GOVERNANCE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN AFRICA

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AFRICA DATA PROTECTION

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

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Artificial Intelligence (AI), whose development is accelerating worldwide, opens up major prospects for Africa and raises major governance issues. With its capacity for calculation, prediction and innovation, AI is profoundly transforming essential sectors such as health, education, agriculture and finance. In a continent marked by dynamic growth and rapid technological expansion, AI represents a unique opportunity to help Africa in overcoming certain structural challenges and fostering inclusive development.

However, its deployment also raises fundamental questions: how can we ensure that AI meets African needs and realities? How can we avoid excessive technological dependence on major digital powers? How can we ensure appropriate regulation that protects fundamental rights, cultural diversity and the interests of local populations? To ensure this, African countries must participate actively in the development of international standards, appropriate regulations, and robust ethical frameworks.

History has shown that major technological revolutions shape societies and redefine global balances of power. Today, Africa can play a central role in this transformation by developing its own AI models, rooted in its values and intellectual heritage. Just as the explosion of mobile telephony in Africa has enabled a profound transformation of societies and expanded access to information, the rise of AI must be an opportunity to assert African digital sovereignty and strengthen international cooperation on more balanced foundations. A more inclusive global governance that takes African characteristics into account, is essential for this technological revolution is to benefit everyone and truly reflect the diversity of human perspectives.

Introduction

On January 27, 2025, the Africa Data Protection Association (ADP) organized an event title "Global Governance of Artificial Intelligence: what role for Africa?" as part of the Africa Data Protection Awards. This event, labelled "The road to the summit", is part of the preparations for the Summit for Action on AI scheduled for February 10 and 11, 2025 in Paris. Two round-tables discussions brought together both African and international experts:

David GUEYE, Deputy Director of Digital and Innovation TV5 Monde

Dr. Ghita MEZZOUR, Founder and President of DecisiveAI, Former Minister Delegate in charge of Morocco's Digital Transition and Administrative Reform

Sonia CISSÉ, Tech, Data and Cyber Lawyer at Linklaters

Silvere ASSOUA, Head of Compliance and Rights Protection Department - Ivory Coast Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (ARTCI)

Dr. Luc JULIA, Renault Scientific Director and co-creator of SIRI

Inès BEDAR, Data & AI Strategy Consultant Capgemini Invent / Former member of the French Data Protection Authority (CNIL) and the French Prime Minister's Office
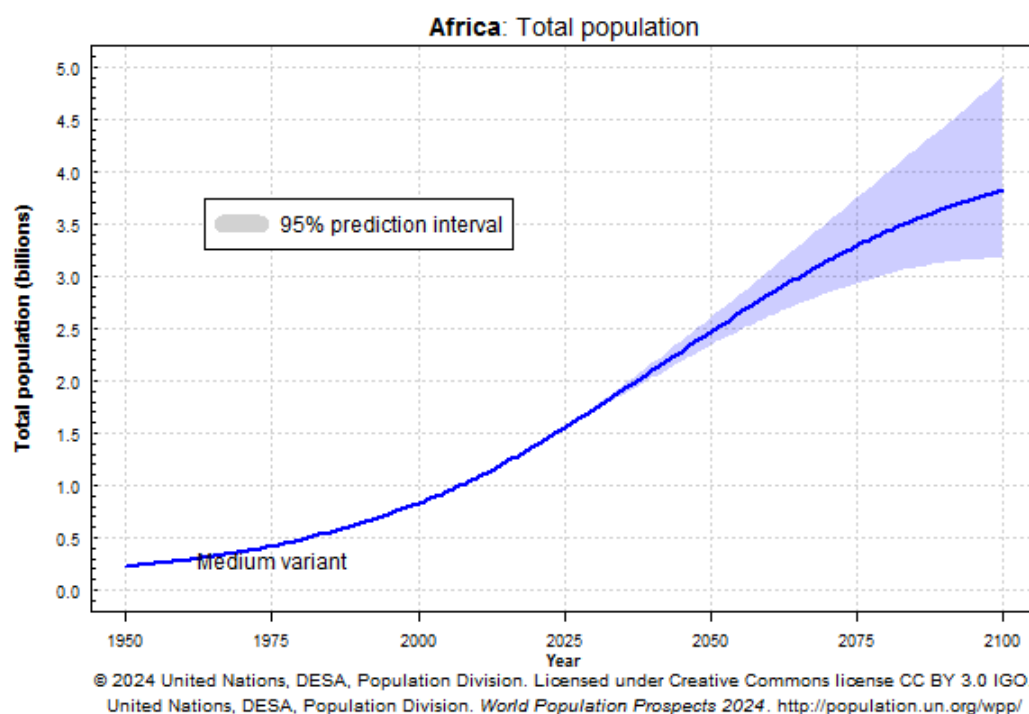
Prof. Benjamin GUINHOUYA, Epidemiologist, Head of the Data Science in Health program, University of Lille

