

# ETHICAL

2023

# AI

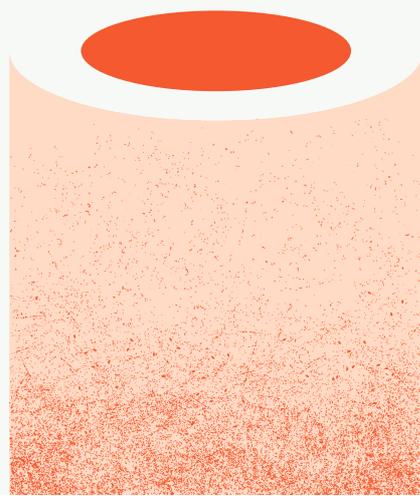
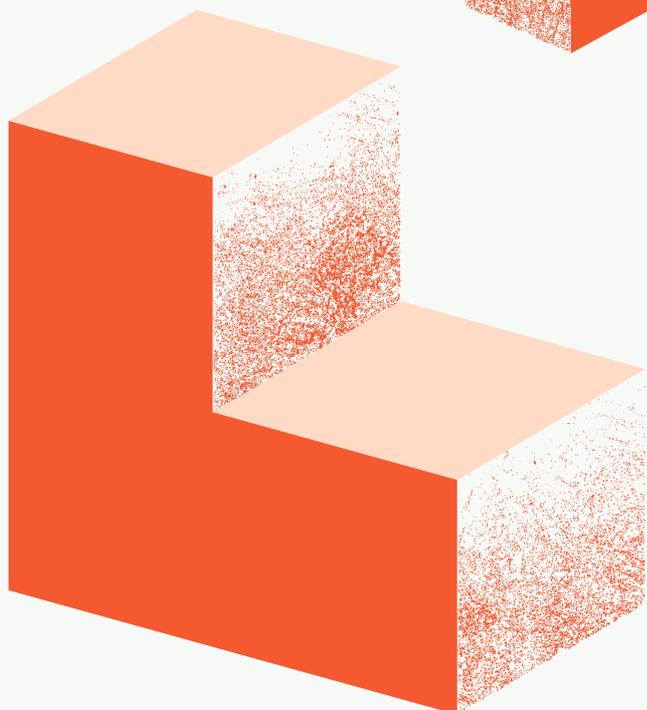
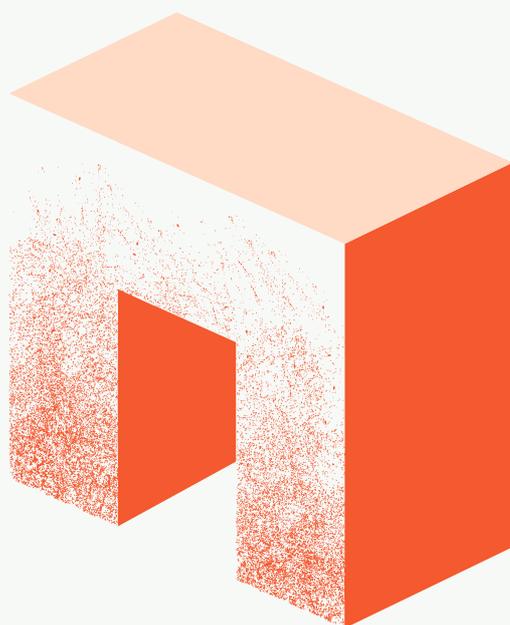
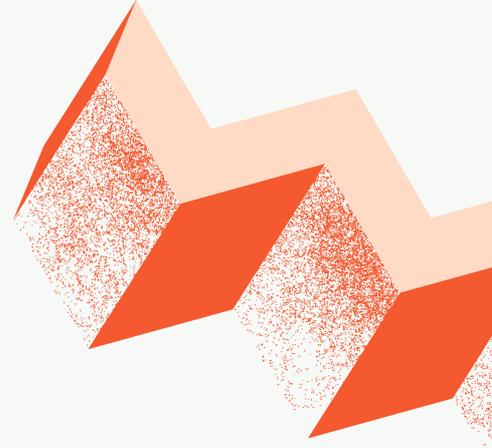
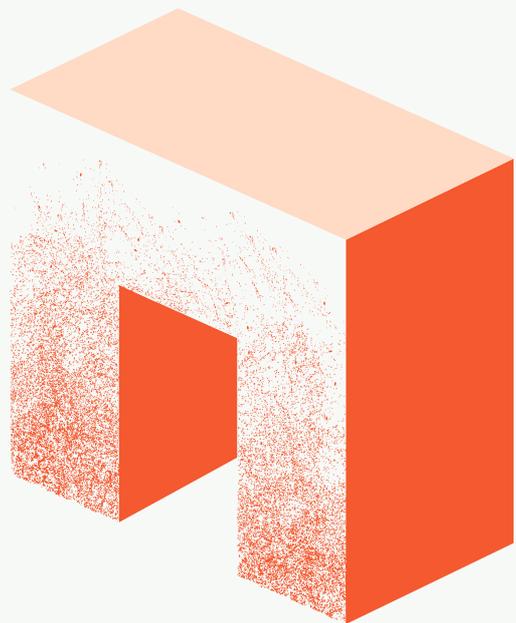


Stories, experiences and ideas on AI from civil society from over 30 countries.

# CIVIL SOCIETY

# MANIFESTO





# INTRODUCTION



## A message to our readers

The Civil Society Manifesto for Ethical AI is more than just a static document; it's a dynamic project that goes beyond words. It encompasses a tapestry of in-person roundtables, discussions, and storytelling from civil society organizations worldwide. It is our contribution to the multiple and diverse efforts of civil society organisations, human rights activists and tech experts to change the approach and narratives around AI and machine learning.

## The origins of this Manifesto

Why Create a Civil Society Manifesto for Ethical AI? Because the narratives and insights of civil society organizations regarding AI development and utilization have often been marginalized in discussions. In the following pages, you will encounter not only a collection of recommendations but also narratives, experiences, and aspirations for a future where technological progress is a topic of shared discourse, rather than the concern of a select few.

## WHO AND WHAT

**40+**

Civil society organisations and activists

**17**

Case studies and articles

**30+**

Countries

# BEGINNINGS

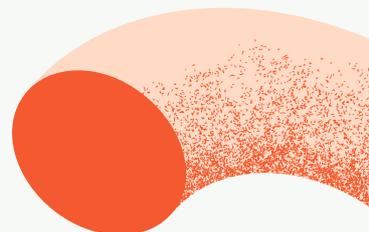
In April 2021, [the European Commission](#) introduced the world's "first rules on AI," proposing the initial EU regulatory framework for AI. Fast forward to 2023 and the [the European Parliament adopted its negotiating position on the AI Act](#), the U.S. a blueprint for an AI [Bill of Rights](#), [Brazil developed a draft AI Law](#), [Canada an Algorithmic Impact Assessments Tool](#) and [Costa Rica an AI Law proposal](#). However, numerous countries and regions worldwide still lack any form of regulation concerning AI and the utilization of innovative technology.

The [questions surrounding AI outnumber the answers](#): How can we ensure that AI systems are safe, rights-based, transparent, traceable, non-discriminatory, accountable and environmentally friendly?

As civil society organizations, acting as intermediaries between governments and communities, we are already experiencing profound effects of AI. From Hong Kong to Belarus to Chile, we have witnessed firsthand the existence and manifestation of AI technologies in the real world. Activists and frontline defenders have suffered abuses as a result of AI technologies, ranging from facial recognition, predictive analytics to other forms of data collection and biases, as documented by recent [UN reports](#) and [special procedures](#).

Simultaneously, various machine learning models are aiding in detecting risks to civic space, and numerous activists and technology experts are investing in ["ethical"](#) or ["responsible" AI](#) to mitigate associated risks and support the work of civil society organizations.

Drawing upon initiatives such as the [Decolonial AI Manifesto](#) and the [EU Artificial Intelligence Act for Fundamental Rights](#), this Civil Society Manifesto for AI represents a collaborative effort to advise policymakers on the risks and opportunities of AI specifically for civil society organizations and its impact on their work.



It brings together diverse voices, including those of indigenous peoples, youth, women, and human right defenders. The manifesto acknowledges the various impacts AI is having on communities and offers recommendations on building a decolonial, fair, accessible AI that can expand rather than restrict civic space worldwide.

The manifesto, developed by a group of over 50 organizations from 30+ countries, will be presented and its messages will be followed up at national, regional, and international levels. This collective effort aims to engage in advocacy and capacity strengthening activities to ensure the document's impact.

We begin with the assumption of researchers and activists, who argue that AI is a product of historical data representing inequities and inequalities. If we utilize current AI systems as a basis for decision-making regarding the future, there is the risk of perpetuating existing inequities.

While we appreciate the ongoing efforts to foster inclusivity in AI, we also acknowledge that the discourse surrounding AI, like the technology itself, has predominantly been shaped by “Western, whiteness, and wealth”. Our objective is to not only explore, challenge, disrupt, and reimagine the underlying assumptions within this discourse but also to broaden the discussion to incorporate communities beyond the traditional "experts."

We recognize that the lives, work, and future of various groups, such as young people, those impacted by the environmental consequences of AI, and individuals affected by its racial and gender biases, will be significantly influenced. In the subsequent pages, they will present their unique perspectives on AI, offering their own interpretations and understandings of the concept, policies and practices.

We are currently at a critical juncture where most countries lack a comprehensive AI policy or regulatory framework. However, several initiatives have been undertaken to promote safer AI adoption and address potential risks associated with the technology.

The sudden reliance on AI and other digital technologies due to the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new vulnerabilities, allowing citizens' data to be commercialized and even weaponized. Consequently, issues such as algorithmic bias, privacy breaches, lack of transparency, and the overall complexity of understanding AI interactions require policy considerations.

It is crucial to inform AI policies that approach the extent of reliance on AI systems critically, particularly in public sectors.

Ultimately, because of its strategic role and responsibilities, civil society possesses the potential to steer AI in a positive direction. By promoting accountability and elevating the voices of historically marginalized communities who have been overlooked, we believe that this collective manifesto will contribute to achieving these goals.

## THE PROCESS

The process of crafting the Civil Society Manifesto for AI begun at the [Digital Rights Asia-Pacific 2023 Assembly \(DRAPAC\)](#), held in Chiang Mai in May 2023. This collaborative endeavor was initiated through a roundtable discussion organized by Forus, a global civil society network, in collaboration with the Asia Development Alliance, European Center for Not-For-Profit Law (ECNL), the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), and the Asia Center. Over 50 civil society organisations gathered online and offline to explore the risks and opportunities associated with AI and its applications.

Subsequently, a virtual global workshop was conducted to delve deeper into these topics with diverse testimonials from civil society organizations, including Paradigm Initiative, the Uganda National NGO Forum, Red Unitas from Bolivia, the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) and initiatives such as [Machine Learning for Peace](#) project from the University of Pennsylvania. The workshop aimed to foster collective discussions and share personal experiences regarding AI's impact on the operations and working environment of civil society organizations. The workshop was followed by an interactive session as part of the Tech for Democracy Advisory Group meeting.

The organizations and activists involved in these initiatives formed the constituting body responsible for developing the Civil Society Manifesto for Ethical AI, a collaborative writing process that spanned over six months. We believe that this somewhat varied and unstructured format better mirrors the early and evolving nature of this discussion, while also ensuring that the reader remains cognizant of the wide array of perspectives articulated during this collective process.

# LIST OF ORGANISATIONS

**AIPP** / Asia-Pacific

**Alianza ONG** / Dominican Republic

**Association INFO-COM 'Jeunes de Guelma** / Algeria

**Act Church of Sweden** / Sweden

**Asia Development Alliance** / Asia

**Asociación Chilena Pro Naciones Unidas (ACHNU)** / Chile

**Balkan Civil Society Development Network** / The Balkans

**Both Nomads** / Belgium

**Brazilian Association of NGOs (ABONG)** / Brazil

**CCOAIB** / Rwanda

**CNONGD** / Democratic Republic of Congo

**CONCORD Europe** / Europe

**Connect Humanity** / USA

**Creativity Lab for Empowerment and Innovation** / Palestine

**DanChurchAid (DCA)** / Denmark

**Machine Learning for Peace** / USA

**Digital Grassroots** / Global

**ECNL** / Europe

**EDRi** / Europe

**Feminist Humanitarian Network**

**Fingo** / Finland

**FONGTO** / Togo

**Forus** / Global

**Fundapi** / Ecuador

**Guinée juristes** / Guinea

**IDAY Liberia Coalition Inc.** / Liberia

**Hitesh Bhatt** / India

**Jalpa Patel** / India

**Jun-E Tan** / Malaysia

**Instituto para el Futuro Común Amerindio**

**IFCA** / Latin America

**Kq Hub Afrika** / Uganda

**Lafede.cat** / Spain

**MAKAIA** / Colombia

**National Campaign for Sustainable Development Nepal** / Nepal

**Nigeria Network of NGOs** / Nigeria

**Nyéléni** - The International food sovereignty movement / Global

**Oxfam** / Global

**Paradigm Initiative** / Nigeria

**PFNOSCM** / Madagascar

**Public Organization "Dawn"** / Tajikistan

**REPONGAC** / Central Africa

**Sask** / Finland

**UDYAMA** / India

**Uganda National NGO Forum (UNNGOF)** / Uganda

**Unitas** / Bolivia



# WHAT WILL YOU FIND IN THE MANIFESTO?



Introduction



List of organisations  
involved in the  
Manifesto



17 Case studies,  
articles,  
experiences



6 Facts about AI



10 Recommendations  
for Ethical AI



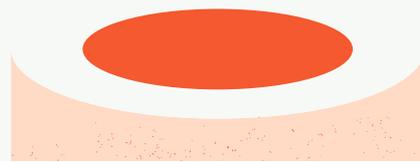
Resources on AI  
and civil society



Call to Action:  
Join the Manifesto!



Acknowledgements



# THESE ARE OUR STORIES

In the pages ahead, you'll find real-life examples, letters, stories, and personal experiences that delve into how AI intersects with topics like youth perspectives, workers' rights, capacity building, civic engagement, inclusivity, and much more.

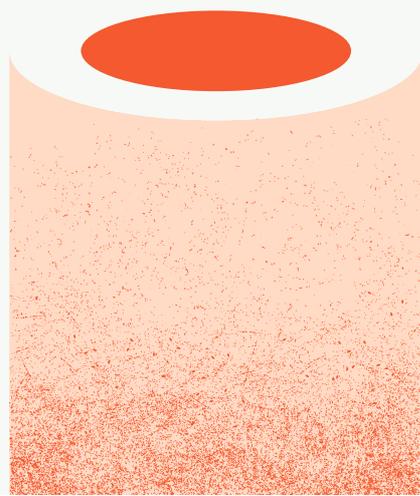
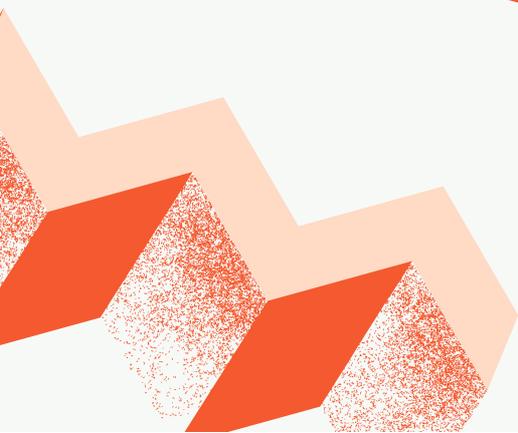
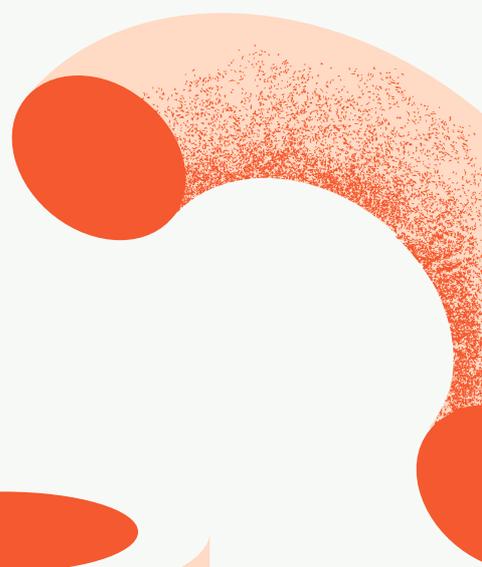
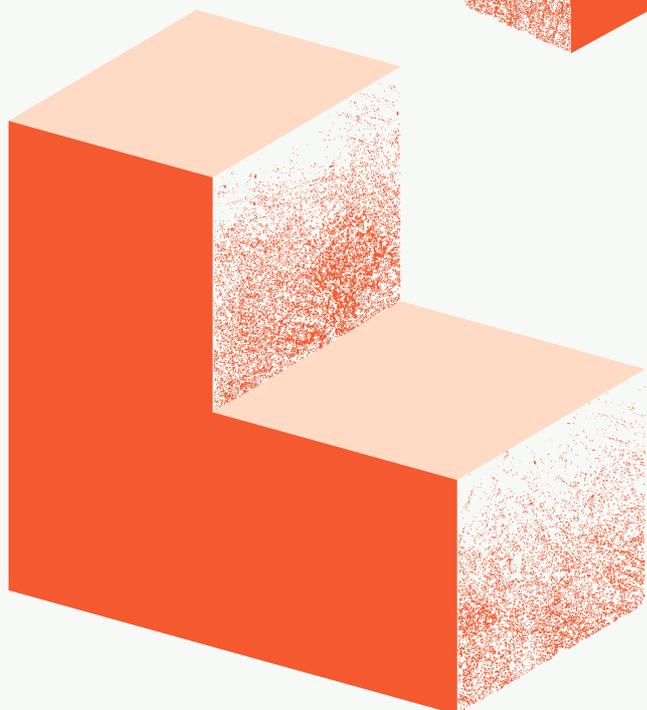
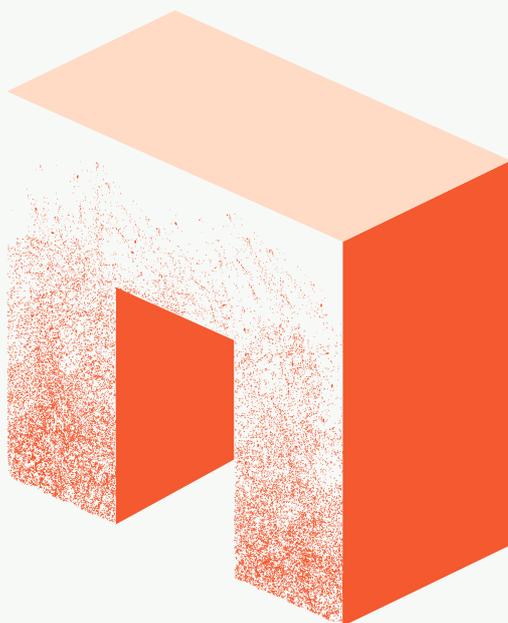
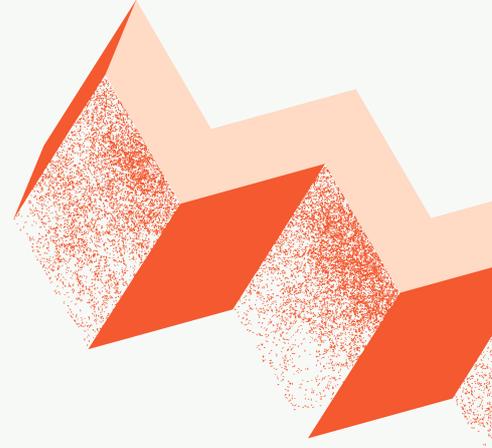
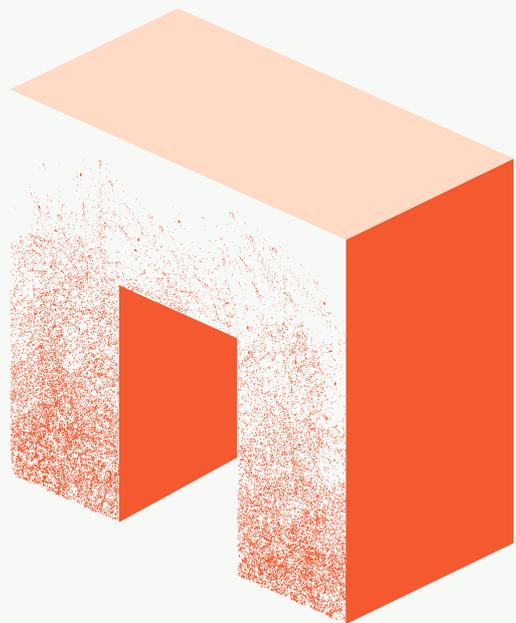




