Report:

Successfully Harnessing AI in Africa

Monday 2 – Wednesday 4 December 2024

In partnership with
The UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and Google

In association with
The African Leadership University and The African Observatory on Responsible AI

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Executive Summary

"With decisive action, Africa can make AI into a catalyst of inclusive and sustainable development."

This report covers the event "Successfully Harnessing AI in Africa" held on 2-4 December 2024 at Wiston House, Wilton Park, UK in partnership with the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and Google and in association with the African Leadership University and the African Observatory on Responsible AI.

Bringing together global and African leaders from the government, academia, civil society, development partners, AI practitioners and the private sector, the event focused on ways to harness artificial intelligence (AI) as a driver of sustainable development in Africa. The participants worked to identify concrete initiatives to promote AI adoption, use, and innovation in Africa, building on ongoing strategies and initiatives such as the African Union's 2024 Continental AI Strategy; the AI for Development program led by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and FCDO that

promotes AI use in Africa; Google's AI Sprinters report; and the Google-commissioned AI Policy Blueprint for Africa delivered by Nextrade Group that stresses digital infrastructures, AI skills, investment in innovation, and enabling policy environment as key drivers of AI in Africa.

The discussions were based on a shared understanding that promoting AI development in Africa needs to be contextualized to Africa's socio-economic circumstances, leverage African data, and respond to Africa's development needs.

The first day centred on ways to harness AI's transformative potential for solving the most pressing challenges to Africa's development. Concrete examples of the uses of AI for maternal healthcare, agricultural productivity, and disaster management demonstrated how AI-driven innovations already improve and even save lives in Africa. However, catalysing further AI innovations and scaling the use of AI in Africa will require larger sets of local data, including open government data, the development of local AI expertise, and improved digital infrastructures and computing capabilities.

The second day turned to responsible uses of AI, including in the government. Trust-building emerged as a central theme, with calls for localized AI models and an African Charter on Ethical AI. There is also a need to develop AI systems that account for socio-economic inequalities and innovate new inclusive solutions and promote "diversity by design". Further recommendations included establishing an African AI Safety Summit and embedding ethics experts in African AI projects. Promoting open data while protecting

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sensitive information was deemed essential to promoting trust in AI systems.

The stakeholders also explored how African governments could use AI to improve public service delivery. Case studies from Rwanda, the UK, and South Africa illustrated AI applications in government, from AI-powered chatbots in healthcare to AI-driven document processing systems in public administration. However, challenges such as data availability, algorithmic bias, and workforce displacement remain. African governments could follow the lead of the UK in adopting and scaling low-risk AI deployments in public service delivery, while experimenting and iterating with higher-risk, high-touch applications.

Sessions during the third day centred on scaling existing AI initiatives through partnerships. Public-private partnerships and collaboration models involving governments, technology companies, and universities are critical for promoting AI innovation and adoption at scale. These can include, for example, targeted training programs to help small businesses use AI, AI-driven scientific research initiatives, and pro-AI policy initiatives such as the promotion of data governance frameworks and privacy-enhancing technologies. Work does not have to start from scratch; rather, stakeholders can "turbocharge" existing, promising initiatives and AI capabilities.

The event concluded with a call to action: Africa must lead its AI development agenda by crafting bold strategies contextualized to local socio-economic realities and needs, promoting enabling policy environments, and forming international partnerships. Africa should drive the AI revolution its way – meeting local needs through local AI

innovation and local data. This takes leadership from the very top of African countries: heads of state and senior policymakers such as finance ministers must be sensitized to AI's transformative potential and commit to national and regional AI strategies. With decisive action, Africa can make AI into a catalyst of inclusive and sustainable development.

The proposed priority actions emerging from the event include:

- Developing national strategies aligned with the African Union's Continental AI Strategy and global AI governance frameworks to ensure policy coherence and promote African-led AI innovations.

- Investing in digital infrastructures, including cloud services, data centres, and connectivity, to support the scaling of AI-driven solutions across the continent.

- Creating national AI education and training programs in collaboration with universities, tech companies, and research institutions to build a workforce able to apply AI, and crafting a blueprint for national AI upskilling plans with Google's leadership.