Amal RANNEN-TRIKI, Senior Research Scientist at Google DeepMind, and member of the Deep Learning Indaba executive board

The event was moderated by **Sofia EL MRABET**, a lawyer specializing in Fintech and Tech at Pledge Avocats, and the report was written by **Dalila FERRAH**, an independent Data Protection Consultant.

Africa, a thriving land for AI

Africa, the second largest continent in terms of size and population, with 54 countries and over 1.4 billion people, boasts a diverse territory, rich in culture, natural resources and history. Thanks to its growing youthfulness, the continent benefits from a high penetration rate of new technologies — over 60% of its population is under the age of 25.

Africa: Total population

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United Nations, DESA, Population Division. *World Population Prospects 2024*. http://population.un.org/wpp/

This demographic dynamic, combined with a growing openness to technological innovation, provides fertile ground for the adoption and development of AI. According to PwC, AI could generate up to $1.2 trillion for the continent by 2030, representing a 5.6% increase in its GDP.

Case study: precision agriculture

Precision agriculture relies on advanced technologies such as sensors, drones and satellite data to provide accurate, data-driven analyses. The aim is to optimize the use of resources, improve crop yields and reduce the environmental impact associated with the use of fertilizers, pesticides and water. This approach leverages AI, Internet of Things (IoT) and big data analytics to process large volumes of information, including soil composition and weather conditions. Machine learning (ML) algorithms exploit this data to generate actionable recommendations, enabling farmers to optimize their crop management decisions.

Practical use cases:

UjuziKilimo : harnesses AI to analyze soil composition and provide farmers with personalized advice on fertilization, irrigation and crop rotation to optimize yields.

Riwe Technologies : uses satellite imagery and machine learning to monitor crop health and make recommendations tailored to each farm.

Aerobotics : uses AI to detect pestsand diseases, providedrone imaging services and optimize orchard management as well as agricultural yields.

Importantly, several African countries have incorporated agriculture into their national artificial intelligence (AI) strategies to modernize this key sector. For example, Benin has developed a National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence and Megadata (SNIAM) aimed at improving agricultural performance by 2025. This strategy promotes for the use of AI to optimize the management of resources such as water and soil, plan production according to market outlets, identify high-potential agricultural areas and detect crop diseases early using drones captured images.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN AFRICA

NATIONAL AI STRATEGIES

DRAFT/ DISCUSSION

Source : www.africadataprotection.org/ia
March 2025

An emerging continent facing structural challenges

Despite sometimes promising economic growth rates and ongoing industrialization efforts, Africa still faces considerable challenges, particularly in terms of human development, access to basic infrastructure and education improvement. These obstacles continue to hinder the continent's overall development, limiting the exploitation of its potential.

However, new opportunities show that it is possible to overcome these limitations. Djibouti is a striking example, thanks to its strategic position at the crossroads of undersea cables linking continents. The country has set itself the goal of becoming a regional AI hub in East Africa, with the establishment of the first data center in the Horn of Africa and a new data center inaugurated in 2024, marking a significant step forward in the region's digital infrastructure. In this respect, it should be noted that solar energy represents a major opportunity in Africa to power this type of infrastructure locally.

According to the Government AI Readiness Index 2024, Africa is making significant strides in AI readiness. The index, developed by UK consultancy Oxford Insights, assesses governments' ability to adopt and effectively integrate AI into their public services. The index scores range from 0 to 100.

The 2024 edition of the index evaluated 40 indicators divided into three pillars:


Government: This pillar analyzes the strategic vision of governments regarding the development and governance of AI. It takes into account regulations in place, attention to ethical risks, as well as internal digital capacity, including skills and practices that promote adaptation to new technologies.

Technology sector: This pillar assesses the maturity of a country's technology sector, its capacity for innovation, the entrepreneurial environment, R&D spending, as well as the quality of human capital available to support AI.