---

## THANK YOU

Sarah Strack, Marie L'Hostis, Bibbi Abruzzini, Clarisse Sih, Estefania Acosta Vieillard (Forus), Jyotsna Mohan Singh (ADA), Vanja Skoric (ECNL), Alain Serge MIFOUNDOU (REPONGAC), Oyebisi Babatunde Oluseyi (NNNGO), Jun-E Tan, Machine Learning for Peace - University of Pennsylvania, Paradigm Initiative, Jean Bosco Senyabatera (CCOAIB), Nina Sangma (AIPP), Osei Manu Kagyah and Hanna Pishchyk (Digital Grassroots), Mika Vällitalo (Fingo), Camilla Lohenoja (SASK), Ebenezer S. Thomas (IDAY Liberia Coalition Inc.), Nyéléni, Jared Ortíz González (Alanza ONG), Pollicy, Lafede.cat – Organitzacions per a la Justícia Global, Global Focus.



# EXISTING LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN AFRICA

By Miriam Beatrice Wanjiru and Sani Suleiman, Paradigm Initiative

## Abstract

This article presents the findings of a desktop research study conducted by Paradigm Initiative to explore the current state and developments of legal and regulatory frameworks around Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Africa. The purpose of this research is to gain insights into the AI landscape, identify existing frameworks and initiatives, and understand the progress of AI adoption across different African countries. The article also provides an overview of existing challenges and opportunities for AI advancement in Africa. Given the rapidly evolving nature of AI, the accuracy and currency of the information presented in this report are confined to developments up until July 2023.

*Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, African Context, Frameworks, Emerging Technologies, Policy*

## Introduction

### Background and Objectives

In recent years, the rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has ignited transformative changes across diverse sectors, reshaping economies and societies worldwide. Within the African context, this technological evolution holds unique implications due to its potential to address long-standing challenges and drive inclusive growth. Be that as it may, AI has also raised legal and ethical concerns, particularly within academia and civil society. Against this backdrop, this research article aims to delve into the present state and evolution of legal and regulatory frameworks concerning AI in Africa.

The primary objectives of this study are multifaceted. These include:

1. To illuminate the current AI landscape across the continent, encompassing both existing frameworks and emerging initiatives.
2. To assess the challenges and opportunities intrinsic to AI advancement in Africa, examining key obstacles and potential pathways to overcome them.
3. To analyse the adoption of Ghana's AI national policy which will serve as a case study to this project

## **Contextual Analysis**

### **Overview of AI in Africa**

The adoption of Artificial Intelligence and emerging technologies in Africa is an interplay of opportunities and challenges. With the continent's diverse linguistic, cultural, and economic landscape, Initiatives like AI-powered agriculture techniques for sustainable food production, and personalised learning platforms have showcased the transformative capabilities of AI in the African context. Some of the existing challenges that hinder AI adoption in Africa include infrastructural limitations, such as inadequate access to high-speed internet and reliable power sources. Socioeconomic disparities and digital divides further exacerbate the uneven distribution of AI benefits, potentially leaving marginalized communities at a disadvantage.

Ethical concerns, including data privacy, algorithmic bias, and cultural sensitivity, add another layer of complexity to adopting AI technologies in diverse African societies. Furthermore, a scarcity of local talent skilled in AI development and research poses a significant obstacle to achieving sustainable AI-driven growth on the continent.

### **Intersection of AI and Civil Society in Africa**

African scholars and civil society actors in the region are mostly concerned with the intersection of artificial intelligence, ethics, and privacy. The AI industry is seen to already exploit cheap labour and harvest data from consumers in Africa while giving little (if anything) back to these communities. For instance, Worldcoin, which was founded by Sam Altman, who also founded OpenAI (the company behind ChatGPT), has been reported to collect biometric iris scans from the uninformed consenting public.<sup>1</sup> In Kenya, for example, where the company has operated for over a year without proper consent from the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner (ODPC), civil society actors in Kenya argued that the initial purpose of collecting biometric data for cryptocurrency verification evolved into other uses without adequate oversight leading to function creep and expanded surveillance of the Kenyan people.

There have also been raised concerns about potential AI neo-colonialism within private and civil society space in Africa. For example, In a bid to improve service delivery and efficiency in Nigeria, the use of conversational agents such as chatbots capable of providing round-the-clock responses is growing. This is gaining more traction in the financial sector, particularly in fintechs where significant improvements have occurred in the last year. However, more research needs to be conducted on the impact of the gendering of these conversational agents. This is concerning, especially as findings from our research reveal that most chatbots currently deployed in the country are deliberately gendered to appear female, reinforcing already existing gender stereotypes within African societies. With an increase in the deployment of these bots in many other sectors, it is crucial to evaluate the significance of the gendering of these bots to ascertain the effect on gender inequality in Nigeria.<sup>2</sup>

## **AI Policy Landscape in Africa**

This section provides an overview of the current state of AI in Africa, exploring government initiatives and continental policies related to AI.

### **Existing AI Policy Frameworks in Africa**

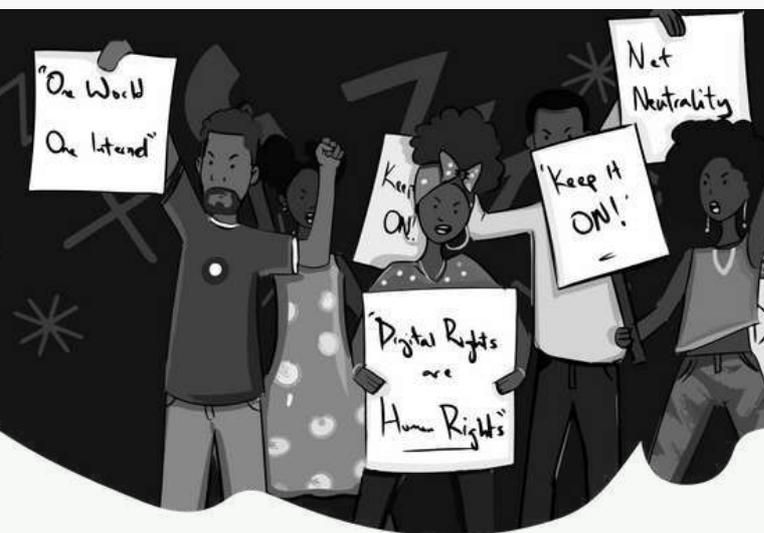
- Mauritius's AI strategy, published in (2018) - Areas of focus suggested in the strategy include manufacturing, healthcare, fintech, agriculture, smart ports and maritime traffic management.<sup>3</sup>
- Egypt's national AI strategy (2021) - focuses on four pillars: AI for government, AI for development, capacity building, and international activities.<sup>4</sup>
- Kenya's 2022–2032 Digital Master Plan – Adopted following findings from the Distributed Ledgers Technology and AI Task Force that was created to develop a roadmap for how the country can take full advantage of emerging technologies.<sup>5</sup>
- Rwanda AI National Policy (2023) - The Policy has six priority areas, sub-divided into enablers, accelerators, and safeguards.<sup>6</sup>

### **Other Government Initiatives/ Continental Frameworks**

- Ethical Policy Frameworks for Artificial Intelligence in the Global South (2019) – A pilot project by the UN Global Pulse and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.
- The African Union Artificial Intelligence Continental Strategy for Africa - A draft strategy shall be submitted to AU Member States for review and validation to sustain ownership, after which a continentally adopted version shall be launched at the January 2024 AU Summit by Africa's Heads of State and Government.<sup>7</sup>
- Blueprint on Artificial Intelligence for Africa (2021) by SMARTAfrica and the South African government.<sup>8</sup>

## Existing Institutions dedicated to AI research.

- The Ethiopian Artificial Intelligence Institute
- Nigeria's National Centre for AI and Robotics (NCAIR) – established under the National Information Technology Development Agency – works to promote R&D in AI, robotics, drones, and related technologies and create a thriving ecosystem for innovation-driven entrepreneurship, job creation and national development.
- Egypt - AI Centre of Excellence which works to educate AI professionals, accelerate the deployment of AI, and produce standards and guidelines on the safe and responsible use of AI.
- South Africa hosts the Centre for AI Research (CAIR) – a research network, as well as a Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (C4IR South Africa) – an initiative of the Department of Science and Innovation, connected with the World Economic Forum's (WEF's) networks of centres for the 4IR
- Rwanda opened a Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (C4IR Rwanda) in cooperation with the WEF.
- The Republic of the Congo hosts the African Centre for Research on AI, an initiative launched in February 2022 with the support of UN ECA and dedicated to advancing AI-related capacity development and research across the continent.



## AYETA

Discover this proactive toolkit for African digital rights actors by Paradigm Initiative, addressing the growing need to safeguard digital rights defenders, journalists, whistle blowers, and others working with sensitive information in the global South.

- 1 <https://www.technologyreview.com/2022/04/06/1048981/worldcoin-cryptocurrency-biometrics-web3/>
- 2 [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-08215-3\\_6](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-08215-3_6)
- 3 [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-08215-3\\_6](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-08215-3_6)
- 4 National Council for Artificial Intelligence, Egypt. (2021). Egypt National Artificial Intelligence Strategy.
- 5 <https://paradigmhq.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Artificial-Intelligence-in-Kenya-1.pdf>
- 6 <https://cioafrica.co/rwanda-launches-ai-policy-to-drive-economic-growth/#:~:text=Rwanda's%20AI%20policy%20focuses%20on,%2C%20public%20administration%2C%20education%20etc.&text=Rwanda%20has%20designed%20an%20Artificial,foster%20inclusive%20and%20sustainable%20development.>
- 7 <https://www.nepad.org/news/artificial-intelligence-core-of-discussions-rwanda-au-high-level-panel-emerging#:~:text=The%20AU%20AI%20Continental%20Strategy%20seeks%20to%20guide%20these%20areas,of%20AI%20in%20various%20industries.>
- 8 <https://afripoli.org/ai-in-africa-key-concerns-and-policy-considerations-for-the-future-of-the-continent>

## Case Study: Ghana

Ghana boasts an impressive 72% internet penetration rate according to recent statistics, cultivating a thriving digital environment particularly appealing to the youth. However, the adoption of artificial intelligence in Ghana is still in its early stages, with most individuals possessing only a basic understanding of this technology's vast potential.

In 2018, Google took a significant step by establishing its first African AI research center in Accra, Ghana. The US-based tech giant aims to bolster Africa's growing capabilities in artificial intelligence through collaborative efforts with regional universities, research institutions, and governments. Among the innovative initiatives is Google's Project Relate, an Android app designed to leverage AI research to assist individuals with non-standard speech in improving their communication. After recording 500 phrases, users receive a customized speech recognition model.<sup>9</sup>

This groundbreaking app is currently available for user testing in Ghana, offering a range of features. It can transcribe speech into text, utilize a synthesized voice to repeat the speaker's words, and even engage Google Assistant to perform various tasks, such as providing directions, playing music, or controlling lighting.

Furthermore, Project Relate includes an in-app reading companion named Diya, specifically designed to assist children in developing their reading skills. Diya actively listens to the user reading aloud and provides support when difficulties arise, while also rewarding their achievements.

In addressing pressing agricultural challenges, the collaboration between Google's AI center in Ghana, InstaDeep (an AI-focused company), and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is tackling the issue of locust outbreaks. This initiative aims to enhance the detection of locust infestations, benefiting not only South Africa but the entire African continent. By providing early detection capabilities, farmers can implement effective control measures to mitigate the devastating impact of locust swarms on crops and agriculture.

---

9 <https://integrisa.com/insights/f/artificial-intelligence-in-ghana>

## Navigating the Regulatory Landscape

Currently, Ghana lacks a comprehensive legal or regulatory framework dedicated to AI. Nevertheless, certain sectors, such as banking, have seen the adoption of AI tools for electronic transactions, albeit governed by industry-specific regulations rather than a dedicated AI framework. AI currently operates without a structured regulatory regime, an issue that may need addressing in the near future to prevent unmitigated damages.<sup>10</sup>

However, Ghana's Ministry of Communications and Digitalisation, the Data Protection Commission, and various other stakeholders are working on the country's National Artificial Intelligence Strategy. This strategy envisions a future, set for 2033, in which residents of Ghana experience a society transformed by AI. Its overarching goal is to harness the power of AI to advance human capabilities, bolster government functions, drive commercial growth, and elevate the overall quality of life, thereby fostering inclusive social and economic transformation.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, Ghana has a relatively comprehensive data protection law. The Data Protection Act governs data protection in Ghana. The Act sets out the rules and principles governing the collection, use, disclosure, and care of your personal data or information by a data controller or processor. The Act applies to processing carried out in Ghana whether or not the controller is established therein.<sup>12</sup>

## Challenges and opportunities of AI adoption in Ghana

Identifying the challenges that hinder AI development in Ghana, this section presents the opportunities and potential solutions to overcome these obstacles.

1. Limited Technical expertise
2. Underdeveloped legal, regulatory, and commercial ecosystem
3. Skill Development and Capacity Building
4. Lack of robust and well-defined partnership between government and private sector
5. Infrastructure, Connectivity, Data and limited investment

While Ghana may have adopted a national AI policy slower than some of its African counterparts, it is not too late to take action. The key lies in formulating a comprehensive AI policy that addresses crucial aspects such as infrastructure development, talent cultivation, ethical considerations, collaboration, and regulatory frameworks. This policy should outline clear guidelines, standards, and incentives to promote AI adoption, research, and innovation, establishing a regulatory sandbox environment that will facilitate controlled experimentation and ensure compliance with existing laws while promoting innovation.

---

10 <https://integrisa.com/insights/f/artificial-intelligence-in-ghana>

11 <https://amalitech.org/articles/amalitechs-ai-strategy/>

12 <https://paradigmhq.org/report/data-protection-authorities-in-africa-dpas-report/>

In terms of collaboration between the government, private sector, academia, and civil society which is crucial to drive AI adoption and innovation. The platform will foster partnerships and create platforms for knowledge sharing, resource pooling, and joint research and development efforts. Engaging with international AI initiatives and organizations will also provide valuable insights and networking opportunities. By leveraging collective expertise and resources, Ghana can accelerate its AI journey.

Ghana must also establish incubators, provide funding opportunities, and offer mentorship programs to support the development and scaling of AI startups. This will create a vibrant ecosystem that attracts investment, fosters innovation, and generates employment opportunities. By nurturing a thriving AI startup culture, Ghana can position itself as a hub for AI-driven entrepreneurship, unlocking significant economic advantages and driving sustainable development.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this article provides a comprehensive overview of the legal and regulatory frameworks surrounding AI in Africa. It will continue to examine existing AI policy frameworks in various African countries, highlights key government initiatives and continental strategies, and discusses challenges and opportunities for AI advancement. By analysing the strengths and limitations of AI policies, African nations can navigate the evolving landscape of AI technology while fostering ethical, sustainable, and innovative AI adoption.