- Establishing clear data governance frameworks that promote open government data while ensuring data privacy, protection, and equitable cross-border data flows, and developing plans for promoting the availability of African data for AI development.

- Ensuring African AI models and innovation scale – for example by accelerating the adoption of interoperable AI standards in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).

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- Developing an African framework for ethical and responsible development and deployment.

- Promoting African governments' use of AI for public service delivery while ensuring responsible AI use in the government.

- Promoting Africa's AI innovation through venture capital, public-private partnerships, and targeted research funding.

- Creating a plan for enhancing scientific research with AI in Africa, with FCDO's leadership.

- Building on what exists and turbocharging initiatives that work, including through partnerships with Google's initiatives and technologies, from the Hustle Academy training to SMEs to DeepMind use cases with African scientists.

Introduction

"There is a narrow window of opportunity to ensure AI is harnessed effectively and responsibly"

This report covers the event "Successfully Harnessing AI in Africa" held on 2-4 December 2024 at Wiston House, Wilton Park, UK in partnership with the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Google, the African Leadership University, and the African Observatory on Responsible AI.

The event convened African and international leaders from the government, academia, civil society, development partners, AI practitioners and the private sector to discuss how Africa can harness artificial intelligence (AI) to address the continent's societal and economic challenges and drive the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The participants agreed that for AI to transform such key sectors in Africa as healthcare and agriculture requires responsible, inclusive, and context-aware AI strategies.

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Throughout the event, speakers stressed the urgency of building a skilled workforce, investing in data infrastructure, making local data available for AI R&D, and creating enabling regulatory environments to ensure Africans benefit from AI. With over one-half of Sub-Saharan Africa projected to have internet access in the coming years, there is a narrow window of opportunity to ensure AI is harnessed effectively and responsibly.

Day 1
Opening remarks: setting the stage for Africa's AI future

"Governments can lead by example to promote AI use"

The discussions opened by highlighting the urgent need for African economies to promote AI strategies aimed at bridging the continent's inequalities. Google introduced the new AI Policy Blueprint for Africa commissioned by Google and delivered by Nextrade Group that lays out detailed and comprehensive policies for AI development and deployment in Africa, arranged under four pillars key for AI development – infrastructure development, skills training, investment in innovation, and responsible AI policies. It was acknowledged that several efforts are already on the way to promote AI use in Africa that can be readily leveraged, such as the AI for Development program led by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).

Session 1: Exploring the transformative potential of AI for Africa

The first session examined how AI can improve availability and productivity in key sectors in Africa, including healthcare and

agriculture, and in general promote the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The session featured a healthcare innovator who described how an AI model, trained on two million real-life queries from mothers in Kenya, is providing healthcare advice to expectant mothers at scale. The AI tool answers more than 12,000 questions daily from expectant mothers at 90 percent accuracy; questions related to more serious health conditions or where the mother reports that she did not receive a sufficient response are answered by a human. The AI system provides locally contextualized, actionable information that helps reduce maternal mortality.

An AI researcher discussed how AI is transforming agriculture through disease detection models. For example, AI-powered tools enable farmers to identify cassava crop diseases early and help them increase productivity and reduce harvest losses. The application has already expanded to other crops. Access for non-English speakers can be expanded through large language models (LLMs) that have multiple languages – Google for example has added 24 African languages such as Somali and Hausa in Google Translate.

AI's predictive capabilities are also being used in disaster management in Africa, for example to predict floods and wildfires by providing early warnings that enable timely evacuations and emergency responses.

Participants agreed that governments can lead by example to promote AI use; one example is Kenya Revenue Authority's exploration of AI use for tax collection.

Applying and scaling these types of AI applications in Africa requires, for example, enhancing skills for Africans to apply AI; promoting access to large local datasets including government data; enhancing data privacy; and promoting AI innovation through fair use copyright laws that both protect and promote innovation. These policies are ever more important for harnessing such breakthrough technologies as agentic AI, a leading AI trend for 2025, where AI-driven agents complete complex tasks.

African countries can drive these policies through concerted national and regional AI strategies, building on ongoing work such as the African Union's 2024 Continental AI Strategy, the UK and Canada's AI for Development Initiative, Google's AI Sprinters report, and the Google-supported AI Policy Blueprint for Africa delivered by Nextrade Group that stresses digital infrastructure, AI skills, and enabling policy environment as key drivers of AI in Africa.