Data & infrastructure: This pillar measures the availability and quality of data essentials for AI tools to function properly, as well as the necessary infrastructure for their operation and accessibility to citizens.

Fundamentally, this index answers the following question: how prepared are governments to implement AI in the delivery of public services? The aim is to help policymakers make informed decisions and fully exploit the potential of AI to improve public services around the world.

Egypt (55.63) leads the continental ranking, followed by Mauritius (53.94), South Africa (52.91) and Rwanda (51.25), which stand out as forerunners in strengthening their AI ecosystems. A second group of high-performing countries emerges, led by Senegal (46.11), followed by Tunisia (43.68) and Morocco (41.78), highlighting new growth opportunities in the region. By comparison, France has an index of 79, while the USA reaches 87, underlining the significant gap between regions in terms of AI readiness.

Africa 2024 Overall Scores
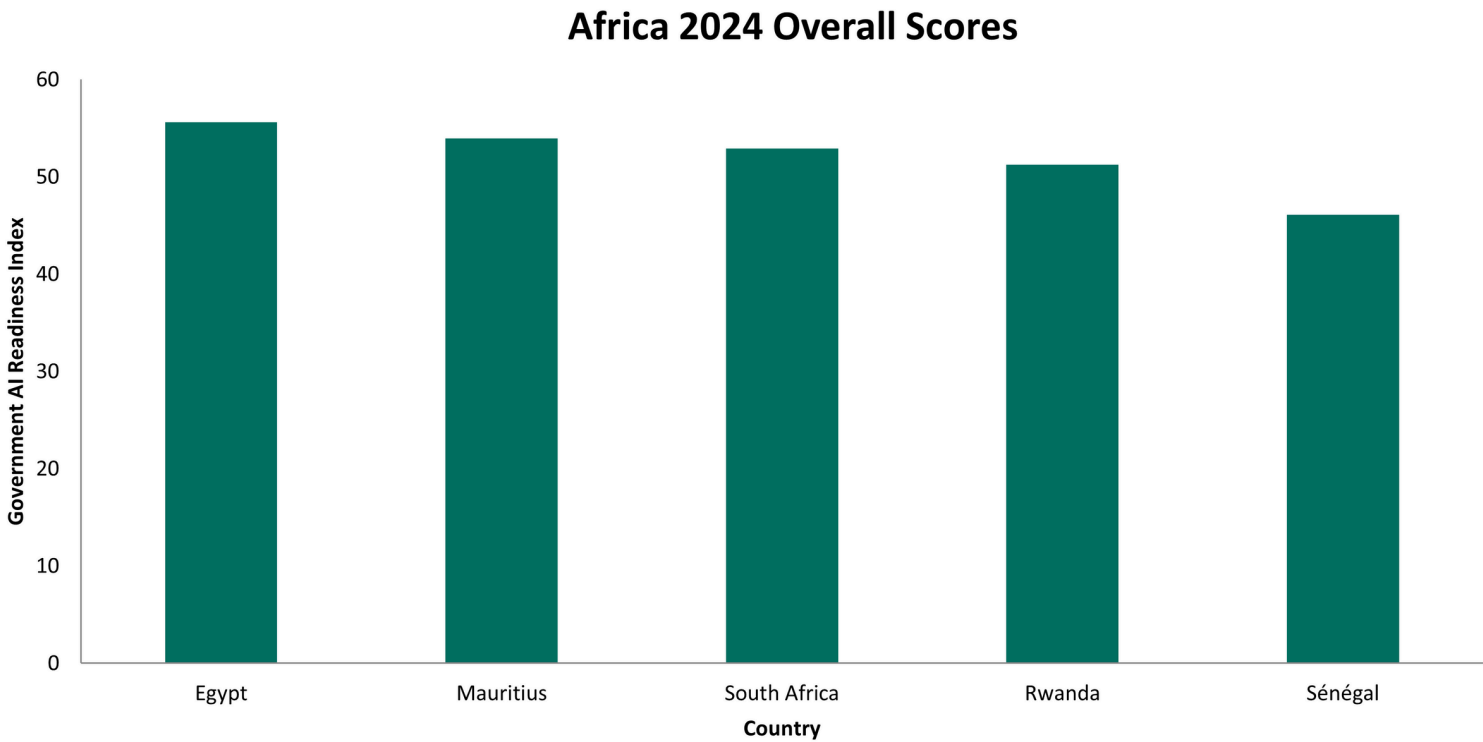
At the same time, Mauritius is establishing itself as a regional AI hub, with initiatives such as the Deep Artificial Intelligence Centre, located at the Data Technology Park, serving as an incubator for digital transformation and innovation development on the continent.