---

13 <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Economic-advantages-of-Ghana-adopting-a-robust-Artificial-Intelligence-AI-policy-1772198>



## ABOUT PARADIGM INITIATIVE



Paradigm Initiative is a pan-African organisations working to connect underserved young Africans with digital opportunities, and ensures protection of their rights. Their programs include the Life Skills. ICT. Financial Readiness. Entrepreneurship (LIFE) training program, Dufuna and a digital rights program.



---

**“THE AI INDUSTRY IS SEEN TO ALREADY EXPLOIT CHEAP LABOUR AND HARVEST DATA FROM CONSUMERS IN AFRICA WHILE GIVING LITTLE (IF ANYTHING) BACK TO THESE COMMUNITIES.”**

# **A MULTISTAKEHOLDER APPROACH IS NECESSARY TO ENSURE THAT AI SYSTEMS ARE SAFE**

**By Oyebisi Babatunde Oluseyi, Executive Director, Nigeria Network of NGOs**

Artificial intelligence, machine learning, and big data are tools that can aggregate data to gather intelligence and provide valuable information. Many questions arise, including concerns about human rights. How can we ensure that these technologies do not infringe upon human rights? How can they be harnessed for the benefit of humanity?

In Nigeria, artificial intelligence is an area of interest within civil society organizations. While there are ongoing legislative efforts, we have not yet established a comprehensive national AI strategy. This is a common scenario across Africa, where only a few countries have formulated AI strategies. Our primary concern is the need for an AI framework that respects human rights, addressing potential issues before widespread adoption. However, we also have concerns about the rights that these technologies might potentially infringe upon.

To ensure that artificial intelligence systems remain safe, transparent, non-discriminatory, and environmentally friendly, we believe that a multi-stakeholder approach is essential. This approach involves collaboration among civil society, the private sector, government entities, citizens, and more to engage in a dialogue about potential rights issues and challenges associated with AI. Our goal is to develop a common language and legal framework capable of safeguarding these rights. It is crucial that we learn from the lessons of social media, which has faced challenges such as misinformation, disinformation, deep fakes, and fake news. We aim to anticipate potential AI-related challenges and address them proactively before widespread adoption.

Importantly, we believe that decision-makers should not make these decisions in isolation. A genuine multi-stakeholder approach is necessary, where all parties cooperate to establish a legal framework that protects everyone's interests.

We have heard about the possibility, for instance, of using facial recognition technology during protests. This technology could be used in ways that hinder or lead to the arrest of protesters. There are also concerns about invasive surveillance that compromises individuals' privacy, including the recording of conversations and geolocation tracking even before protests take place. While security considerations exist, our primary aim is to prevent AI from infringing on fundamental rights, such as the right to freedom of assembly.

However, AI also presents opportunities for civil society organizations. We can leverage AI in our research efforts to provide timely information and resources to our members through websites, various platforms, or mobile hotspots. For instance, we've seen how drones are used to deliver medical supplies to remote hospitals. As a membership-based organization, why can't we explore the use of drones to distribute newsletters and promotional materials to our members across the top six states of the Federation? In an age of information overload and a shift towards communication on platforms like WhatsApp, occasional paper-based documents may prove valuable.

The key message is that everyone should participate in ongoing conversations at the global, national, or regional levels. While AI offers significant benefits, we must also be vigilant in addressing its potential downsides before they emerge.



## **ABOUT NNGO**



NNGO supports Nigerian NGOs in their commitment to poverty reduction, promotion of human rights and in bringing development to the door-steps of the common man.

---

# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN CENTRAL AFRICA

By **Alain Serge MIFOUNDOU, REPONGAC**

Digitalisation accelerated rapidly in Africa during the Covid-19 pandemic. In these difficult times, the ability to go digital contributed greatly to the resilience of public action, enabling democratic institutions to continue to function and public services to be provided. At the same time, however, artificial intelligence is exposing African democracy, public administration and civil society to new vulnerabilities at the hands of malicious private and public actors. To harness the potential of artificial intelligence for civic engagement, continental, regional and national institutions need to be constantly vigilant in identifying and addressing emerging risks. They must also prepare for a cultural change: flexibility, critical thinking, lifelong learning and IT skills will be needed to enable everyone to use technology responsibly and prevent its drawbacks.

## Introduction

By March 2020, more than half the world's population had been placed under containment, and strong measures had been taken to halt the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Beyond the human and health tragedy represented by the coronavirus, it is now widely acknowledged that the pandemic has caused the most serious economic crisis since the Second World War. Public administrations, the private sector and civil society organisations had to work in a context of total uncertainty, making difficult choices in the face of the health, economic and social challenges posed by the virus.

Bureaucratic procedures had to be simplified and digitised; a number of public services were also computerised in record time; civil servants at various government levels, the private sector and civil society mobilised online and were forced to work from home by videoconference.

On the other hand, the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) in public and private administrations is booming in Africa. This technology offers a number of advantages and opportunities for organisations to improve the efficiency and quality of services offered to citizens.

The priority given to scientific and technological innovation in Africa has been underlined by the African Union through the adoption of the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation in Africa 2024 (STISA) and the Science and Technology Consolidated Plan of Action (CPA).

## **Artificial intelligence for civic engagement**

Artificial intelligence still raises fears that are often exaggerated in Central Africa, but it is also making spectacular technological advances, enabling it to assist humans with tasks that were previously impossible. Its use in support of public administrations could improve and reinforce the quality of public commitment and service.

## **Building trusted public artificial intelligence in Central Africa**

AI is still being deployed very slowly in African public administrations, and often timidly. But a firm commitment to artificial intelligence could have a number of benefits for the quality of public service, such as improving the continuity of public service 24 hours a day, the relevance of decisions and services delivered and equal treatment, reducing the time taken to examine users' requests, and so on.

Artificial intelligence will strengthen the human relationship between citizens and public officials by freeing up time by automating certain tasks (acknowledging receipt, requesting additional documents, etc.) and improving the quality of service by performing tasks that were previously physically impossible. This is why REPONGAC is calling on international, continental, regional and national institutions to implement a resolutely proactive and responsible policy for the deployment of artificial intelligence, in the service of the general interest and public performance in Central Africa.

The African Union, the African Union ministers responsible for information and communication technologies and other national, regional and international bodies must anticipate the establishment of a regulatory framework, particularly at African level, by implementing pragmatic guidelines now to enable the deployment of artificial intelligence in public services in stages, in a lucid and vigilant manner, as close as possible to the needs of Africans.

## **Providing resources and appropriate governance**

To implement a public artificial intelligence strategy, public and private administrations in Central Africa must have the appropriate human and technical resources. One of the priorities must be to train public players, but also to equip themselves with the necessary technical resources. Consideration should also be given to making the legal framework more flexible, particularly with regard to data sharing within government departments.

REPONGAC also insists on a profound improvement of national ICT bodies into a national control authority responsible for the regulation of AI systems in order to embody and internalise the dual challenge of protecting fundamental rights and freedoms, on the one hand, and innovation and public performance, on the other.

## **Civic commitment**

We emphasise here the approach in terms of individual rights in Central Africa. Yet the fairness of the system is a global issue, based as much on the nature of the data processed as on the choices made to guide the operation of the AI system, or the variables that will determine its development. A collective approach is therefore necessary.

Involving the citizen in the regulation of AI in Central Africa is an ambition that raises questions that go far beyond the issue of artificial intelligence: citizen participation, usually through formal consultations and other citizen panels, calls for a wide range of reflection, on changes in the status of associations, how much they shrink, access to expertise, the creation of new rights, all of which are clearly beyond the scope of our reflection.

The effective presence of the 'Landa' or ordinary citizens, either directly or through social partners or associations, around AI design, deployment, criticism and corrections is necessary.

The aim is not, of course, to hijack independent criticism, from which the authorities can only benefit, but first and foremost to work with them and in the public arena, establishing a dialogue fuelled by the transparency of rollouts and by a shared concern for the common good in terms of the objectives being pursued.

Nor is it a question of ousting internal consultation structures, but of ensuring that this consultation is in tune with the agility of the projects themselves, without being a prisoner of traditional consultative processes: in this respect, REPONGAC or other networks cannot be limited to a one-off presentation, project by project, at a social committee meeting, but must give rise to genuine strategic consultation, at the level of the African Union, regional institutions, ministries and national regulatory bodies. This should also be seen as part of a wider consultation involving all the stakeholders, without artificially pitting the interests of citizen users against those of public officials.

It is up to legislators and administrations to determine the modalities of this civic participation in Central Africa. There is a clear need to explore various forms of civic engagement aimed at fostering trust. This involves harnessing the dedication of local communities, associations, and volunteer citizens, with a strong emphasis on their training and access to necessary resources to enable them to actively participate. Currently, several approaches are under consideration, such as mandating consideration of public expectations, facilitating user-suggested checks, and establishing structured channels for direct interaction with users through ongoing mediation. The ultimate objective is to identify the conditions for respectful cooperation that serve common interests and promote the responsible use of AI technology in Central Africa.

## Conclusion

The potential of AI to foster civic engagement is vast and largely untapped in Central Africa. By harnessing the power of AI, Africans can create innovative solutions that not only enable civic engagement, but also allow them to participate more effectively in their country's development process. As AI continues to advance and becomes more integrated into our daily lives, it is essential that we explore its potential to strengthen democracy and promote a more informed and engaged citizenry in Central Africa.

To prevent the potential threat of losing control over technologies that are crucial for the collective benefit and to maintain the capacity to deliver services to citizens that are on par with what advanced private entities offer, public institutions must unequivocally engage in the advancement of artificial intelligence. They must embrace a path characterized by judicious, ethical, sustainable, and responsible implementation. This is the fundamental requirement for achieving the performance objectives advocated by REPONGAC.



## ABOUT REPONGAC



REPONGAC, set up in 2008, represents over 1,200 Central African NGOs grouped into 10 national NGO member platforms. REPONGAC's aim is to influence regional institutions, but also to defend the views of member NGOs on common regional issues on the world stage.

---

# AI'S TRANSFORMATIONAL IMPACT ON CIVIL SOCIETY

**By Jean Bosco Senyabatera, Head of Programmes and Capacity Building at the Conseil de Concertation des Organisations d'Appui aux Initiatives de Base (CCOAIB), Rwanda.**

Established largely in the aftermath of the Rwandan Tutsi genocide, the member organizations of Rwandan civil society initially faced significant communication challenges. Infrastructure had been severely damaged, and the available technology at the time was quite basic. Communication relied on landline phones, postal mail, fax machines, telegrams, and radio broadcasts. However, this landscape changed rapidly, particularly after March 1989 when the internet became a part of the global digital ecosystem, facilitating information sharing, file exchanges, and electronic mail.

The transition from email to the emergence of various social networks happened swiftly within roughly a quarter of a century. While adapting to this new era dominated by social networks has been relatively smooth for some, it has posed challenges, especially for older individuals, including many civil society members affiliated with the CCOAIB platform.

As part of our platform's objectives, we have been dedicated to strengthening the community capacity of our members in recent years. We understand that effective communication plays a pivotal role in addressing the daily challenges that communities encounter. To achieve this goal, we launched training programs for our member organizations, which play a crucial role in community engagement. These organizations operate in 30 districts across Rwanda. To facilitate these engagements, we conducted training sessions at both the district and city levels in Kigali.

Our motivation for embracing digital technology stems from the geographical dispersion of our member organizations across the 30 districts of Rwanda. The need for efficient communication and data exchange across these distant locations drove us to leverage digital solutions. We implemented a monitoring and evaluation software, MNT Database, which has facilitated data collection on various interventions and organizational interests. This software streamlines the exchange of critical information, such as the number of individuals trained in nursery setup or those accessing weather information.

Prior to its implementation, collecting such data involved extensive travel and time. With the MNT Database, we can access real-time data efficiently, enhancing collaboration with both local and international partners.

Artificial intelligence arrives at a pivotal moment. It complements our work, especially in areas where data analysis is essential. AI systems, equipped with sophisticated software, process and interpret field data at a speed and accuracy that sometimes seem to surpass human capabilities.

This ability is invaluable, particularly when addressing complex challenges like climate change and unpredictable weather conditions. While there may be aspects of AI that remain less understood, its potential to provide quick solutions and propose measures aligns with our objectives to support communities across Rwanda.

Emerging technologies have transformed the world into a global village. They have broken down barriers, enabling civil society to connect, access information, and engage on a global scale. This rapid exchange of information supports civil society to stay informed, voice their opinions, and respond swiftly to issues. It enhances our ability to adapt and collaborate effectively, ensuring we remain relevant in a fast-changing landscape.

I want to emphasize that artificial intelligence is not limited to any specific group or institution. It is a tool for all, including civil society. To harness its potential, civil society must actively engage, stay informed, and keep pace with evolving technology. The world is evolving rapidly, particularly in the realm of information technology, and it's essential for civil society organizations to remain up-to-date and connected to effectively address the challenges of our time.



## **ABOUT CCOAIB**



CCOAIB is an umbrella organization for local Rwandan NGOs working in various development sectors. Created in 1987 by 12 local NGOs, CCOAIB officially began its activities in 1988. Today, CCOAIB members work in a variety of development fields, including agriculture and the environment, governance, socio-economic empowerment and civic participation.

---

# DEFENDING RIGHTS IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: REFLECTIONS FROM LIBERIA.

By Ebenezer S. Thomas, President of IDAY Liberia Coalition Inc.

We strongly believe that civil society organizations play a crucial role in shaping the future of AI and its impact on communities. We have observed firsthand the impact of AI on civic space and human rights in Liberia. Frontline activists and advocates have faced abuses as a result of AI technologies, such as facial recognition and data collection, which have been used to suppress dissent and persecute individuals.

We strongly believe that safeguards, transparency and accountability mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that AI systems do not infringe on the rights and freedoms of individuals and communities.

Furthermore, as an organization committed to promoting the rights and well-being of indigenous peoples, we support the inclusion of indigenous peoples' perspectives in AI discussions. The unique knowledge systems, cultural practices and ways of relating to the environment of indigenous communities must be respected and taken into account in the development and deployment of AI.

In terms of opportunities, we see the potential for AI to contribute to the preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages, which are a vital part of Liberia's cultural heritage. AI technologies can be leveraged to develop language translation tools, language learning applications and other resources that support the linguistic diversity of indigenous communities.

We would also like to highlight the importance of engaging young people in the AI debate.

Young people bring new perspectives and innovative ideas and can play a vital role in shaping the future of AI.

Their voices must be heard and their visions taken into account in policy development and decision-making processes related to AI.



## ABOUT IDAY LIBERIA



IDAY Liberia Coalition Inc. is committed to promoting the rights and dignity of Liberia's children and youth, especially in the field of education.

---



---

**“THERE IS A CLEAR NEED TO EXPLORE VARIOUS FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AIMED AT FOSTERING TRUST.”**

# INTERVIEW

## INEQUALITY, FRAGMENTATION, AND THE RACE TO REGULATE: DR JUN-E TAN ON TECHNOLOGY GOVERNANCE

This interview is with Dr Jun-E Tan, a policy researcher from Malaysia. Jun-E has a background in sustainable development and various policy areas, including climate change and social and solidarity economy, but now she's focused on digital rights, AI governance, and digital policy in general. And, for a fun fact about her, she really enjoys making things, especially sewing these days.

*What would you say got you interested in artificial intelligence and the laws surrounding its usage?*

**Jun-E:** When I began my research on digital communication and the human rights issues it entailed, my primary focus was on digital rights in a broader sense. I delved into the conceptualization of digital rights, and one significant discovery emerged: there was a notable gap, particularly in Southeast Asia and similar contexts, regarding one of the key areas of digital rights, which centers on data-centred rights. This realization occurred around 2019. Following this research, my path naturally led me to explore data-centred rights further, where the data representation of individuals (we sometimes refer to them as digital clones, digital twins, or digital shadows, etc) in digital spaces, could impact decisions affecting their life opportunities, such as access to jobs, education, and public services. With the advent of AI, which involves machine learning on a vast scale, it became clear that AI has a pivotal role in influencing data-centred rights. This connection sparked my interest in the field of AI governance.

*How would you define technology governance as it stands today?*

**Jun-E:** Technology governance is about making the rules to direct and control where the technology goes, what it can be used for, who can use it for what, and what happens if something goes wrong, who's accountable. As it stands today, I would say that technology governance in our world right now is quite fraught with inequalities. This comes from multiple aspects.

It can be between the Global Minority and the Global Majority (or as we used to call it, Global North and Global South), with the Global Minority having a lot of power and resources and use of the technology compared to the Global Majority who's very much affected but has a lot less power to influence what's going on and how the technology is being used and diffused. This global inequality is just one facet of the issue. Inequalities also persist within countries, where access to and understanding of technology remains uneven, leaving many individuals grappling with digitalization and at risk of being left behind. This disparity is yet another form of inequality.

I would further elaborate that this is also a very fast-moving area, technology governance, we are chasing after something that is just morphing into something else all the time. That's a key challenge because technology always manages to go much faster than regulation and there are limited safeguards.

Lastly, I would say that technology governance, as it stands today, is quite fragmented. Ideally speaking, I think with such powerful technologies, to harness the potential and mitigate the risks, we should have a very concerted effort from the global community, charting out where we want this technology to go. However, in reality, those who are able to control the technology and those who do not often fail to engage in meaningful dialogue to collectively determine its direction. In sum, technology governance faces complex challenges characterized by global disparities, rapid technological advancement, and a fragmented global landscape.