The key recommendations for expanding the potential of AI in Africa included:

- **Promoting access to local data, including government data:** Africa lacks readily available local data for building locally relevant AI models. African governments play a key role in promoting cross-border data transfer and access to government data. Universities and local institutions should be empowered to manage data-sharing agreements to advance AI research while safeguarding privacy.

- **Developing local AI expertise in Africa:** African governments should scale AI training programs through partnerships with universities, research centres, accelerators, and tech companies, and offer scholarships and research grants to build a talent pipeline to innovate using AI and apply AI.

- **Expanding AI infrastructure and internet access:** To scale AI use in Africa, governments need to urgently prioritize investments in digital infrastructure, including cloud services, data centres, and internet connectivity.

Session 2: Shaping regional and national AI strategies

The second session focused on building comprehensive AI strategies tailored to Africa's needs and circumstances. Participants emphasized such strategies should help ensure that AI's benefits are equitably distributed in Africa, African businesses own and monetize AI innovations, and African governments form part of global AI governance debates. They should focus on ways to promote enabling regulatory environments, sector-specific AI policies, and AI infrastructure and compute capabilities.

The discussion also focused on practical ways to move from AI strategies and blueprints to implementation of AI initiatives. There were five major themes.

The first was the importance of prioritizing responsible uses of AI and building trust in AI systems, by addressing data privacy violations, algorithmic bias, and economic exclusion. A policy expert noted that building trust means building representative local datasets, applying AI to Africa's unique contexts, and incorporating African values into

AI ethics, including through a regional African Charter on Ethical AI. There were also calls to move from "responsible AI" to "trustworthy AI" to bridge the trust deficits associated with AI. Kenya is leading the charge on trust in AI by hosting a Trust Summit on AI in June 2025. There are also such useful tools to track trust in AI such as the Global Index on Responsible AI co-funded by the IDRC, Global Affairs Canada, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and FCDO.

The second theme was inclusion. African AI systems need to be developed with inclusion in mind lest AI widen Africa's existing inequalities. For example, AI applications should have innovative designs to account for persons with disabilities. Inclusion and diversity should be a starting point, not a problem to be solved ex post – and disability in the AI era should be a central theme and not be a side issue. As such, Africa's AI strategies must also address more than technological innovation and be geared to tackling underlying socio-economic inequalities. AI can also be geared to promoting inclusion in African labour markets, by augmenting employees' skills and productivity.

Third, the participants also explored the potential for innovative financing models to support AI development in Africa. The goal should be to enable local companies to scale AI-driven solutions while ensuring that economic value remains within the continent. Suggestions included promoting venture capital funds for African AI startups, public-private partnerships, and cross-border investments.

Fourth, to scale data available for AI, African governments should promote convergence among national data rights and privacy,

consumer protection, and data transfer policies. Common, interoperable AI standards, for example in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), are essential for scaling AI innovations in Africa and ensuring that African governments apply the same terminology in regulating AI deployments. AI standards should be aligned with globally emerging standards and international AI governance principles.

Fifth, turning strategies into action requires leadership at the highest level, from African heads of state. Many African AI success stories to date are due to visionary leadership. Leaders such as heads of state and finance ministries need to be sensitized to the potential of AI and its many use cases. In addition, leadership is needed to turn Africa's many challenges to AI adoption and use into strengths – for example, the vast young population can be seen as a unique asset of developing and scaling AI applications.

The key recommendations from the session on AI strategies included:

- **Creating national and regional AI strategies:** African countries should develop comprehensive AI strategies aligned with the African Union's Continental AI strategy to promote policy coherence and African AI standards aligned with global AI governance principles. The drive toward national and regional strategies requires strong leadership from the highest levels of African governments – and awareness-building with top policy makers on AI's potential use cases.

- **Supporting inclusive regulatory frameworks related to AI:** Governments need to drive the twin goals of innovation and inclusion by crafting policies that address the trust deficit with AI and promote inclusive AI systems. This includes adopting balanced data protection policies and involving underrepresented groups in AI-related policy-making.