Despite this progress, Africa faces significant challenges that it will only overcome with determination. Dependence on foreign technologies is one of them, particularly in the medical sector, where the United States largely dominates with their AI-embedded devices. To meet these challenges, the African Medicines Agency is set to play a central role in driving a sovereign health policy by investing in local medical research with the active support of the African diaspora. These efforts are essential for ensuring technological autonomy and enhancing the adoption of AI tailored to African realities.

Also, the low volume of African data used in global training databases - only 4% -, can lead to algorithmic biases, affecting the reliability of results for certain local populations.

DATASETS BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Over 90% of the datasets that the researchers analyzed came from Europe and North America, and **less than 4% come from Africa.**

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Source : World Bank Official Boundaries/2024
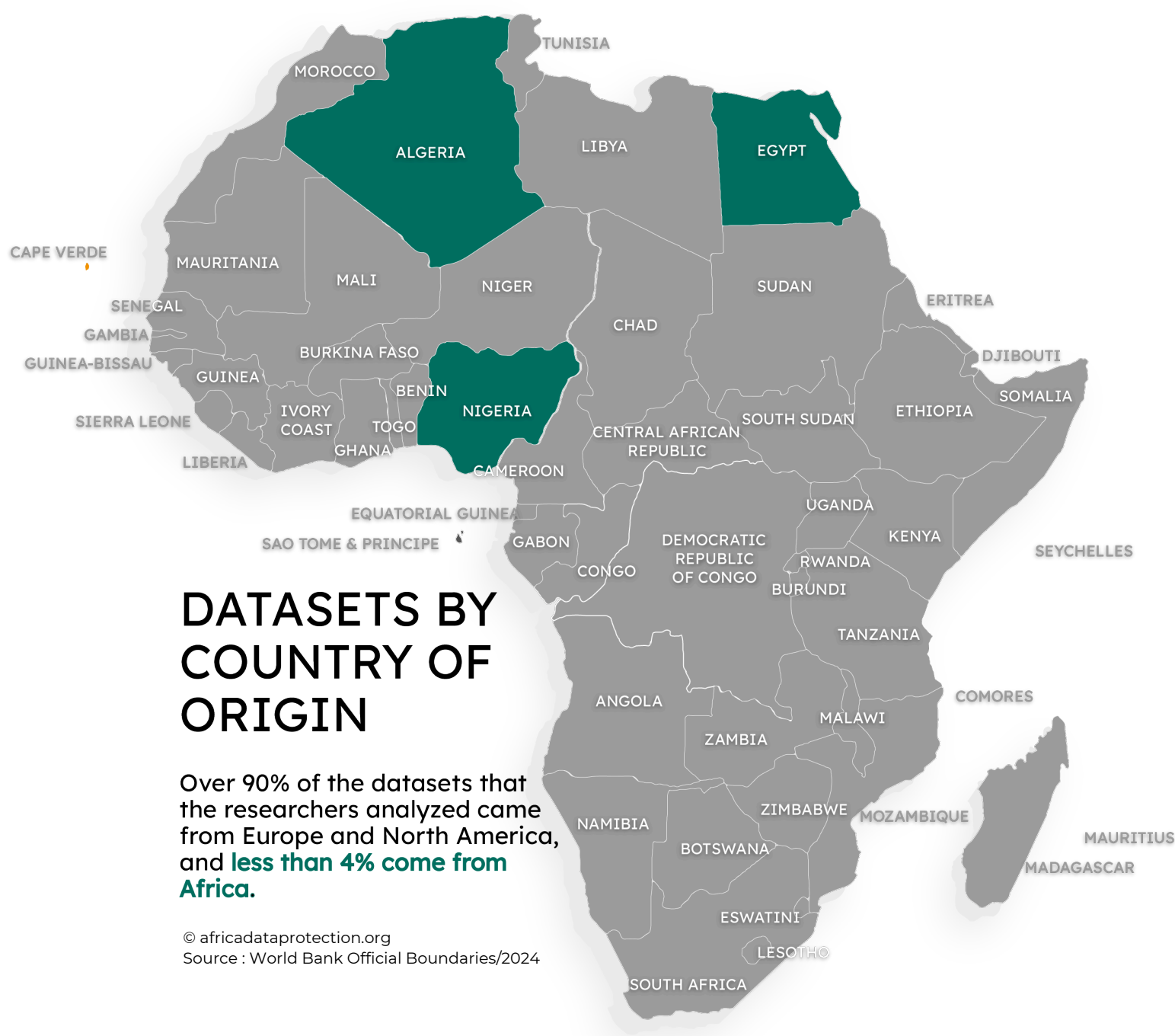
AI must be inclusive to meet the specific needs of the African continent, while respecting its cultural diversity. This implies developing solutions that are accessible in local languages and adapted to different economic contexts.