*You wrote the report "Governance of Artificial Intelligence AI in Southeast Asia" in partnership with EngageMedia. So far, it has led to a lot of brain racking on the issue of AI governance. What has changed or what do you think needs to change almost two years after its publication?*

**Jun-E:** Since its publication in 2021, I'd say there has been a noticeable increase in the appetite for regulation. Back then, our discussions mainly revolved around AI ethics. However, due to significant advancements in technology and AI hype generated by the tech industry, for better or worse, we now frequently encounter headlines emphasizing the immense power of this technology, highlighting the pressing need for regulation. The problem now is more on how to regulate it. Secondly, I'd like to point out that technology has become significantly more advanced, particularly in the mass market. In 2021, generative AI was still relatively unknown. As many of you are aware, by the end of 2022, it gained widespread recognition and popularity, especially with the emergence of ChatGPT.

Consequently, there's been a rush to deploy this powerful technology with limited safeguards. It's akin to chasing the frontiers of what technology can achieve, all while having to grapple with the potential unintended consequences and even the weaponization of technology.

However, certain aspects have remained consistent. For instance, the need for increased cooperation between powerful and less powerful countries in the realm of technology persists. There's also a prevailing sense of techno-optimism, albeit possibly less utopian than before. There remains a need for more research, particularly evidence-based assessments of technology's potential and its alignment with this optimism. It's crucial to define the boundaries of what can and cannot be achieved with technology. I think we should put greater attention to the potential impacts of this technology, and on mitigation and adaptation to its effects, especially given the ongoing rush towards adoption.

*What critical issues do you believe still need addressing today to ensure that individuals in the "Global Majority", regions like Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America, can actively participate in shaping AI laws and the broader utilization of AI technology. How can communities be included and represented?*

**Jun-E:** I'd like to approach this from two angles. First, let's consider the aspect of laws and regulations which are being developed at the international level. Entities like the EU and China are in the process of formulating laws that will have far-reaching implications beyond their borders. Additionally, there are international standards and efforts such as those initiated by the United Nations. At the global level, it's crucial that we move beyond geopolitical considerations because the dominant narrative often stems from the US or the broader Western perspective. While there's talk of a technology race between US and China and geopolitical implications, the real issue at hand extends beyond this. While not on the scale of nuclear war or climate change, there is a substantial potential for harm through disinformation, misinformation campaigns, and issues like algorithmic management, where AI increasingly influences workplace dynamics. These are not hypothetical concerns; they can significantly affect people's lives. The creators of technology, though relatively few, hold significant power. Collaborative efforts are essential to curb the concentration of this power, ensuring that technology benefits everyone, not just specific nations or groups within them. It's critical that we work together to rein in the influence of big tech companies.

Now, shifting our focus to the national level, there are steps we can take to involve people in the development of AI-related laws. One crucial step is greater engagement with civil society and those directly impacted by this technology. Often, policy discussions predominantly involve tech companies exclusively, but this limited perspective does not provide adequate input for lawmaking. We must consider the real-life impacts on individuals. For instance, platform workers, what are their lived experiences? How can we make life better for them? The other thing I think is very important is to have some awareness campaigns to look at what the real issues are. This isn't about sensationalized AI hype or existential risks. I'm talking more about actual limitations of the technology, what the technology is good for, what it's not so good for. For example, we should be promoting media literacy to help people discern misinformation from reliable information.

*What challenges, in your view, exist in Southeast Asia that hinder people from fully benefiting from AI?*

**Jun-E:** There are two main comments that I have on this. Firstly, let's discuss the issue of capacity. In Southeast Asia, a region marked by diversity, many countries are still grappling with digitalization. Singapore stands out as a leader, boasting high rankings in AI-readiness, securing the second position globally in the Government AI Readiness Index in 2022. Then we have a second tier of countries, including Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, and Brunei. These nations have adopted national AI strategies and are making strides in understanding and implementing AI. Moving to the third tier, we find countries like Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Timor-Leste, despite not being in ASEAN but still a Southeast Asian country. These countries are still struggling with the digital divide, and AI has not yet made significant inroads. In essence, there's a capacity issue at play. If you're still working on getting your population online, AI remains largely inaccessible.

My second comment is about access to the key ingredients of AI. This includes factors like data quality, computing power, and access to talent. Unfortunately, many countries, particularly in Southeast Asia, lack access to these essential components. These three fundamental elements necessary for creating technology are often out of reach, except for powerful countries/regions like the US, China, the EU, and some middle-power nations where wealth and talent are abundant. Returning to the first point, the lack of capacity often leads to a scenario where we become more users than producers of technology. In other words, much of the technology we use is developed by other countries that may not fully comprehend the nuances of our cultures, languages, and sensitivities. This presents a significant challenge because not all technologies are plug-and-play; some require adaptation. To design and build technology that best suits local needs, it's essential to understand the ground realities. For instance, if you want to have a really good technology for farmers, say, somewhere in Malaysia, you need to know their problems. But if you're not in communication with them and the government wants farmers to adopt such technology, then we would basically need to adopt technologies from elsewhere, which may or may not align with our needs.

*Do you believe that civil society is giving the necessary attention to this issue? If not, what actions do you think should be taken?*

**Jun-E:** I'd say there are indeed pockets of civil society in Southeast Asia that are paying quite a bit of attention to this issue. However, it's a relatively smaller segment of individuals who actively follow such news and are genuinely interested in learning. Much of the ongoing discussions seem to revolve around cybersecurity and privacy, but I believe it would be beneficial for them to shift their focus more towards exploring the practical applications of technology.

Questions like "What are the suitable applications for this technology?" and "What applications may pose risks or dangers?" are not receiving as much attention as they should be, in my opinion. I believe it's crucial for us, as a collective, to broaden our scope and learn from other regions about how technology is being utilized — and then what are the impacts? Are they good? Are they bad? Good for who? Bad for who?

To address this, there are a few things that could be done better. Firstly, we need to build capacity to understand these technologies and their consequences. The other one would be to do more research and basically generate more stories and evidence for instance on how people deal with AI at their work or how AI is impacting elections worldwide. There are some people actually doing research on this, of course, but I think that we could always benefit from more.

Lastly, because civil society in the region is strapped for funding and tech expertise, collaborations across borders could be valuable. For instance, organizations in the global north may have access to international forums. By building partnerships, we can amplify our voices in these forums. Basically, we need to increase our representation and to channel information up and down. What's going on at the international level and what's going on at our local level? How can we work out some way to work better together and to improve feedback mechanisms within society?



## **ABOUT DR. JUN-E TAN**



Dr. Jun-E Tan is a Senior Research Associate at Khazanah Research Institute. Her current research interests include digital rights and AI governance in the contexts of Southeast Asia and Malaysia. She has also worked in the areas of environmental and climate policy, social and solidarity economy, as well as sustainable development in general. This interview was carried out by Bibbi Abruzzini (Italy) and Clarisse Sih (Cameroon) from Forus. You can find A Space for Us podcast episode [here](#).

---

# INTERVIEW

## MACHINE LEARNING FOR PEACE: HOW CIVIC SPACE CAN BE ANALYSED AND MONITORED WITH AI

Civic spaces can serve as a barometer of political health. Policymakers and other stakeholders in civil society, philanthropy, and foreign aid need accurate analysis of the civic spaces around the globe in order to know what locations need help. In this interview with Jeremy Springman we discover the Machine Learning for Peace project, a new interactive online tool to address shrinking civic space and growing authoritarianism around the world. With the help of recent developments in big data and machine learning, it provides up-to-date data on recent and historical trends in civic space as well as forecasts about how conditions are likely to change in the near future. To do this, tens of millions of articles published by more than 270 regional and domestic news sources in more than 30 languages are continuously scraped and processed.

*Hi Jeremy can you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you got into AI?*

**Jeremy:** I am a senior research associate in the Dev Lab at the University of Pennsylvania, with a background in political science. Regarding my research interests, I am primarily focused on civil society and its role in governance and political accountability. This was also the central theme of my dissertation. Specifically, I examined how the delivery of services by non-governmental organizations in Africa influences the political accountability of incumbents. I delved into the political dynamics of countries where substantial service delivery comes from non-governmental organizations rather than the state. Since then, I have shifted my focus from service delivery to studying political activism and accountability within this broader context. This is how my involvement with the Dev Lab's Machine for Peace Project began. I took my interest in civil society and joined forces with the Dev Lab to transition from a purely research-oriented approach to work that directly engages with both the policy realm and practitioners actively involved in civil society work.

My journey into the realm of AI started differently. Initially, my focus was not on machine learning or artificial intelligence, as my work primarily revolved around field experiments and randomized control trials. I still continue such work, as I find value in large-scale, field-based projects that allow me to actively engage with communities to develop interventions and then rigorously evaluate their impact. However, the project that currently occupies the majority of my time, and the reason for our discussion today, presented an opportunity to shift my research efforts significantly. I realized that the skills and knowledge I had been developing could be redirected towards more than just research production. Instead, I could use them to actively contribute to initiatives that could benefit civil society in practical ways. This perspective led us to identify a fertile space rich with data and the potential to create new data streams at an unprecedented speed, thanks to recent advancements in technology.

*What significant developments do you observe in the field of AI, and what implications might they have for the activities of civil society organizations?*

**Jeremy:** As impressive as they are, I must say that large language models have proven to be far more versatile and applicable to a wide range of problems than I initially anticipated five or six years ago. We've witnessed the evolution of large language models, starting with those developed by major tech companies and released to the public. However, what we're seeing now, particularly in the last year or two, with tools like ChatGPT and related models, surpasses what most people, including myself, expected these models to achieve just a few years ago. While the current large models can be interacted with by programmers and integrated into various applications and workflows, they can be somewhat unwieldy due to their size and complexity. Looking ahead, one trend we're likely to see more of is the development of smaller, more nimble language models. These models are trained on less data but are still remarkably powerful, thanks to creative techniques that maximize their efficiency. This approach enables the training of models that can operate not only on publicly available English text, which is predominantly Western-centric, but also on more tailored and diverse collections of text from various countries, languages, and perspectives.

*What are the ways in which civil society can harness the power of AI?*

**Jeremy:** One specific area of focus, which aligns with our project's goals, is the accelerated generation of more data. In recent years, there has been extensive discourse about how organizations can leverage data to their advantage. We live in a world where an abundance of data is constantly being generated—data stemming from individual behaviors, interactions, social media, and more. This has garnered substantial attention, and it's an area where our project is specifically concentrated.

*Can you tell us more about the Machine Learning for Peace project?*

**Jeremy:** The Machine Learning for Peace project has been ongoing for quite a while; we're now finishing our fifth year. Initially, in the early stages of this project, we collaborated with several major international NGOs and the US Agency for International Development. As researchers, our focus was on the phenomenon of "closing civic space," which is part of the broader trend known as democratic backsliding. While there is a wealth of data available on aspects like regime type and long-term trends in democracy and governance, most of this data assesses these factors retrospectively. It tracks the state of democracy in a country year by year, making it useful for understanding long-term trends over five or ten years. However, it isn't very practical for planning specific programs in a country over the next six months. Our goal was to leverage the existing data resources but create something more actionable and useful for short-term planning, focusing on the coming weeks and months rather than years or decades.

Our approach involves extensive data collection, including scraping hundreds of millions of news articles published globally in various languages. What sets us apart is our emphasis on local sources based in the countries we're analyzing. We've invested significant effort and human resources to ensure accurate and high-quality scraping of news sources in approximately 60 countries.

Once we have this raw text data from news articles, we employ a variety of tools, including large language models, to process it into structured data on political events, effectively creating a dataset that tracks monthly events related to civic space. Finally, we combine this data with other relevant information, such as local economic conditions, to develop forecasting models that aim not only to track recent events but also to predict future developments.

*What impact has the project had so far?*

**Jeremy:** The most critical aspect of our work is the impact it has. While we have access to a wealth of fascinating and novel data, the primary goal has always been to make a real difference in how we operate. As I mentioned earlier, this project has been ongoing for five years now. It took us roughly three and a half years to develop a system that functions effectively. Initially, we naively hoped that collecting and processing data would be straightforward. However, we soon realized that obtaining news from the specific sources we needed, especially from domestic sources based in countries with fewer economic resources, required an immense amount of effort and ongoing quality monitoring—something that, for now, only humans can handle. We invested significant time and effort in getting this process right. It's only been in the past year and a half that we've had something publicly accessible, where we showcase our data for specific countries, including recent data and forecasts.

With this public-facing element in place for a year, we've gained insights into how it's currently being used and how we envision it being used in the future. One of the initial applications was resource allocation within the consortium that the Machine Learning for Peace project is a part of. This consortium includes several major international NGOs and the US Agency for International Development.

Part of the consortium's work involves having funds that can be rapidly deployed to countries showing signs of closing civic space. These funds, made available by USAID, are allocated based on ongoing assessments of countries experiencing challenges with civic space. One of our early endeavors was to utilize forecasting models to determine where to allocate these flexible response funds. Often, based on their on-the-ground knowledge, one of the consortium members would identify several places where they anticipated worsening conditions in the next six months. However, the available funding might only allow us to assist one or two of these locations.

To make these decisions, we started comparing the quantitative forecasts generated by our models with the insights shared by our on-ground partners in these countries. When both our forecasting models and our partners on the ground raised concerns about a particular situation in the near future, it gave us added confidence that directing funds to that location was the right course of action. In cases where only one of these information sources flagged an issue, it helped us prioritize where to provide support.

In essence, our project involves collecting and analyzing data, making it accessible to the public, and applying it practically to allocate resources where they are needed most, ultimately striving to make a positive impact on the ground.



## **ABOUT JEREMY SPRINGMAN**



Jeremy Springman is a Senior Research Associate at DevLab@Penn. He studies political economy in developing countries, with a specific interest in how non-profit organizations shape, and are shaped by, politics and governance. In his research, Jeremy aspires to generate insights that can help donors and civil society strengthen democratic institutions and weaken autocratic rule in developing countries. He completed his PhD in comparative politics and international relations at the University of Pennsylvania in 2019. From 2019 – 2022, he was a Postdoc and then Senior Research Associate at Duke University.

---



---

**“TECHONLOGY IS THE  
NEW FACE OF GENDER  
INEQUALITY. IT’S  
ACTUALLY INCREASING  
GAPS RATHER THAN  
BRIDGING GAPS.”**

# INTERVIEW

## GENDER PATTERNS IN TECH: “THE CYCLE OF MARGINALIZATION CAN AND MUST BE BROKEN”

**Virtual engagement is biased. Women and girls face hurdles to access technology and need to overcome inherent socio-cultural norms that keep the doors shut when it comes to their ability to step into and influence the digital sphere - including AI. We ask Jane Coffin, Connect Humanity Senior Advisor and Dianne Olivan, gender and digital rights expert, why the online world is still a hostile space for women and how we can change that.**

*The pandemic catalysed a worldwide shift to virtual engagement. But girls and women are still missing out. Data shows that globally, men are 21% more likely to be online than women, increasing to 52% in certain regional contexts, where only 19% of women are using the internet. There are gendered stereotypes around men being more suited to using technology and women are more likely to suffer from online violence and cyberbullying, turning online spaces into hostile grounds duplicating existing inequalities that we find in the "analog world". What are the gender and power dynamics at play in digital rights?*

**Dianne:** Access to and participation on the internet is greatly determined by one's cultural, political, and economic context and capital. What the pandemic has unfortunately and finally highlighted for everyone to see -- something that feminists and digital rights activists have been campaigning towards since we have identified the potential (and harms) of ICT - in the most basic sense, is that any "innovation" that takes a neutral ground, i.e. does not take into consideration the experience of marginalised groups and communities nor are designed with them, will exacerbate existing inequalities.

It is crucial we take a step back and take a more inquisitive look at the internet as a platform for embodiment. Imagine we all have individual ladders that represent our capacity to participate in digital platforms, trying to reach a fully meaningful existence at the top. Then we will remove steps as representation of barriers that we experience across our intersecting identities.

Some ladders would be so short because they cannot economically afford connectivity, or because they require the permission of their husbands to purchase and use a digital device. Some would stop halfway because they routinely experience violence online. And some would not even know what to do with the ladder because it primarily uses a language they do not use. How short will your ladder be? Your grandmother's? Your friend with a disability? Our migrants and refugees?

The analog and the digital are mirrored, interconnected. What happens in the analog impact how we use and access the internet.

**Jane:** Digital exclusion in today's world is economic exclusion, political exclusion, and social exclusion. This makes the digital gender divide a huge threat to progress in gender rights that so many have fought for, for so long. The cycle of marginalization can and must be broken. This calls for nationwide campaigns for socio-economic development.

Governments must support training initiatives to help citizens mitigate the risks and harness the benefits of being online, including online safety, cyber security, and ways to communicate with friends and family. These programs must have a gendered lens with an understanding of the specific risks that women and girls face.

Governments must also invest in the expansion of fast, affordable broadband access and devices to help close digital divides. This again must include a strategy to address the specific barriers keeping women and girls offline. And to invest in enabling more women to work in ICT and networking infrastructure — sectors which remain overwhelmingly male.

*The global majority is the global minority when it comes to having a say in digital rights and internet governance. Somehow these spaces of discussion are sealed off from citizens even though the digital realm has such intimate and profound impacts on our daily lives. Like a toxic love relationship, the digital takes so much space but we matter so little. How can we build digital communities and infrastructures that are representative and democratic?*

**Dianne:** The marginalised are "sealed off" from these spaces because these spaces move within a neocolonial framework. Those who usually participate in these conversations also have the privilege to participate; they have the economic and cultural capital to contribute and thrive.