- **Promoting investment and financing models to catalyse AI innovation and use:** African policymakers should encourage innovative funding mechanisms such as venture capital, blended financing, and impact investing to support AI startups and local entrepreneurs. AI investment hubs could be built to fund tech-enabled businesses and scale AI-driven innovations.

Closing reflections on day 1: turning potential into action

Participants agreed that Africa must lead, not follow, in defining its AI development agenda, by driving AI strategies and translating ideas into concrete policies, scaling pilot projects, and creating supportive AI ecosystems. In addition, African governments need to urgently improve infrastructures, establish skilled AI workforces, and build supportive regulatory environments.

Fireside chat with Google DeepMind

Day 1 closed with a fireside chat that explored how AI is driving scientific breakthroughs and expanding opportunities in Africa. A key focus was Google DeepMind's development of AlphaFold, which was tasked to solve a decades-long "protein folding problem." By predicting the 3D structures of proteins from amino acid sequences, AlphaFold has transformed research in drug discovery and

agricultural resilience. Its open-access database of over 200 million protein structures has accelerated global research, including work on antimicrobial resistance and malaria, two challenges central to Africa's health landscape.

The conversation also addressed how Google DeepMind is working to increase AI's positive social impact through its Impact Accelerator. This initiative emphasizes two core areas: talent development and technological accessibility. Examples by which AlphaFold is brought to Africa include a [Master's program in AI for Science at the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences](#) and supporting capacity-building workshops through BioStruct-Africa. DeepMind has also developed models like Gemma, which operate on standard laptops, enabling AI research in low-resource environments.

The session highlighted further tools such as [MedLM](#), Google's large language model trained on medical data, and [CoDoC](#), which evaluates AI's accuracy in diagnosing medical conditions. These technologies augment human expertise and can support healthcare systems and scale service provision, especially in under-resourced regions. There are numerous examples of how AI can address Africa's pressing healthcare challenges, from AI-driven research on bacterial biofilms to new antimalarial drug targets.

There are also lessons-learned for African researchers seeking to use AI. First, researchers need to be clear on the problem they are seeking to solve. Second, solving a problem with AI requires vast amounts of data, including data on the desired outcomes. A major reason why AlphaFold succeeded is that it could use a database of

170,000 known protein structures in the Protein Data Bank. This existing data also enabled researchers to validate AI's performance.

African research institutions can prepare to take advantage of AI-driven scientific advancements through a number of ways, such as building multidisciplinary teams, defining bold, impact-driven research goals, and promoting open collaboration on AI applications. Securing vast datasets of high-quality local data is critical for success.

Day 2
Session 3: Maximising the potential while mitigating the risks of AI

"AI training programs should include AI ethics, social science, and human rights considerations alongside technical AI skills"

As AI technologies become more advanced, accessible, and embedded in Africans' daily lives, ensuring their safe, ethical, and equitable use becomes increasingly urgent. This session examined how African governments, the private sector, and civil society can develop inclusive AI ecosystems that mitigate risks such as disinformation, biased data, labour exploitation, and cybersecurity threats. Speakers discussed AI governance models, trust-building strategies, and the potential for Africa-led regulatory frameworks that balance innovation with protection.

It was highlighted that AI's economic potential is ultimately unlocked by removing barriers such as language and coding expertise. This is already happening: for example, non-technical African creators can use AI to build apps and leverage AI to reach new markets. However, to scale AI use further requires focus on trust and safety – and such elements as clear product policies, content moderation systems, and AI model testing. Google's AI Principles outline risk-reduction

strategies such as watermarking AI-generated content, red-teaming, and using classifiers to detect abuse.

There are many challenges to operationalize these principles. It was noted, for example, that frameworks like "AI for Good" do not necessarily address labour market disruptions and inequality as effectively as desired. In addition, bias in training data can reinforce discrimination. Governments can help solve these challenges through promoting open government data and prioritizing inclusive regulations that protect vulnerable communities, such as low-income workers performing data labelling tasks.

There is also a need to promote the reliability of data, to ensure AI offers Africans better information than they may receive "offline" through neighbours, frontline health workers, educators, and other service providers – and that these traditional sources of information are also equipped to access reliable data faster through AI.

