## Contents

Acknowledgments  ix

1 **Hopes and Potentials**  1  
   Africa in the Global Economy  3  
   New Connectivities, New Beginnings  4  
   Is African Digital Entrepreneurship on the Rise?  6  
   Digital Technology and Entrepreneurship: How Two Gospels Have Become One  9  
   What Does Digital Entrepreneurship Theory Suggest?  13  
   The Why and How of This Book: A Grounded Empirical Inquiry  23  
   Analytical Framework  27  
   Book Outline  30

2 **Taking Stock**  33  
   How Can We Take Stock of Digital Entrepreneurship in Africa?  34  
   Comparing Digital Production in Africa versus High-Income Countries  37  
   Africa Is Not a Country: Continent-Wide Variation of Activity  42  
   African Digital Markets and Infrastructures  46  
   What African Digital Enterprises Do  62  
   Summary: An Uneven and Uncertain Landscape  74

3 **Bounded Opportunities**  77  
   Close to Home: How Most African Enterprises Become Specialists for Localization  78  
   Global Competition, at Home and Abroad  85  
   Pan-African Expansion: Resources and Relationships  89  
   Summary: The Lure of Scalability  95
4 Viable Strategies 97
Scaling Based on Customer and Partner Relationships 98
Local Information Platforms: Digitizing, Curating, and Mediating Local Content 102
Distant Markets, Local Assets: Labor, Market, and Culture Brokers 105
Last-Mile Platforms: Asset-Heavy User Base Scaling with a Digital Backend 107
Summary: Location-Based Strategies and Hyperlocalization 113

5 Uneven Ecosystems 117
Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: Concepts and Theory 118
Unevenness of African Ecosystems: Discerning Three Tiers 120
Bottleneck #1: Markets and Infrastructures 124
Bottleneck #2: Entrepreneurial Knowledge, Mentorship, and Experience 127
Bottleneck #3: Digital Venture Labor and Talent 131
Bottleneck #4: Innovation Hubs and Other Support Organizations 137
Bottleneck #5: Inadequate and Exclusive Funding 145
Summary: Bottlenecks and Vicious Cycles Thwart Ecosystem Evolution 152

6 Transitioning Identities 155
Digital: Technological Aspirations 156
Entrepreneurs: Agents of Change 163
Summary: An African Avant-Garde? 178

7 Silicon Tensions 179
Silicon Somethings and the Digital Developmentalist Aspiration 180
Down to Earth: Local Markets, Local Models 190
Racial Bias 194
Reluctant Responses 198
Summary: The Future Mirrors the Past 206

8 Ways Forward 209
Chapter Summaries and Testing of Analytical Framework 211
Digital Expectations 216
Global Ambitions 217
Down a Notch: Contextualizing the United States’ and China’s Digital Success 218
Local Realities 221
Uneven Development 222
A Long-Term, International Game 225
Implications for Policy and Practice 227
Future Directions 231
Appendix A: Methodology 233
Research Questions 234
Selection of City Cases 234
Interviews 237
Field Notes 240
Participant Observation and Desk Research 241
Analysis 241
Validity and Reliability 244
Ethical Considerations 245

Appendix B: Case Study Notes and Market Data 247
Abidjan, Ivory Coast 247
Accra, Ghana 249
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 252
Dakar, Senegal 254
Johannesburg, South Africa 256
Kampala, Uganda 258
Kigali, Rwanda 260
Lagos, Nigeria 262
Maputo, Mozambique 264
Nairobi, Kenya 266
Yaoundé, Cameroon 268

Notes 271
References 275
Index 311