There are of course attempts to be representative and inclusive, but we should ask: Where are these conversations happening? What do I need to have to participate? In what language are they sharing meaning? Whose voices are the loudest in the room? What happens after these conversations, what is the accountability framework?

After these “consultative” convenings in digital rights policymaking and internet governance, we will all go back to the same digital power structures that allow and disallow the information we access and retain, and what identities are allowed to exist in these platforms.

Truly inclusive digital communities and infrastructure require transformative lens from its inception – they reject a capitalist internet. They are driven by creativity, sharing, care, consent, and well-being; they challenge and circumvent infrastructures of surveillance. And we will build that by first, shifting our focus, from working towards being accepted by the loudest, most articulate voices in a stingy meeting room, to holding space and looking for those who are not even able to go through the door.

**Jane:** There are increasing opportunities for fellowships to attend local, regional, and global internet governance forums and other training. We must ensure more women and girls around the world access these opportunities. Part of our challenge as non-profits and civil society organizations is to compete less and collaborate more, so instead of duplicating efforts, we get the right training to those who can most benefit.

As someone passionate about expanding broadband infrastructure, I fiercely advocate for local-local training, financing and community mobilization to close digital divides. This is where local people are at the center, leading their digital futures. If broadband infrastructure is to be more representative, we urgently need to support more women to work in this space so that not only do they receive training, they are training others, building networks, and reversing decades of an industry dominated by men. We make online communities more representative by giving women real power in them.

*We are seeing the rise of a virtual world, the metaverse, envisioned as a shared space where people can interact and participate in a simulated environment that mimics the physical world. As with other transformative technologies such as the cloud and AI, whose evolutions have spanned decades, the metaverse’s early consumers and leaders—including investors and CEOs—will shape its future. That’s worrying when we look at how gender dynamics are playing out in the early stages of the metaverse and the few - out of billions - who have access to this type of technology. From access to design, what would you say are the top 3 priorities when it comes to creating sustainable digital futures?*

**Dianne:** While there is global hype, sustainability can have varying meanings across sectors, but what stands true is the need for evidence building, content creation, and collective care.

In this context, evidence drives innovation. Beyond the politics of one's cultural capital (like having easy access to funding platforms because your parents are friends with venture capitalists), evidence and data help us highlight the need for more transformative, feminist technologies. When we build evidence of our experiences, we embed it in memory, to be able to review relevant signals and trends, and weave it into our imagined scenarios of how sustainable digital futures would look like for us and our communities.

In the same grain, we need to take up space by creating more content. While Big Tech is driven by capitalist, for-profit algorithmic decisions and biases, when we create more content and share our realities without losing consciousness of the politics and risks in which we are existing, we are maximising these platforms' infrastructure and audience for movement-building. When we create more content in our local languages, we create spaces for participation for those who come from the same context. When we share our experiences, we rally people to do the same.

Lastly, no digital futures are sustainable without embedding collective care. There should not be a conversation about sustainability without a shared understanding of what drives us: for the betterment and well-being of those who will come after us. Without integrating genuine collective consideration of the technologies' impact on our and future communities' mental, physical, and emotional health, who and what are we doing it for then?



## **MARCH WITH US CAMPAIGN**



This article was part of the annual participative March With Us campaign - a full month of stories from women activists from across the globe in collaboration with civil society organisations, researchers, photojournalists and artists. [Find more stories here.](#)

---

# “THE ONLINE SPACE IS NOT GENDER NEUTRAL”

**Global Focus, shares the highlights of their event organised in parallel to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) under the theme: Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.**

From the local to the global level, ensuring that everyone benefits from expansion of connectivity is key to unlock the power of women and girls. This is also the case for women and girls' access to historically male-dominated forums.

Building upon the [#UNmute initiative](#), Global Focus organised a side event to the CSW67, exploring how to ensure inclusive access to decision-making forums for civil society, focusing on women and girls, through safe, universal, and meaningful connectivity.

“Digital equity must be a mission for civil society, digital needs must be seen as cross-cutting and transversal. Internet access is a basic right,” says Erica Mesker, Director of Partnerships, Connect Humanity, highlighting the urgent need for gender justice to be integrated into the digital rights sphere.

For “meaningful connectivity” to be real, women and girls need to have high-speed and permanent access, the right device and affordable internet or alternatively, public spaces where they can access it for free. They also need digital skills, the right content and tools aligned to their experiences, explains Catalina Escobar, Co-founder and Chief Strategy Officer at MAKAI. MAKAI means “to build” or “to do”, in Miskito an indigenous language from Honduras. Its name represents its objective: to build partnerships and relations oriented to social and economic development. And technology is a crucial dimension of this.

“Technology is the new face of gender inequality. It’s actually increasing gaps rather than bridging gaps,” Catalina explains. As a mechanical engineer, she faced first hand the stereotypes and barriers women are confronted to in tech. On top of the little number of women in decision-making spaces even in emerging fields such as AI, another worrying trend is emerging: online spaces are increasingly unsafe.

“Technology is facilitating gender-based violence; it is magnifying it. Women that are mostly attacked online are those who are leaders, politicians, those who are trying to make a change in society. It’s a threat to democracy.”

“Digital harassment against indigenous people has intensified, online attacks are widespread and unprecedented, we are labelled as terrorists by the government, the police and the military. Online platforms are being used by state agents to further repress indigenous people as part of the government’s counter-insurgency and anti-terrorism efforts. The government is not making a distinction between armed groups and citizens. Basically, everyone who is criticising the government is targeted,” explains Sarah Bestand K. Dekdeken, Secretary General at Cordillera Peoples Alliance.

The Cordillera Peoples Alliance is an independent federation of progressive peoples organizations, most of them grassroots-based organizations among indigenous communities in the Cordillera Region, Philippines .

Terrorist or red tagging of indigenous leaders in the Philippines is leading to serious human rights violations. Sarah herself was convicted for speaking out for the rights of indigenous people at a press conference on Facebook. “People are afraid of posting comments online for fear that the military or the police will go after them”.

“Attacks against indigenous women leaders is leading to mental and emotional stress,” Sarah explains. “Even our children are targeted”.

Shahla Naimi, Human Rights Lead at Google, explains how Machine Learning and emerging technologies can help moderate online violence and abuses. Harassment management apps for instance, are an open-source tool especially designed for public figures.

“It documents and manages abuse targeted at them,” Shahla explains. “It’s one thing to take down the abuse, but public figures also need to document them for proof that they actually happened.”

To ensure globally access and safety online, we need to consider issues such as language barriers, time zones, and safety, including ICT-facilitated violence, which often holds a gendered component.

As Sigrid Kromann Schiøler, policy advisor and project lead of the #UNmute initiative at Global Focus and organizer of the side-event puts it: “To close the digital divide and growing online inequality it is imperative to establish a strong multistakeholder approach, which can ensure women and girls more and equal digital access at all levels. To name a few, we need political will, regulations, gender-centered technology, and increased awareness about digital rights. This can only be achieved through strong and committed multistakeholder collaboration.”.



---

**“DIGITAL EXCLUSION IN  
TODAY’S WORLD IS  
ECONOMIC EXCLUSION,  
POLITICAL EXCLUSION,  
AND SOCIAL  
EXCLUSION.”**

# THE INTERNET OF COWS<sup>1</sup>

by Nyéléni - newsletter issue coordinated by Sofia Monsalve (FIAN International) and Shalmali Guttal (Focus on the Global South). Article written by the ETC Group.

It sounds like a joke, but it is one more aspect of the invasion of digital technologies into agriculture and food, whose ultimate aim is an agriculture without farmers - industrialized from seed to plate or glass of milk, and controlled by large agribusiness companies, machinery and computing.

Companies like IBM, Microsoft and Huawei offer technology packages for what they call the "Internet of cows." These are digital devices (collars and / or chips) that are placed in each cow to measure their pulse, temperature, peak fertility and other health conditions related to the digestive system. The data is transmitted over the internet to a cloud owned by the companies themselves, which stores them in Big Data systems, analyzes them with artificial intelligence and sends the information that the program deems pertinent to the computer or telephone of the agricultural company, farm owner. There are also interactive chips that can direct the cattle for milking when it is time, connected to an automated milking system previously installed to suit the cow in question. Each device is associated with a particular cow.

For a decade there have been satellite systems for monitoring livestock in certain areas. The difference now is that the data collection is much broader, the data is about each animal, and all the information goes into a cloud owned by those companies, or according to the contracts shared clouds with Bayer-Monsanto or agricultural machinery companies such as John Deere.

There is also the internet of pigs and sheep, which are similarly structured. The idea is not that the process ends at each farm, but that the monitoring follows each animal, including on the hoof livestock transactions, through the use of blockchain and crypto currencies, to the slaughterhouse, certification chains that include processing, sale tracking retail and even as far as the refrigerator.

Both IBM and Microsoft have advanced digital systems that cover all the agricultural production of a farm. The package offered by Microsoft, called "Farmbeats", offers a system of permanent monitoring of the condition of soils, humidity and water, condition of the crops (if they need irrigation, if there are diseases, pests, etc.), climatic data, up to date weather data (wind direction, rains, etc.), to provide indications when and where to sow, apply irrigation, fertilizers or pesticides, when to harvest etc - all from the Microsoft cloud.

To solve the issue of rural connectivity, a key element of the system, but which is lacking in rural areas, Microsoft uses the “white spaces of TV”, which are disused television bands. This allows a router to be installed in each farm, connecting sensors, drones, chips, phones and computers to the Internet within a radius of a few kilometers and sending the information to the company’s cloud. The largest agribusiness companies such as Bayer, Syngenta, Corteva and BASF have digital divisions with projects of this kind and since 2012 they have collaboration agreements or joint ventures with the largest machinery companies (John Deere, AGCO, CNH, Kubota) for big systems data, clouds for storage and computing, and drone companies. For example, PrecisionHawk, Raven, Sentera and Agrobotix are new companies created in collaboration between multinationals manufacturers of agrotoxic seeds and machinery.

Again, as with transgenics, companies claim that this is necessary to feed a growing world population, to increase production, save water and be “sustainable.” In reality, it is about agriculture without farmers, aimed at replacing small farms with large companies, where from the seed to the plate, the control is carried out by a chain of transnationals that leave no decision to the farmers. Each farm also provides a large amount of data that companies appropriate, building maps over entire regions, which allows them to visualize and negotiate projects far beyond each farm, passing over farmers and peasants. They are projects that move forward, but it does not mean that they work. The true knowledge about fields and animals, which is what gives food and sustenance to most of the planet, come from the peasant way of life itself. These technology packages are new forms of attack against her.

<sup>1</sup> For more information look at the ETC Group report, Blocking the Chain. Industrial food chain concentration, Big Data platforms and food sovereignty solutions, 2018 - <https://www.etcgroup.org/content/blocking-chain>



## **ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL NYÉLÉNI NEWSLETTER**



The international Nyéléni newsletter is the voice of this international movement for Food Sovereignty. Its main goal is to strengthen the grassroots of the movement, by providing accessible material on key issues and creating a space – for individuals and organisations involved in the struggle – to exchange their experiences and share information. See all the editions of the Nyéléni newsletter [here!](#)

---

# WHO DETERMINES THE DIRECTION OF THE FUTURE: HUMANS OR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE?

**by Mika Väitalo, expert specializing in development and innovation, Fingo**

I vividly remember the gut-punch feeling and dizziness in my head when I first read about the vision of Google's visionary, Ray Kurzweil, regarding the future of artificial intelligence. According to his singularity theory, a super intelligent AI surpassing human intelligence will be developed by the middle of this century. After that, it will develop exponentially and permanently surpass humans. Kurzweil presented his vision as an opportunity to solve the world's problems all at once.

On the other hand, the late physicist Stephen Hawking warned of AI developing its own will, which might clash with human interests. Superintelligence would sweep humanity off its path like a bear swiping ants off its path.

Artificial intelligence appears as a large canvas set before humanity, inviting us to paint our dreams and nightmares upon it.

Having familiarized myself more closely with AI in recent years, the initial vertigo has eased. A more nuanced picture has emerged between the utopias and dystopias of AI. One key distinction is between weak and strong AI: weak AI is based on performing very specific tasks, whether it's a chess program, Netflix recommendations, or facial recognition.

An algorithm learns from the data fed to it, categorizing new data and drawing conclusions. If you put a chess program to play Monopoly or install Tesla's autopilot on a motorcycle, both will fail.

Strong AI, in contrast, should be capable of independent and flexible thinking similar to humans and understand what it's doing. Strong AI hasn't been created because independent thinking, especially consciousness, remains a mystery to science. All advancements in AI in the 21st century have been on the weak level. The strong level has mainly remained a fantasy.

If AI isn't going to save or destroy the future, what practical benefits could it have, for example, in achieving sustainable development goals? There are many possibilities. For example, farmers adapting to climate change can be supported with better information, and the emergence and spread of viruses can be anticipated. AI can also assist in the intelligent planning of ever-growing cities.

In practice, learning algorithms have been used, for instance, in evaluating the independence of media in Mozambique, where an algorithm trained by the IREX-focused civil society organization analyzed local news far faster than humans.

A UN program called UNOSAT and an AI-focused UN Global Pulse use satellite imagery and AI algorithms to provide rapid and accurate situational pictures, for instance, of the number and movements of unofficial refugee camps. This information is shared with NGOs on the ground.

Social enterprise Omdena crowdsources AI professionals worldwide to build AI solutions to support practical work for development actors, including NGOs.

However, the use of new technology doesn't just neutrally enhance, for instance, the work of development actors. One essential problem is the opacity of algorithms. AI's internal workings are so complex that humans often can't grasp its decision-making process. We just have to trust the outcome.

If the machine recommends poor decisions, who's responsible?

When data and algorithms sound mathematical and objective, it's easy to forget, for example, that a credit-scoring AI might be based on potentially discriminatory data. Thus, existing inequalities in organizations and communities can be replicated and expanded, with their origins disappearing in the background. Information is power. Massive, automated data collection and data-utilizing AI algorithms are largely a technology developed, maintained, and directed by the global north.

Even if more accurate weather forecasts and guidelines are distributed to farmers through development programs, does it matter if power consolidates globally among the AI-leading countries? Should we rejoice in the spread of the internet and mobile phones to the poorest communities if it partly strengthens the omnipresent, AI-based businesses of a few giant companies?

As development actors harness new technology to combat poverty, improve education, or achieve other sustainable development goals, they must understand the power and risks involved.

In a fairer world, citizens around the globe would participate in AI development and its limitations, not just a few visionaries. An example of this is UNICEF's international guidelines on considering children when using AI. It emphasizes children's rights to determine issues related to them concerning AI.

What should we make of all this?

Historian Yuval Noah Harari has pointed out that the inventions of the Industrial Revolution, from steam engines to factories, did not dictate the kind of society built with their help. The revolution laid the foundation for communist and capitalist systems, depending on values, views, and visions people had.

The same applies to AI.

(This text was originally published in [The World's Pictorial Magazine](#) in [Finnish](#)).



## ABOUT FINGO



Fingo is the umbrella organisation of about 270 Finnish civil society organisations and an expert in global development. [The Fingo Powerbank project](#), more specifically, supports development NGOs in three areas: innovations, technology solutions and private sector collaboration. The Fingo Powerbank offers NGOs a comprehensive resource hub, featuring proven technological solutions, best practice content, successful experiments in Eastern Africa, and a matchmaking service with over 70 potential private sector partners. It's a one-stop platform for NGOs looking to enhance their work through tech innovation and collaboration.

---

# DEAR AI DEVELOPERS

By the creative collective **Both Nomads**

This letter is for you. Have you heard of the journalist Celia Izoard and her radical critique of digital society? She is the one who inspired us to write you a letter. Several years ago, with her book "Letters to the humans who are robotizing the world", she opened a dialogue with tech designers, asking about the meaning of their work and analyzing the social and ecological impact of emerging technology. This book is traveling from hands to hands, together with its main question: what is the role of "machines" in our society? You are pushing the frontiers of artificial intelligence, but what guiding principles steer the path of this ship?

With great power comes great responsibility. And responsibilities are hard, but better when shared. AI has a global reach, but what reach are we talking about? AI - not only the hardware or software, but also the concept of AI - needs to be accessible to a broader public and the implications of this technology need to be discussed together in cross-border, inter-generational ways. You have to be clear about the risks as well. How can we trust this technology if we don't trust its developers? Trust comes with conversations, with transparency, with understanding. And with spending some quality time together.

When it comes to using AI tools, especially for images, we've been surprised by how these systems interpret our text inputs. For example, when gender isn't explicitly mentioned, AI often defaults to portraying women in ways that can be overly sexualized, resembling characters like Tomb Raider. Similarly, AI tends to fall into stereotypical portrayals of indigenous peoples and so many other communities.

We are being told that we're still in the early stages of AI technology, but these issues are already quite prominent. George Orwell envisioned the dangers of monolithic government armed with artificial intelligence in his famous novel of a future dystopia, "1984". To borrow a phrase from his book, there's one particularly unsettling motto attributed to Big Brother: "Ignorance is strength." The question we must confront is whether people will be kept in the dark, will you inform us, or will AI development just happen behind collective consciousness? How can we do this together?



## ABOUT BOTH NOMADS

Both Nomads is a global creative collective which uses documentary practices and participative storytelling for activism. They're also exploring the integration of AI in narratives and the boundaries of creative expression.



# THE AI DEBATE AND YOUTH: NEW VISIONS

By Osei Manu Kagyah, community member of Digital Grassroots from Ghana

The impact of AI is enormous and it presents a remarkable opportunity for the Youth to harness the potential of this emerging technology. As we reflect on the accomplishments of those who paved the way for us, it becomes our responsibility to not only embrace AI's advantages but also to pose thought-provoking questions that shape its ethical and inclusive application. The Youth envisions an AI manifesto or framework built upon the principles of Trust, Safety, Accountability, Inclusivity, and Ethics.