Global Benchmarks	English	52.60%	English languages **53%**	
	Hindi	0.10%		
Top African Languages	Afrikaans	0.003%	African languages **0.02%**	
	Twi	0.00195%		
	Swahili	0.00135%		
	Malagasy	0.00022%		
	Bambara	0.00025%		
	Venda	0.000115%		
	Hausa	0.00011%		
Average with other African languages*		0.000999%		
Sum of African Languages		0.01999%		

Prevalence of internet content in African languages compared to global benchmarks
(% of internet content in language, 2023)

*Afrikaans, Twi, Swahili, Bambara, Malagasy, Hausa, Venda, Haitian, Haitian Creole, Igbo, Luba-Katanga, Ndonga, Kirundi, Tokelau,Tswana, Akan, Chichewa, Chewa, Nyanja, Fulah, Ganda, Masai
Source: AI4D Africa

African countries cannot remain a passive market for major technological powers. They must be able to make independent decisions regarding its own tools and infrastructures.

Strengthening research and training: an essential pillar for governance and global influence

If Africa is to play a major role in global governance, strengthening its research and training capabilities is crucial. These two areas are fundamental to ensuring innovation, technological autonomy and the continent's influence on the international stage.

On the government side, initiatives such as Nigeria's recent allocation $1.5 million to encourage AI R&D, demonstrate to the growing awareness of this technology's potential. International donors also play a key role in the development of the African AI ecosystem: the World Bank is financing several AI-related digital projects, notably in Kenya (Digital Economy Acceleration Project), Tanzania (Digital Tanzania Project) and Madagascar (PRODIGY), while France, via the AFD, is supporting initiatives such as the Nairobi Faculty of Engineering and the digitization of public services in Rwanda. It is also contributing to the development of the Rwanda Space Agency to exploit geo-data. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, meanwhile, finances health and agricultural projects in Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda.

In this dynamic, public-private partnerships are essential. Companies are investing massively in AI infrastructure in Africa, including the construction of data centers and the development of AI skills-building programs. For example, Microsoft plans a global investment of $80 billion in AI infrastructure, including data centers in Africa and an AI skills development program in Kenya. This type of investment, coupled with local initiatives such as the Deep Artificial Intelligence Centre in Mauritius or the African AI Competence Centre in Kenya, shows that innovation ecosystems can be created and supported, even in emerging contexts.

African universities are also playing a key role in this process. Prestigious institutions such as Makerere University in Uganda and the University of Cape Town in South Africa are integrating advanced AI training and research programs, helping to strengthen local expertise. At the same time, technology hubs such as iHub in Kenya or Cairo's AI Research Centre in Egypt act as catalysts, nurturing innovation and strengthening the continental technology ecosystem.

In 2006, African Union member states pledged to allocate 1% of their GDP to research and development (R&D). However, in 2024, investment in R&D reached just 0.42%, well below the world average of 1.7%, revealing a glaring lack of political prioritization and funding. Investment in these areas remains insufficient. This reliance on external funding and lack of local investment must be addressed. If Africa is to succeed in making AI a driver of internal development and strengthening its international commitment, it must equip itself with resources commensurate with its ambitions.

AI governance in Africa: the springboard for a legitimate African voice in global dialogue

Thanks to the Continental Strategy for AI and the African Digital Pact, the African Union (AU) is creating momentum that goes far beyond the simple adoption of technologies. These initiatives aim to address pressing socio-economic challenges while strengthening the continent's technological independence. The training of local skills, the integration of AI into key sectors such as health, agriculture and education, as well as an ethical and inclusive approach, are at the heart of this ambition.

The AI for Africa Blueprint 2021 report confirms this vision by proposing a solid roadmap based on inclusion, innovation and ethics. This collective will shows that Africa is not content to follow the global technological revolution, but intends to take an active part in defining the rules of the game. Countries such as Egypt, South Africa, Ivory Coast, Djibouti and Kenya have already taken positions on the OECD principles and supported UN resolutions concerning the ethics and regulation of AI.

