscious governance structures will likely inform the operational framework of his startup.

Moustapha Cissé’s journey challenges the perception of AI as the exclusive domain of the West. He exemplifies the potential for African nations to tailor technology to suit their needs, on their own terms. His healthcare startup signals a crucial next step in a career defined by tangible impacts rather than superficial trends. Within a global discourse often tinged with anxiety regarding AI, Cissé offers a clearer vision: technology, if developed with intention, has the power to heal, empower, and unify.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.techinafrica.com/moustapha-cisse-pioneering-ai-for-african-progress/), [[4]](https://www.ifc.org/en/interviews/2024/healthcare-more-than-any-other-industry-is-a-business-of-partnerships)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.techinafrica.com/moustapha-cisse-pioneering-ai-for-african-progress/), [[5]](https://www.theafricareport.com/320182/moustapha-cisse-african-states-disconnected-from-ai-discourse/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.ifc.org/en/pressroom/2023/ifc-partners-with-kera-to-improve-access-to-healthcare-services-in-west-africa-using-ai-and-digital-solutions), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/business-48139212), [[6]](https://businessday.ng/technology/article/domesticating-knowledge-of-ai-to-solve-african-problems/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.techinafrica.com/moustapha-cisse-pioneering-ai-for-african-progress/), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/business-48139212)
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* Paragraph 10 – [[2]](https://www.ifc.org/en/pressroom/2023/ifc-partners-with-kera-to-improve-access-to-healthcare-services-in-west-africa-using-ai-and-digital-solutions), [[5]](https://www.theafricareport.com/320182/moustapha-cisse-african-states-disconnected-from-ai-discourse/)

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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.ifc.org/en/pressroom/2023/ifc-partners-with-kera-to-improve-access-to-healthcare-services-in-west-africa-using-ai-and-digital-solutions> - In November 2023, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) partnered with Kera Health Platforms, a Senegalese health tech company, to enhance healthcare accessibility in West Africa through AI and digital solutions. Kera Health Platforms aims to digitize and connect health information, creating an integrated health platform for Africa. This collaboration seeks to address the shortage of healthcare professionals and facilities by leveraging AI to improve healthcare delivery, empowering patients, healthcare professionals, and partners with actionable information. Moustapha Cissé, founder and CEO of Kera Health Platforms, emphasized the importance of technology in shaping a healthier Africa.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-48139212> - In 2019, Moustapha Cissé, Google's head of AI in Accra, Ghana, discussed the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to address complex challenges in Africa. He highlighted the continent's efforts to train computer scientists and develop AI solutions tailored to local needs, such as improving healthcare, agriculture, and education. Cissé emphasized the importance of AI in automating disease diagnosis and facilitating communication across Africa's diverse linguistic landscape. He advocated for African governments to prioritize AI and support initiatives that harness its benefits for the continent's development.
4. <https://www.ifc.org/en/interviews/2024/healthcare-more-than-any-other-industry-is-a-business-of-partnerships> - In May 2024, Moustapha Cissé, founder and CEO of Kera Health Platforms, discussed the challenges and opportunities in digitizing healthcare in Africa. He emphasized the need for partnerships among doctors, pharmacists, insurance providers, and other stakeholders to use AI-based tools for digitizing and exchanging patient information. Cissé highlighted the shortage of healthcare professionals and facilities in Africa and the importance of establishing stringent data privacy protocols in line with global standards to ensure a successful digital health transformation on the continent.
5. <https://www.theafricareport.com/320182/moustapha-cisse-african-states-disconnected-from-ai-discourse/> - In August 2023, Moustapha Cissé, former head of Google's AI research laboratory in Ghana, expressed concerns about African states being disconnected from global AI discussions. He advocated for Africa to harness AI technology to address its unique challenges and eliminate potential sociocultural and economic biases. After leaving Google in September 2022, Cissé focused on a healthcare startup in Senegal, aiming to utilize AI to improve medical accessibility and health outcomes in regions with limited resources, demonstrating his commitment to applying AI for Africa's development.
6. <https://businessday.ng/technology/article/domesticating-knowledge-of-ai-to-solve-african-problems/> - In November 2018, Moustapha Cissé, then lead of Google's AI Research Lab in Accra, Ghana, discussed the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to address Africa's challenges. He highlighted the importance of developing local AI solutions tailored to the continent's needs, emphasizing sectors like agriculture, education, and healthcare. Cissé advocated for better AI education across Africa and the need for African governments to prioritize AI to harness its benefits for the continent's development, aiming to empower young Africans to solve local problems using AI.
7. <https://partechpartners.medium.com/africanow-5-the-vital-role-of-ai-tech-in-transforming-africa-with-moustapha-ciss%C3%A9-1ab0ef9b6efe> - In a 2020 interview, Moustapha Cissé, director of Google's AI research centre in Accra, Ghana, discussed the transformative potential of artificial intelligence (AI) in Africa. He highlighted the continent's rapid population growth and the need for investment in research and education to harness AI's benefits. Cissé provided examples of AI applications in agriculture, natural language understanding, disaster prediction, and health informatics, emphasizing the importance of developing AI solutions tailored to Africa's unique challenges to drive positive change across the continent.