To develop a comprehensive framework or Manifesto, we must address essential questions that ensure full inclusivity, especially for those who might face adverse consequences from AI's implementation. How can we design a process that genuinely respects and considers the concerns, viewpoints, and rights of all stakeholders, including critics, particularly the youth?

Ensuring openness in the process design will build trust in the outcome. The youth envisions a future where policy is context-specific, but also prepares for the diverse potential contexts of using 'foundation models'.

A vital step is to encourage young people to actively engage in the formulation of policies and decision-making processes concerning AI. This inclusive approach reflects our commitment to transparency and accessibility, all while balancing the imperative to minimize misuse and harm.

While the enactment of new legislation is undeniably significant, we must not underestimate the importance of optimizing the utilization of existing legal frameworks. Striking a balance between promoting economic competition and fostering collaboration is key to shaping a dynamic AI landscape. The bedrock of this endeavour should be honesty and accountability. Incorporating these values into the process design and delivery will uphold the integrity of its mission and outcomes.



## ABOUT DIGITAL GRASSROOTS



Digital Grassroots a youth and female-led non-profit proactively engaging youth in addressing internet related issues in their communities through digital literacy, networking, and activism.

---

# INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: AI IS INHERENTLY RIDDEN WITH ALGORITHM BIAS AND POISONED DATA

By Nina Sangma, Communications Programme Coordinator, AIPP

AI is inherently ridden with algorithm bias and poisoned data that will have massively negative repercussions on Indigenous Peoples including both connected and unconnected or poorly connected communities. Below 5 points that showcase the negative impact AI has on Indigenous Peoples.

**1. Economic impact:** AI seeks to automate low skill jobs and since many indigenous bear the brunt of poor access to education and high skills, many are employed in the unskilled and disorganized sectors. AI will effectively decimate their access to employment including disguised employment.

**2. Exclusionary:** Most AI tools such as [ChatGPT](#) are grouped into free and premium (paid) services. That leaves out even the ones among the Indigenous Peoples who can access all spectrums of the internet who do have the technical skills or general awareness of AI to access the premium services. Therefore, it is not inclusive of vulnerable groups. Furthermore, the online world is largely ableist and tends to be aimed at the English-speaking world with other mainstream global languages taking over. Indigenous languages are yet to be integrated fully into this eco-system, exacerbating the widespread erasure of languages, cultural diversity, richness, good practices of natural resource management, spiritual world view of Indigenous Peoples since documentation, journalism, research and online resources are written by the non-indigenous, catering to the mainstream gaze. Automated translation services do not include indigenous languages.

**3. Negative narratives:** Indigenous Peoples are overwhelmingly targeted by structured and strategic disinformation/misinformation as well as State sponsored campaigns against them. Indigenous Peoples activists which include human rights defenders, journalists, climate defenders and all whom the State declares its enemy. AI is designed to further existing harmful narratives on Indigenous Peoples. For example, the search word "terrorist" will show up Indigenous Peoples activists' names since that is what exists as data and stories online.

This has been the case in the Philippines with the red tagging of indigenous activists who are often termed terrorists. Similarly, in Thailand IOs (Information Operations) are targeting Indigenous Peoples to sustain and prolong bullying tactics, land grabbing and imaginative forms of violence on the ground. In India, under Modi's repressive regime, anyone of critical of the State is branded an anti-national with Adivasi activists called Maoists, the terms are almost interchangeable. Indigenous women are particularly vulnerable to doxing that will certainly increase due to the risks posed by AI.

**4. Post pandemic post truth world:** Covid 19 made the Digital Divide - i.e lack of devices, data and limited control over discourse - painfully obvious. Access to the internet is a fundamental right to many globally and yet is viewed as a privilege for indigenous communities who are often unconnected or poorly connected to the internet and its eco systems powered by AI and the Metaverse.

**5. Invisibility:** Non recognition of Indigenous Peoples by the State is one of if not THE reason for the barrier to the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples. According to the United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, "self-identification as indigenous is considered a fundamental criterion." The Declaration refers to their right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions. Lack or little existing data on Indigenous Peoples including challenges posed to indigenous data sovereignty along with biopiracy continue the exploitation of indigenous knowledge and traditions, patented for profit by the non- indigenous. Further, Indigenous Peoples are not at decision making tables in the tech world engaged in policymaking.

Do digital rights belong only to the connected or are they inclusive of those who are unconnected or poorly connected as are many of our indigenous brothers and sisters who are overwhelmingly negatively impacted by the virtual world? AI alarmingly is designed to widen existing structural inequalities through integrated algorithm bias and poisoned data aimed at sustained invisibilization of Indigenous Peoples. It is therefore crucial to include indigenous voices in order to influence AI policy and practice if we are to retard the rampant abuse of our rights both online and offline.



## ABOUT THE ASIA INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PACT (AIPP)



The Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) is a regional organization founded in 1992 by indigenous peoples' movements. At present, AIPP has 46 members from 14 countries in Asia with 18 indigenous peoples' national alliances/networks (national formations), 30 local and sub-national organizations.

---

# USING AI TO ‘DECOLONISE’ LANGUAGE - CAN AI BE USED TO SHIFT IMPLICIT POWER IN DEVELOPMENT LANGUAGE?

**By Bibbi Abruzzini, Communications Coordinator, Forus. This article first appeared on Global Voices and is available in Arabic, Spanish, French, Dutch, Bangla, Bosnian and Esperanto.**

We need to find a new language, new narratives, a new world view and the tools to create the words to overcome the “grand humanitarian narrative.” Can technology help?

Many of us this past month have heard about the “Matrix”-like functions of the new AI-powered ChatGPT, which is leaving citizens unsettled, shocked, and in several other emotional states, ranging from fear to enthusiasm. The use of AI remains niche for most civil society organisations and activists. Yet, several initiatives that use emerging technologies and artificial intelligence to “decolonise” language are appearing – especially in the development sector. Is development language colonial?

The question of whether development language is colonial is a complex and debated one. The imposition of European languages and cultures on colonized peoples has been a key component of the process of colonialism. Colonial powers imposed their tongues, often leading to the erosion of indigenous languages. Development language can be seen as a continuation of this legacy, as it often excludes indigenous and minority languages, reinforcing patterns of linguistic and cultural dominance.

“Language is a critical part of a community's identity and heritage. As we lose languages, we lose a part of our collective history and culture. Technology can help us preserve and promote these languages, but we must do so in a way that is respectful and inclusive,” says Anju Mary Paul, research lead at [FirstVoices](#) a platform that includes an AI-powered language archive, which allows users to search and access audio and video recordings of indigenous languages.

“The fact that we use French or English as development languages whereas in certain communities like in Africa we have several tribal languages is a problem. What happens when people do not understand the language we are using?” asks Dr. Moses Isooba, executive director of the [Uganda National NGO Forum](#) (UNNGOF).

## Lexicon and language prototype

Isooba is part of a team [developing a language and lexicon prototype](#) using AI to enable more inclusive communication that is less (or not) implicitly neo-colonial, sexist or racist. The idea is to explore the application of AI to redress and replace the lexicon of pejorative jargon, idioms and terminology “imposed” on civil society organisations involved in the international aid complex and the development sector.

The team is designing a lexicon to shift power in two ways: first by abolishing problematic language, while encouraging more inclusive communication using a new find-and-replace style function, and second by enabling people to use their own local language by testing their work with Luganda, the language commonly used in Uganda.

Terms such as “desk officer” or “in the field” are reminiscent of the colonial era. International humanitarian organisations often refer to their offices in the Global South as “country offices,” akin to colonial outposts “acting as the remaining rope tying us to the colonial ship,” Dr. Isooba says. He further explains:

Decolonising language is critically important because language sets the terms of engagement between the north and south. In as much as possible language should be depoliticized and decolonized. Development and humanitarian assistance are political, but our language should remain nonpartisan. Political parties will come and go, but inequalities will remain if our language begins to mirror that of the people in power, especially if the intentions behind the rhetoric are disingenuous.”

## We can't just speak in acronyms

“Development language has become so full of jargon that even our own families don't understand what we are working on anymore,” explains Harsh Jaitli, of the [Voluntary Action Network India \(VANI\)](#).

Language is among our most ancestral tools for the better and for the worst. In an online universe plagued by misinformation and attacks, various activists and civil society organisations are now focusing on “new narratives” to expand rather than shrink civic space.

In the past few years, many initiatives and organizations have been working at the nexus of AI and language. [Masakhane](#) for instance is a grassroots, community-driven initiative working to build Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools and models for African languages, with the goal of preserving and promoting them in the digital age.

Interpretation and translation are also part of the game, and organisations are now working on broadening the spectrum, for instance with this [free Chichewa-English translation glossary of development terminology](#). [AI for the People](#) focuses on advocating for more inclusive and equitable development and deployment of AI technologies. It also offers resources and training for communities to engage with AI.

Yet, according to NeuralSpace, a platform that helps bridge the massive language gap in tech, 90 percent of NLP solutions are exclusively available in European languages. AI has the potential to break down language barriers for the remaining six billion people by countering this form of “digital apartheid.” How? By bridging language barriers with complex translation systems or language learning apps, for instance. Other ways include the creation of digital archives involving Optical Character Recognition or speech recognition and by making content available in native languages rather than the omnipresent “colonial” ones.

But all this sounds too good to be (just) true. Before AI can decolonise language, AI itself, must be decolonised.

## **The AI paradox**

AI has the potential to transform how we communicate, but it’s also the perfect transmitter for exacerbating existing biases. “We need to address issues of bias in language models and ensure that they are inclusive and representative of all users,” [says Soujanya Poria](#), assistant professor at Nanyang Technological University.

The language AI is trained on might already be “distorted” and incapable of replacing biased human thinking and behaviour.

“The decolonization of language is critically important for empowering communities and challenging dominant narratives. Technology has the potential to be a powerful tool in this process, but we must be careful not to replicate the same patterns of exclusion and marginalization that we are trying to overcome,” says Dr. Isooba.

We asked ChatGPT whether or not AI could replicate colonial, racist or sexist language and this is what it answered: As an artificial intelligence language model, I am not capable of holding or expressing personal beliefs, values, or biases. However, I acknowledge that the data used to train me may contain biases and I strive to provide information that is accurate, unbiased, and inclusive. It is important to note that it is people who program and use AI, and they can unintentionally embed their own biases in the development and use of AI systems. Therefore, it is crucial to be aware of these potential biases and strive to create and use AI systems in an ethical, inclusive, and responsible manner.

In the words of Timnit Gebru, of [Black in AI](#), we need to move away from thinking about “clean” and “dirty” data and towards thinking about data that reflects the diversity of the real world.

“One of the best ways to do this is to build diverse teams of data scientists who are able to recognize and address their own biases,” she says.

Sabelo Mhlambi and other scholars recently drafted the [Decolonial AI Manifesto](#), to “move beyond Western-centric biases” and build “dignified socio-technical futures.” Civil society, as well, is increasingly involved in AI development by actively participating in public discussions and debates around the ethical, social, and political implications of AI technologies. Yet, several civil society leaders and activists

such as [Mwarimū Mūtemi wa Kīama](#) from Kenya, [arrested for his tweets](#), argue that the purposeful exclusion of marginalized voices from tech decision-making processes is a form of structural violence.

“We need to recognize that access to technology is a human right and work to ensure that everyone has a seat at the table,” says Kīama.

Dianne Olivan, a digital rights and gender campaigner tells us how the marginalised are “sealed off” from decision-making environments because these spaces move within a neocolonial framework:

Those who usually participate in these conversations also have the privilege to participate; they have the economic and cultural capital to contribute and thrive. There are of course attempts to be representative and inclusive, but we should ask: Where are these conversations happening? What do I need to have to participate? In what language are they sharing meaning? Whose voices are the loudest in the room? What happens after these conversations, what is the accountability framework?

After these “consultative” convenings in digital rights policymaking and internet governance, we will all go back to the same digital power structures that allow and disallow the information we access and retain, and what identities are allowed to exist in these platforms, says Olivan:

Truly inclusive digital communities and infrastructure require transformative lens from their inception – they reject a capitalist internet. They are driven by creativity, sharing, care, consent, and well-being; they challenge and circumvent infrastructures of surveillance. And we will build that by first, shifting our focus from working towards being accepted by the loudest, most articulate voices in a stingy meeting room, to holding space and looking for those who are not even able to go through the door.

# AI AND LANGUAGE PRESERVATION IN AFRICA

By Clarisse Sih, Forus

With over 3000 languages spoken in Africa and a significant part of the almost 1.5 billion people living on the continent not speaking either English or French, it is important that AI is developed with such diversity and specificities at its core. Challenges in the domain of data access in African languages as well as ways of further developing AI in an appropriate and well adapted way in the region are important aspects that need to be discussed.

"Chat GPT for example knows the capital of Kenya but when being asked in Kinyarwanda (one of the official languages of Rwanda), it does not understand the question. If we do not put in place the necessary requirements, we risk having a huge gap where people on the continent who do not speak foreign languages like English and French do not get access to AI services. 13% of languages on the continent are endangered and it is still a growing number. As digital transformation takes roots in Africa, they will have to adapt to other languages in order to be able to use those services. AI could play a role in lessening the importance of local languages for youth, for instance, who will be more likely to learn English or French. In 10 or 15 years of digital transformation, it is possible to witness the suppression of several of these local languages, not spoken in online interactions," explains Audace Niyonkuru, [CEO of Digital Umuganda](#), an Artificial intelligence company specializing in language technology for African languages with an emphasis on voice based solutions.

He applied to the AI world the concept of "Umuganda," a community-driven initiative designed to foster social and environmental progress, served as the inspiration for the development of digital Umuganda, aimed at igniting collective action. The term "Umuganda" translates to "coming together with a shared purpose to accomplish a goal." In Rwandan tradition, community members would rally their family, friends, and neighbors to assist in tackling challenging tasks. Today, in Rwanda, on the final Saturday of each month, the entire community collaborates to enhance their neighborhoods as part of Umuganda.

"We realized that if this approach was successful for physical infrastructures, it could also be applied to digital infrastructures, as it's a concept that resonates with everyone. To ensure diversity among our contributors, we sought a common ground that bridged the physical and digital realms. This led us to initiate Digital Umuganda to create an open dataset. To prevent data bias, we organized training sessions for our contributors," Audace explained.

"We collaborated primarily with communities who recognized the importance of preserving the language. The contributors were genuinely committed to safeguarding Kinyarwanda. It was a concept that resonated with them, as it was aligned with their understanding and familiarity. Their involvement was voluntary, aimed at creating a public infrastructure that would benefit everyone in the end," he emphasized.

"AI could be a tool for localisation," Audace says, but also a way to facilitate the socio-economic development of the continent by facilitating trade, interactions and cross-border communication.

"Facilitating translations between Wolof and Kinyarwanda, for instance, could greatly benefit commerce between Senegal and Rwanda. However, it's important to recognize that some languages are primarily spoken and lack a written form. Additionally, machine languages are often specialized to specific domains. This means that you would require a dedicated dataset of terminologies tailored to the particular domain you're addressing to ensure accurate and effective translation."

Audace pointed out the lack of data privacy laws in most African countries which further complicates the use and development of "fair" AI:

"On one hand, innovators are being denied access to data that should be readily available, while on the other hand, data from users is being exploited in ways that can be harmful. Additionally, there's a risk of harm to users who share their data without full understanding and consent. People need to understand what they are consenting in the first place. It's crucial to establish data governance, but equally important is ensuring that the principles of data usage align with the realities of the Global South and are firmly rooted in human rights frameworks. To achieve this, it's essential to incorporate local values into the creation of datasets. This requires capacity development for all stakeholders, not just access to technology but also measures to retain talent within the continent and prevent brain drain."

*This article was written based on a conference organised by the Agence française de développement (AFD) aimed at exploring the challenges of developing innovative artificial intelligence models and technology while taking into account the linguistic specificities of the African continent.*



## ABOUT FORUS



Forus is an innovative global network working on civic space, Agenda 2030, financing for sustainable development, capacity development and much more. It reunites 68 national members and 7 regional coalitions representing over 22.000 NGOs.

---



---

**“PEOPLE NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY ARE CONSENTING IN THE FIRST PLACE.”**

# AI AND WORKERS' RIGHTS

by Camilla Lohenoja, SASK ([sask.fi](http://sask.fi))

AI is not simply a new kind of technology. It has the potential to change the way we work, the way we interact, the way we process knowledge altogether, and across all industrial sectors. AI is disrupting strongly the world of work and workers' rights.

AI has a huge potential for innovation and efficiency. It has the potential to contribute to a company's economic success, as well as to good working conditions and quality jobs. However, there are increasing signs of AI causing job loss, deskilling, worsening working conditions, precarious jobs and threats to democracy, inclusion and equality, while the companies, especially Big Tech companies, are benefitting from it. For example a lot of algorithms could help workers making the work safer and less burdensome. But these algorithms do not exist since companies don't have the interest to develop them.

Also, management's decisions shape AI's impacts on workers. It has a strong effect on workers whether AI is the final decision authority or just a tool for human evaluation. The former means algorithmic management which is far less humane than management by people. The latter in turn can empower workers and make workers appreciate AI.