Kenya, for example, has distinguished itself by signing the <u>Bletchley Declaration</u> in 2023 and becoming the first African country to join the US AI Safety Institute, thus integrating an international network dedicated to AI safety. The country also hosted a meeting of African Information Ministers in Nairobi in April 2024, reaffirming the importance of digitalization and digital infrastructure in modern economies. Nairobi was also the scene of the UNESCO Sub- Regional Forum on AI in East Africa in June 2024. Among other key topics, this initiative highlighted the importance of ethical and responsible governance of AI in Africa.

However, its participation in the development of the most influential international frameworks is still limited. For example, no African country has signed the OECD Framework for the Classification of AI Systems adopted in 2022, nor the G7 International Code of Conduct for Organizations Developing Advanced AI Systems established in 2023. This absence limits the continent's influence in defining international norms and standards relating to AI.

As part of this dynamic, the African Union's Agenda 2063, the continent's long-term strategic vision, places particular emphasis on the development of digital infrastructures and technological innovation. AI is seen as a key driver for the continent's economic and social transformation, notably through initiatives such as the Single African Digital Market (SDM), which aims to harmonize digital policies and foster the emergence of African technological champions. This ambition is part of a broader drive to strengthen Africa's digital sovereignty, while ensuring responsible and ethical governance of emerging technologies.

One of the major challenges to Africa hindering Africa's entry into the global AI Governance arena is the lack of unified AI governance and legislation across the continent. Although efforts have been made, as highlighted by Resolution 473 of the African Commission on Human Rightsin 2018, which calls for laws on digital governance, legislative fragmentation remains a hindrance. Within the continent, legal disparities exist between countries, compounded by laws that are often obsolete or insufficiently adapted to emerging technologies, hindering the harmonization necessary for effective governance in this area. This fragmentation is also perceptible in the field of data protection, which is nevertheless a central pillar for the development of responsible AI systems. Despite the existence of texts such as the African Union Convention on Cybersecurity and the Protection of Personal Data (Malabo Convention), few countries have ratified it, and national approaches vary considerably. The lack of clear frameworks for data collection, processing and sharing is a further obstacle to the emergence of a truly pan-African, privacy-compliant AI.

AFRICAN UNION
CONVENTION ON
CYBER SECURITY
AND PERSONAL
DATA PROTECTION

RATIFICATION

SIGNATURE

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Source : African Union

The continent must to address this issue head-on, adopting appropriate local legal frameworks rather than blindly applying duplicated foreign models that are often inappropriate to African realities. It will also need to adopt an evolving strategy, capable of meeting both security needs and those of technological innovation. To achieve this, the role of African institutions, through initiatives such as the Continental Strategy for AI, is essential. The African Union has set up a working group specifically dedicated to AI, to promote its adoption in key development sectors such as education, health, agriculture and infrastructure. This initiative is not limited to promoting innovation, as it also integrates the development of regulatory frameworks to anticipate the ethical, social and economic challenges of this technology. Finally, on February 5, 2025, Smart Africa announced the official launch of the African AI Council aimed at strengthening AI governance in Africa. The official creation of the Council will take place in April 2025 during the Global AI Summit on Africa. Undeniably, addressing the issue of AI governance in Africa will enable the continent to play a greater role in defining a balanced international framework that respects its diversity.

Conclusion

Africa is at a pivotal point where AI represents a strategic lever for its development. With a young and dynamic population, innovative local initiatives and increasingly assertive governance, the continent is on track to transform its challenges into real opportunities. However, to fully realize its potential, Africa must overcome obstacles such as a lack of suitable infrastructure and insufficient funding for R&D and training.

The creation of regional technology hubs and the harmonization of national legal frameworks are fundamental steps towards ensuring coherent governance and AI that aligns with African values. Intra-African cooperation, for its part, will serve as a crucial driving force.

The initiatives underway testify to the continent's determination to make its mark on the global AI scene.

COUNTRIES THAT HAVE SIGNED THE DECLARATION ON SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
+ African Union Commission

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Source : Elysee

Africa has a unique opportunity to shape the contours of the world's digital future, and it is imperative that its voice be fully heard to ensure global AI governance that is fair, inclusive and truly representative of the continent's diversity.
This report aims to fuel future debates and support Africa's active participation in major international projects.

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