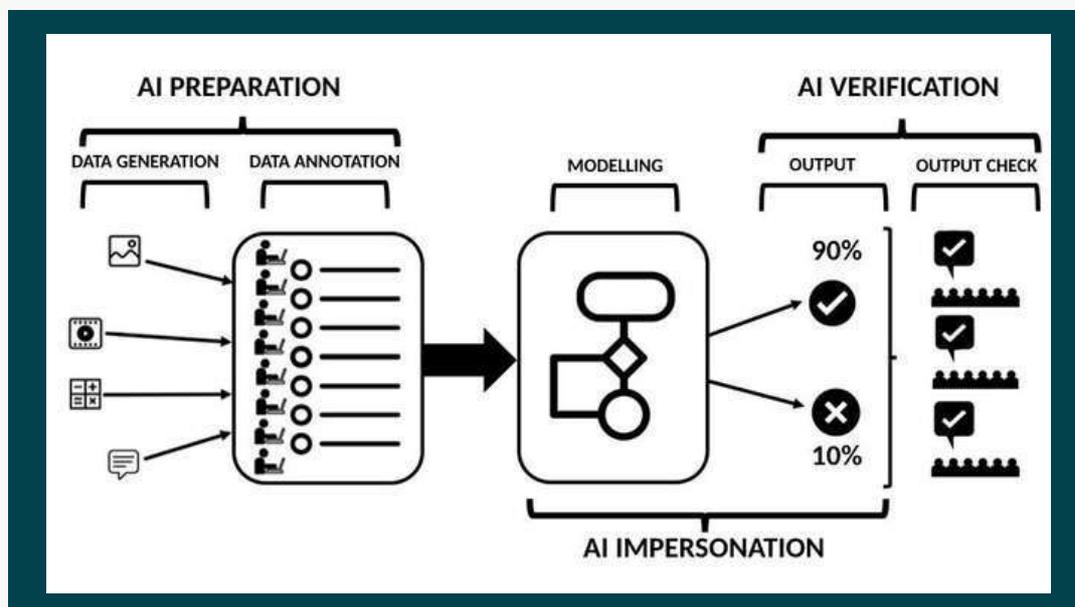
The AI-assisted digital surveillance in workplaces is generally nothing new to previous forms of surveillance of employees. What is different is its:

- **Comprehensiveness:** Wide variety of data on the worker is collected from multiple sources
- **Continuity:** Monitoring is constant and it extends beyond workplace
- **Immediacy:** Data collection and analysis are done real-time
- **Interactivity:** The communication and feedback are real-time
- **Unavoidability:** Surveillance is embedded in work processes and devices

AI has decreasing as well as increasing effects on labour demands. On one hand, AI accelerates automation of work, which often leads to job loss and deskilling. On the other hand, AI creates new types of precarious and marginalized labour, namely platform work. Platform work that is based on AI and algorithmic management puts workers outside traditional workforce with no labour laws or labour contracts protecting them especially in developing countries.

Further, AI has created jobs that cause strong anxiety to the workers. The graph below shows how AI is built using plenty of manpower. The data annotators are the ones doing the "dirty work", meaning moderating the harmful content away from the data. The data annotators need to watch a lot of violent and other types of stressful pictures and videos during their workday. This data annotation is often done through platform companies especially in Africa.

# HUMAN WORKERS BEHIND AI



**The trainer, the verifier, the imitator: Three ways in which human platform workers support artificial intelligence - Paola Tubaro, Antonio A Casilli, and Marion Coville.**

The graph above is from a paper that sheds light on the role of digital platform labour in the development of today's artificial intelligence, predicated on data-intensive machine learning algorithms. Focus is on the specific ways in which outsourcing of data tasks to myriad 'micro-workers', recruited and managed through specialized platforms, powers virtual assistants, self-driving vehicles and connected objects.



## ABOUT SASK



SASK is the human rights organisation of the trade unions of Finland. By empowering trade unions and building up their capacities SASK aims at enforcing of international labour rights, promoting decent work and living wages and thus supporting struggle against poverty and social inequality.

---

# NAVIGATING AI ACROSS ASIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

**By Jyotsna Mohan Singh, Regional Coordinator, Asia Development Alliance (ADA)**

Artificial intelligence, when harnessed in a positive manner, holds great potential, particularly in the realm of research. However, within civil society, it often raises concerns. The use of AI in research may inadvertently lead to issues like duplication, data theft, and increased confusion. Moreover, AI-generated data can be manipulated, posing a risk and discrediting activists, human rights defenders and civil society.

In South and Southeast Asia, as well as Central Asia, the conditions are less than favorable. Civic space is steadily shrinking, with restrictions on freedom of expression and association. Civil society faces challenges in holding the government accountable. In some countries, individuals can be imprisoned merely for expressing opinions, even if non-offensive. During the Covid-19 pandemic, governments in our region intensified regulations, leading to the arrest of civil society activists for questioning the pandemic response. Sadly, this shrinking civic space is rarely discussed in Voluntary National Reviews at the United Nations. Civil society's ability to address this issue is limited, highlighting the gravity of the situation.

Addressing these concerns requires concerted efforts. Data breaches are alarmingly frequent. I receive numerous anonymous inquiries every week, often from international numbers, raising privacy concerns. Governments must take more proactive measures to combat such breaches. The ease with which individuals can access personal data jeopardizes the safety of virtual systems. A comprehensive tool to safeguard privacy and prevent discrimination is essential. Efforts should be made at the national and regional levels, with governments assuming responsibility for protecting AI and technology users.

Other government-led technologies such as facial recognition pose a significant threat as well. While it has legitimate applications, it can be used to track and target individuals under scrutiny, even if their actions are peaceful or in the public interest. Activists advocating for environmental protection or the rights of indigenous peoples are affected. Additionally, the potential for fraudulent use, where someone can create videos from images, the proliferation of increasingly sophisticated Deep Fakes, adds to the concerns.

Exploring the potential of AI in these areas is ongoing, but capacity building is crucial. Understanding how AI can be effectively utilized is paramount. However, it's essential to note that, at this stage, AI often reveals vulnerabilities more than it enhances transparency. Many questions remain unanswered, and further exploration is needed to determine how AI can contribute to enhancing governance, transparency, and accountability, effectively.

Furthermore when we look at internet governance, the North-South imbalance is still a fact. The global disparity in internet governance is substantial, with stark differences between the Global North and Global South. Countries like India have made significant progress in digital governance and internet accessibility. However, many South Asian nations, such as Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, still lack internet access, especially in remote areas and seats at the decision-making table are scarce.

My vision extends beyond civil society alone; it encompasses the broader public and community. I dream of a society where freedom of expression is cherished, where people can voice their opinions without prejudice. In this dream, governments are receptive to solutions without bias. I envision a region in the Global South with clean air, clear skies, and a beautiful natural environment—a vision of a brighter future for all.



## **ABOUT ADA**



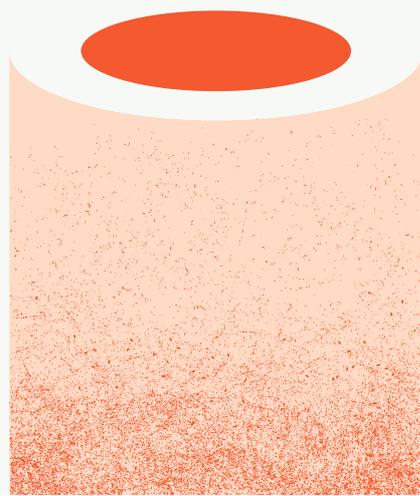
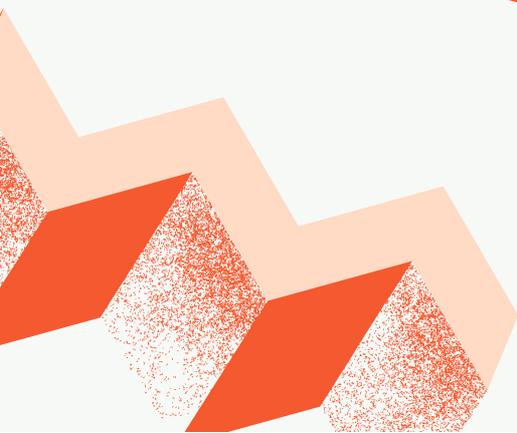
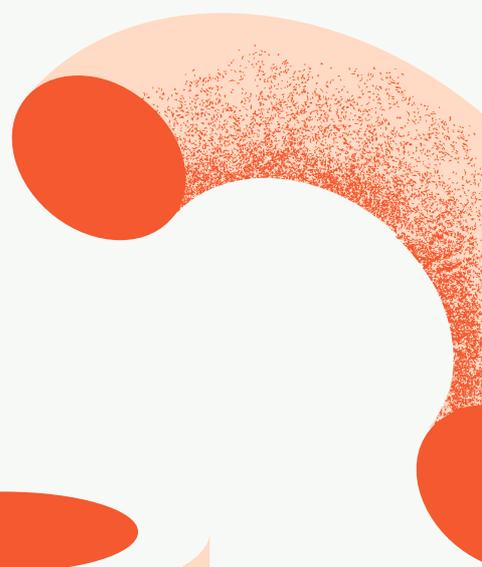
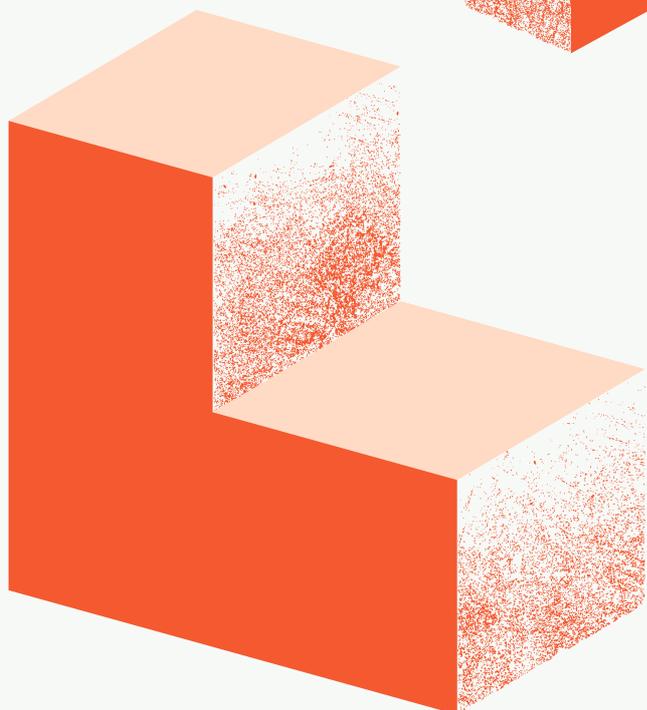
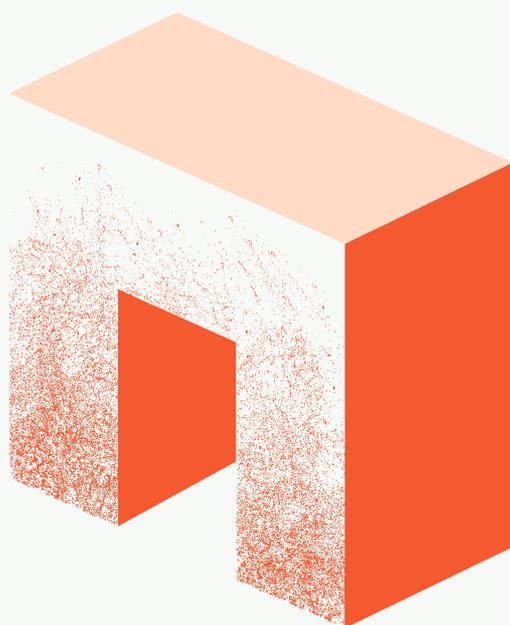
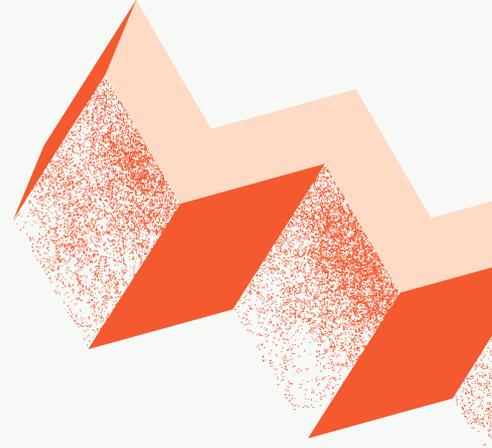
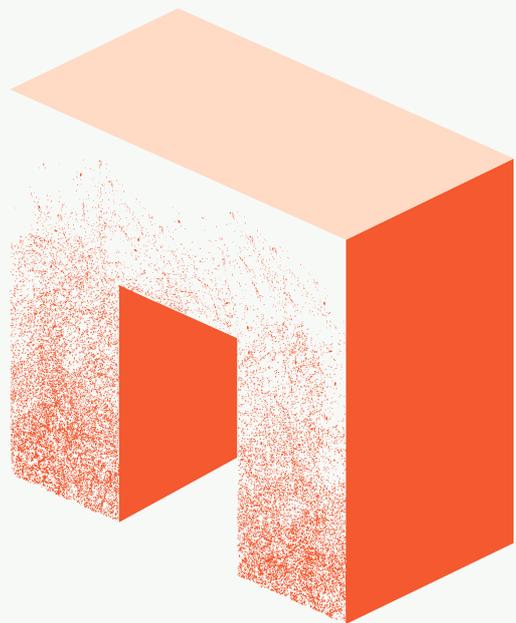
A groundbreaking regional network, the Asia Development Alliance (ADA), empowers civil society and is a catalyst for social change. It brings together 30 national CSO platforms representing over 10,000 organisations from South, South East, North East and Central Asia.

---

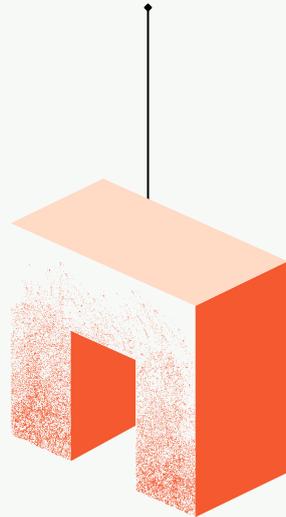


---

**“I DREAM OF A SOCIETY  
WHERE FREEDOM OF  
EXPRESSION IS  
CHERISHED, WHERE  
PEOPLE CAN VOICE  
THEIR OPINIONS  
WITHOUT PREJUDICE.”**



# 6 FACTS ABOUT AI



Civic Space



Concerns about privacy violations, mass surveillance, and algorithmic bias are being raised.

Alan Turing



Alan Turing developed the concept of a theoretical computing machine in the 1930s.

AI for good



AI can help in solving problems related to healthcare, education, poverty, environmental conservation and more.

Representation



The need for diverse representation in AI teams can mitigate bias and ensure that AI technologies serve all segments of society equally.

Ethics



Civil society is raising awareness about the importance of fairness, transparency, and accountability in AI systems.

AI tools for policy change



AI can help identify patterns, generate insights, and advocate for policy changes that advance social justice causes.

# OUR 10 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented in this Manifesto have been collaboratively developed with input from a civil society advisory group. They encompass key elements such as human rights, civic space, capacity development, and inclusivity in the context of AI and machine learning.



# 01

## Ethical AI

Collective reflection on ethics, research and public dialogue based on human rights, the implications of AI and its potential impacts should be promoted.

# 03

## Working groups

National and regional working groups for safe AI research should be established together with inclusive guidelines that will educate users.

# 05

## Accountability

Companies and other non-governmental actors should ensure that their due diligence efforts are complemented by meaningful accountability and independent oversight, including from experts in technical and human rights issues, such as academics and civil society representatives. The development, implementation, and oversight of these approaches should involve all relevant stakeholders, including those from the global south and those most likely to be adversely impacted by AI.

# 02

## Capacity Development

Civil society and communities should be provided with the necessary information skills, competencies and attitudes that support digital literacy, digital hygiene, critical thinking and intercultural competencies; content assessment and awareness of the visible and unknown consequences on the use of AI.

# 04

## Policies

Governments should promote policies and regulations that take into account New Technologies in terms of citizen protection, market fairness and enforcement while enabling new technologies and businesses to thrive.

# 06

## Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

Governments should ensure that the development of legal and regulatory frameworks on AI is inclusive and consultative, and involves a diverse range of stakeholders to address political, socioeconomic, and regional inequalities.

## 07

### Human Rights Impact Assessment

AI developers and deployers (in both private and public sector) should undertake mandatory human rights impact assessments for the development, public procurement, and deployment of AI technologies, with a specific focus on the right to privacy and impacts on civic space. These impact assessments should involve meaningful participation from multiple stakeholders, including civil society.

## 09

### Workers' Rights

Governments and companies should recognize the data rights of workers and be transparent on what data is extracted from the workers, how, and what the data is used for.

## 08

### Multi-stakeholder dialogue

Governmental and inter-governmental bodies should facilitate and strengthen an ongoing multi-stakeholder dialogue, in particular between technology providers and civil society organisations, in order to foster trust, accountability and cooperation.

## 10

### Narratives

To foster a holistic understanding and promote equitable development, we must expand the scope of discussions. But not in a tokenistic way. This means actively involving voices from women, youth, indigenous groups, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented communities to address the multifaceted challenges and opportunities AI presents.

# WHAT DO WE DEFINE AS “ETHICAL” AI?

Ethical AI integrates human rights, civic space, inclusion, non-discrimination, power balance, access to internet governance fora and decision-shaping and making spaces. It refers to the responsible development and deployment of artificial intelligence technologies that prioritize the protection of liberties, ensure equitable access and benefits for all, supports historically marginalised communities, is grounded in transparency & accountability, and actively engages citizens in shaping AI policies and practices.



# NEXT STEPS



## Join the launch

Join us on December 6 to discuss the stories, visions and recommendations of the Civil Society Manifesto for Ethical AI in various languages! The meeting will benefit from simultaneous interpretation in English, French and Spanish.

[Register here.](#)



## Share your story

Would you like to share your experience and resources on AI? We are developing a digital, interactive & multilingual platform open to contributions.

If you would like to join, sign up to the [Manifesto here.](#)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION



Bibbi Abruzzini  
[bibbi\[at\]forus-international.org](mailto:bibbi[at]forus-international.org)



# AI AND CIVIL SOCIETY RESOURCES

Find a curated list of initiatives, toolkits and  
transformative ideas on AI!



## **INDIGENOUS PROTOCOL AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE POSITION PAPER**

The position paper on Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence (IP AI) is a starting place for those who want to design and create AI from an ethical position that centers Indigenous concerns.

<https://www.indigenous-ai.net/position-paper/>

## **USING GENERATIVE AI FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY (WITNESS)**

Reflections on the responsible use of AI tools for the creation and modification of photo, video and audio.

<https://blog.witness.org/2023/06/using-generative-ai-for-human-rights-advocacy/>

## **DEEPAKES, SYNTHETIC MEDIA AND GENERATIVE AI (WITNESS)**

WITNESS helps people use video and technology to protect and defend human rights. Our Technology Threats and Opportunities Team engages early on with emerging technologies that have the potential to enhance or undermine our trust on audiovisual content. Building upon years of foundational research and global advocacy on synthetic media, we've been preparing for the impact of AI on our ability to discern the truth. In consultation with human rights defenders, journalists, and technologists on four continents, we've identified the most pressing concerns and recommendations on what we must do now.

<https://www.gen-ai.witness.org/>

## **EU LEGISLATORS MUST CLOSE DANGEROUS LOOPHOLE AND PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE AI ACT (EDRI)**

Over 115 civil society organisations are calling on EU legislators to remove a major loophole in the high-risk classification process of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act and maintain a high level of protection for people's rights in the legislation.

<https://edri.org/our-work/civil-society-statement-eu-close-loophole-article-6-ai-act-tech-lobby/>

## **ABUNDANT INTELLIGENCES**

The Abundant Intelligences research program imagines anew how to conceptualize and design Artificial Intelligence (AI) based on Indigenous Knowledge (IK) systems.

<https://www.indigenous-ai.net/abundant>

## **AI LEARNING CENTER (ECNL)**

Resources and custom video-explainers on civic freedoms, safeguards and transparency in the development of digital technologies and AI.

<https://learningcenter.ecnl.org/#technology-and-artificial-intelligence>

## **FRAMEWORK FOR MEANINGFUL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION / ENGAGEMENT IN AI DEVELOPMENT (ECNL)**

Human rights impact assessments of AI systems require meaningful engagement of those most affected. ECNL and SocietyInside have created a Framework aiming to address this need.

<https://ecnl.org/publications/framework-meaningful-engagement-human-rights-impact-assessments-ai>

## **GENDER PATTERNS IN TECH: “THE CYCLE OF MARGINALIZATION CAN AND MUST BE BROKEN” (FORUS)**

Virtual engagement is biased. Women and girls face hurdles to access technology and need to overcome inherent socio-cultural norms that keep the doors shut when it comes to their ability to step into and influence the digital sphere. As part of #MarchWithUs, we ask Jane Coffin, Connect Humanity Senior Advisor and Dianne Olivan, gender and digital rights expert, why the online world is still a hostile space for women and how we can change that.

<https://www.forus-international.org/en/custom-page-detail/97928-gender-patterns-in-tech-the-cycle-of-marginalization-can-and-must-be-broken>

## **EU: EU MUST PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS IN UPCOMING VOTE ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE BILL**

"The European Parliament's vote on the Artificial Intelligence Act in May offers the European Union (EU) a significant opportunity to regulate artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in order to protect and promote human rights," said Amnesty International in an open letter to members of the Parliament's main committees."

<https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/news/2023/04/eu-european-union-must-protect-human-rights-in-upcoming-ai-act-vote/>

## **LOCALIZATION LAB**

Making FLOSS technology accessible through collaboration with developers, organizations, end users, and communities in need. Our crowdsourced localization results in more accurate and timely translations and unlocks access to the internet for users all over the world.

<https://www.localizationlab.org/>

# **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS REVOLUTIONIZING HOW WE TACKLE GLOBAL ISSUES, BUT COMES WITH CONCERNS RELATING TO ACCOUNTABILITY, FAIRNESS AND TRANSPARENCY.**

Both business and government can support civil society by making room at the table during discussions over responsible AI. There are three legs to the stool of AI governance: government, business and civil society. The approach to securing the responsible and beneficial use of this emerging technology must include that third leg if we are going to succeed.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/07/civil-society-help-ai-benefits/>

## **FINGO POWERBANK**

Fingo Powerbank supports development NGOs in three areas: innovations, technology solutions and private sector collaboration. They organize trainings, share information and bring actors together – among other activities. Their goal is to boost joint efforts for a sustainable world. Their website is the right place to start to find valuable tools and learning material. <https://fingo.fi/en/fingo-powerbank/>

## **CES CHERCHEURS AFRICAINS QUI CRÉENT UNE INTELLIGENCE ARTIFICIELLE PLUS FINE**

Connaissez-vous Indaba ? Cette communauté de plus de 400 chercheurs africains en intelligence artificielle se réunit tous les ans pour travailler sur des chantiers communs. Elle planche entre autres sur la mise au point d'un modèle de langage alternatif à celui qui a permis la naissance du robot conversationnel ChatGPT. En s'appuyant sur les 2 000 langues du continent, il pourrait être plus riche que son équivalent américain.

<https://deeplearningindaba.com/2023/>

## **INTELLIGENCE ARTIFICIELLE : OÙ EN EST L'AFRIQUE ?**

Les débats montent autour des usages de l'IA dans le monde, l'Afrique n'est pas en reste. Quels sont les pays en pointe ? Quels sont les principaux défis à relever ?

[https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/intelligence-artificielle-ou-en-est-l-afrique-15-05-2023-2520202\\_3826.php#11](https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/intelligence-artificielle-ou-en-est-l-afrique-15-05-2023-2520202_3826.php#11)

## **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA (ENGAGEMEDIA)**

Since 2019, EngageMedia has been exploring and researching AI from a public interest perspective, covering topics ranging from [ethical guidelines for AI](#), the importance of [data justice within AI](#), and the need for AI governance in Southeast Asia. This project documents the impact of AI in the region – from its benefits and uses, to its complications and dangers.

<https://engagemedia.org/projects/ai/>

## **DERECHOS HUMANOS E INTELIGENCIA ARTIFICIAL**

La Inteligencia Artificial es una herramienta sumamente poderosa y necesaria para ayudarnos a abordar los inmensos retos que debemos superar como especie. Pero si a la hora de desarrollarla pasamos por alto los factores sociales, laborales y éticos, la Inteligencia Artificial puede convertirse en arma a favor de la desigualdad, el control y la destrucción.

<https://revistascientificas.us.es/index.php/ies/article/view/19991/18602>

## **STATE OF DIGITAL INEQUITY: CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVES ON BARRIERS TO PROGRESS IN OUR DIGITIZING WORLD (CONNECT HUMANITY)**

Based on survey responses from 7500+ participants across 136 countries, this report provides the largest ever mapping of the digital barriers facing civil society organizations — and those faced by the communities they serve. It provides data across a range of issues, including access, affordability, digital skills, policy, and funding for digital equity efforts.

<https://connecthumanity.fund/digital-inequity-report/>

## **WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GENERATIVE AI AND HUMAN RIGHTS (ACCESSNOW)**

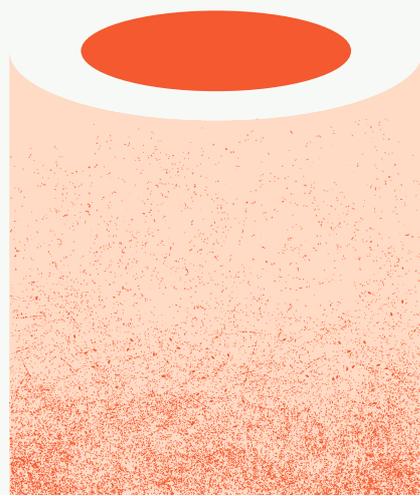
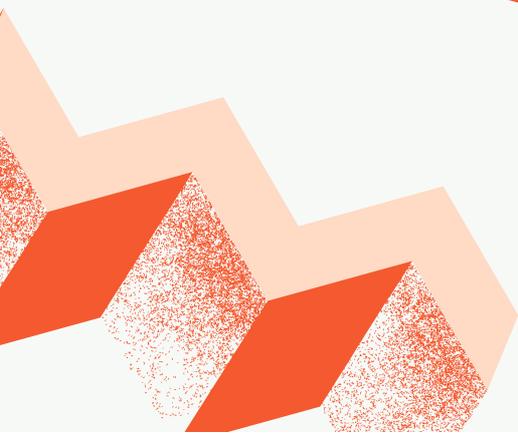
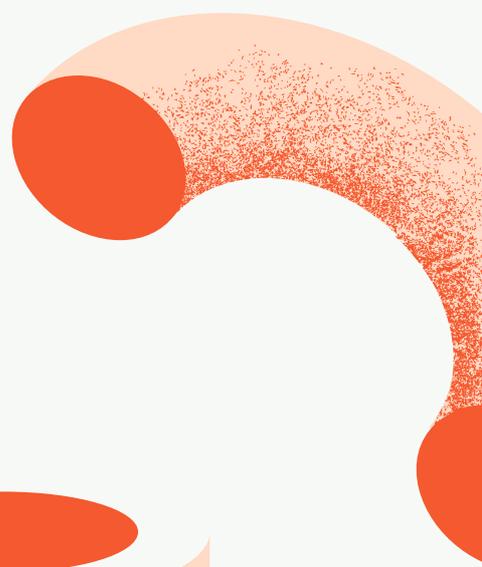
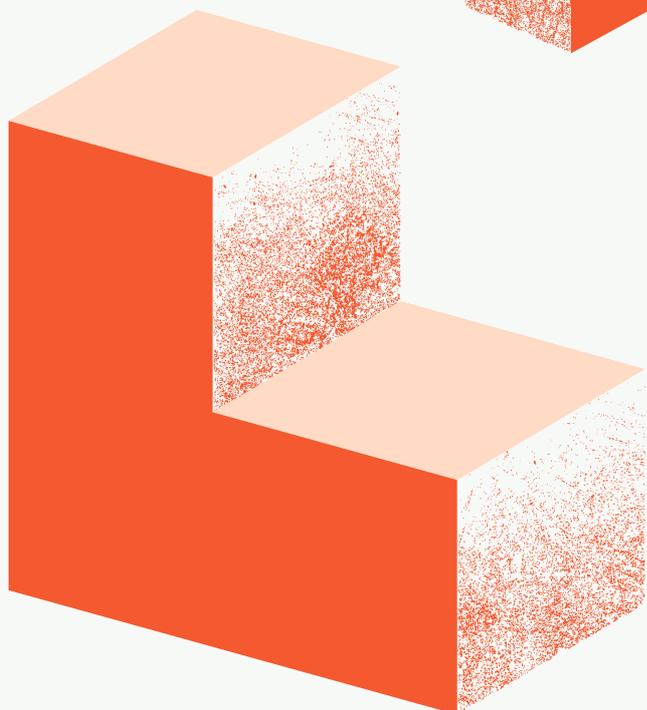
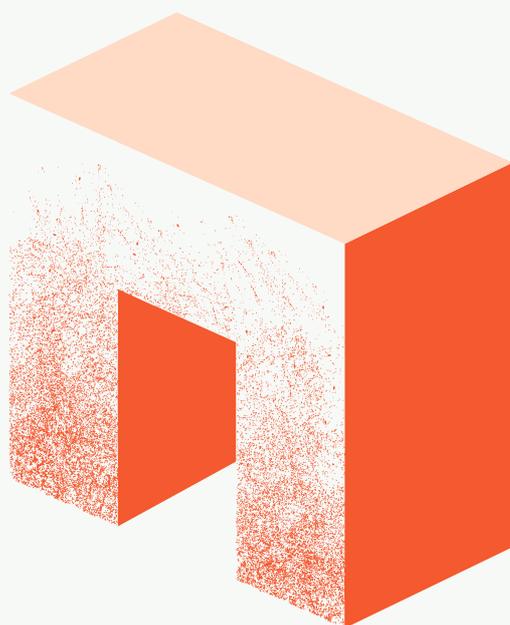
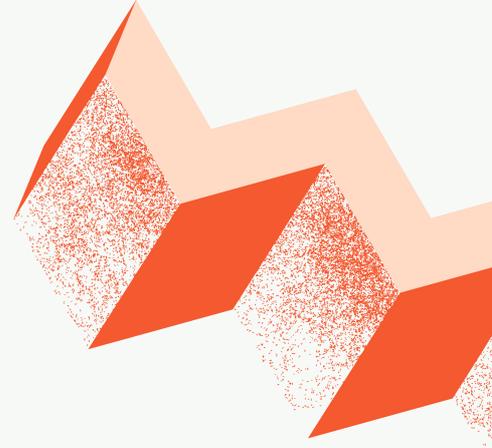
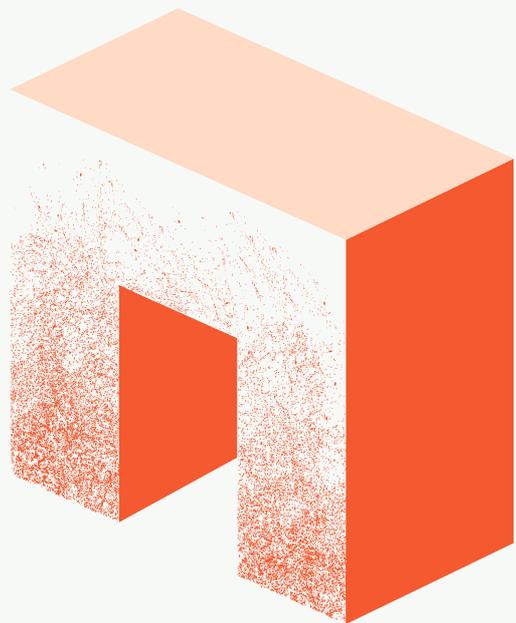
Every day, newspaper columns and social media feeds are filled with equal amounts of overblown optimism about how 'generative AI' will change the world and sci-fi doom-mongering about it ending humanity. Amid all this noise, commentators and companies alike are overlooking the reality of how newly popular AI applications are already impacting people's lives and their fundamental rights. In this explainer piece, we're cutting through the hype to get to the truth about what generative AI can (and can't) do, and why it matters for human rights worldwide.

<https://www.accessnow.org/what-you-need-to-know-about-generative-ai-and-human-rights/>

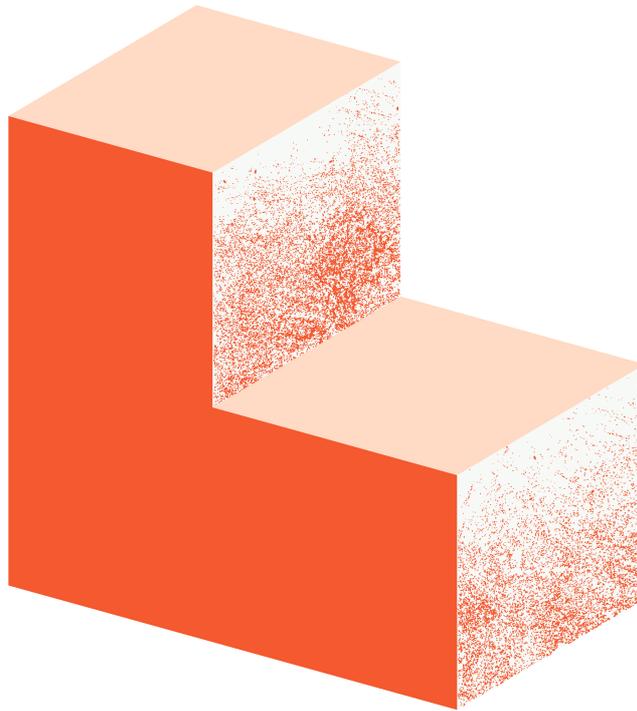
## **ENABLING STORIES - HOW CIVIL SOCIETY CAN BUILD NEW NARRATIVES IN A WORLD TRANSFORMED BY DIGITALIZATION AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC (FORUS)**

The aim of this report is to examine two key factors which have been rapidly transforming civic space across the world in recent years, often negatively impacting the rights and freedoms of activists and civil society practitioners and their operating environments. These factors are, firstly, the COVID 19 global health pandemic and secondly, the accelerating global process of digitalization.

[https://www.forus-international.org/en/extra/hub/resources-publications?modal\\_page=pdf-detail&modal\\_detail\\_id=88273-enabling-stories-how-civil-society-can-build-new-narratives-in-a-world-transformed-by-digitalization-and-the-covid-19-pandemic](https://www.forus-international.org/en/extra/hub/resources-publications?modal_page=pdf-detail&modal_detail_id=88273-enabling-stories-how-civil-society-can-build-new-narratives-in-a-world-transformed-by-digitalization-and-the-covid-19-pandemic)



# Civil society Manifesto For Ethical AI



Forus is a member-led network of 68 National NGO Platforms and 7 Regional Coalitions from all continents representing over 22,000 NGOs active locally and internationally on development, human rights and environmental issues.



This publication has been produced with the assistance of the Agence française de développement and Fondation de France. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Forus and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the Agence française de développement or Fondation de France.

Photo credits: Forus, Midia Ninja, Both Nomads, Sanjog Manandhar, Melania Torres, Sebastian Barros.

*Interviews carried out by Bibbi Abruzzini and Clarisse Sih - Forus.*