The key recommendations from the session to mitigate potential risk of AI in Africa included:

- **Adopting risk-based governance frameworks for AI:** Governments should implement dynamic regulatory systems that adapt as AI technologies evolve, through safety benchmarks, interoperable standards, and AI testing protocols.
- **Ensuring convergent national data policies and data privacy:** Governments should create African-led data governance frameworks that emphasize open data initiatives while safeguarding personal and sensitive information.

- **Building awareness and mainstreaming AI ethics in AI development:** AI training programs should include AI ethics, social science, and human rights considerations alongside technical AI skills, and stress the protection of human rights and vulnerable communities in operationalizing AI.

Session 4: AI in service of citizens: What governments can do to improve services with AI

AI has the potential to transform African governments' public service delivery. This session explored practical steps for African governments to successfully integrate AI into public service.

The session explored how African governments can harness AI to improve public service delivery, administrative efficiency, and transparency. Case studies from governmental leaders in Rwanda, the UK, and South Africa illustrated how governments are already experimenting with AI to enhance public services and their delivery while managing technological and ethical challenges.

A representative from Rwanda discussed the government's national AI policy issued in 2023, which focuses on translating AI into adding six more percentage points to Rwanda's GDP. Rwanda has succeeded at deploying AI-powered chatbots in healthcare and supporting telemedicine and emergency logistics through drone-based medical deliveries. However, data availability remains a significant barrier.

The UK government shared lessons from its AI deployment strategy, which is guided by its Generative AI Framework. The government has considered AI applications in a two-by-two model with low to high complexity work on one axis and low to high proximity of work to citizens on another. For example, teachers and doctors perform high-

complexity work at high proximity and need different AI applications than needed in low-complexity services – such as updating vehicle permits. In the UK, AI applications such as customer service chatbots and document processing have boosted productivity by 5-10 percent. There are real gains shaping public servants' lives – for example, a nurse can see another patient with that time.

However, challenges like AI hallucinations in chatbots have led to a cautious, experimentation-driven approach. This reflects the early internet era, where technological promise outpaced policy safeguards.

South Africa's government outlined its work on national AI policy, which is envisioned to stress AI ethics, digital identity systems, and data infrastructure. Collaboration with universities has advanced public-sector AI tools, including a chatbot for e-government services. However, concerns remain about workforce displacement, digital rights protections, and balancing AI-driven automation with job retention.

There was a vibrant discussion on uses of AI in the government. Some called for governments to test out AI for various use cases even when AI may still be imperfect, while others promoted a more gradual approach. The UK has struck a balance between scaling AI in simpler tasks while experimenting and iterating with AI in more complex and citizen-facing settings.

Key recommendations from the session included:

- **Establishing goals for AI in the government:** Governments should implement AI action plans that set clear goals for digital transformation while balancing data security, transparency, and service equity.

- **Promoting responsible AI use in the public sector:** Policymakers should adopt AI tools through iterative experimentation, rolling out low-risk, high-impact applications like administrative automation, health diagnostics, and agricultural forecasting while iterating more on higher risk applications such as provision of personalized healthcare. AI policies must align with citizen rights, ensuring public trust and accountability.

- **Using public-private partnerships to promote public service delivery:** Collaborations with tech companies, universities, and NGOs can accelerate AI adoption while reducing costs and sharing technical expertise. Governments should consider funding AI research through multi-sector innovation funds.

The World Café at the end of day 2 focused on small group collaboration exploring AI use-cases in agriculture and food systems, assistive tech, health, and education.

Day 3

Session 5: Breakout groups

Day 3 consisted of focused discussions in small groups to consider in very practical terms how to "turbocharge" existing AI projects and initiatives in Africa including by leveraging Google's technologies, especially in four areas: skilling for AI; AI-driven scientific research and innovation; data and data governance; and AI ethics, safety, and trust. The recommendations were as follows:

AI skilling

Group discussions on AI skilling emphasized the urgent need to scale AI education across Africa through targeted training programs involving governments, tech companies, and schools and universities. Participants identified three critical areas for action: mainstreaming AI into education systems at all levels, creating inclusive skilling programs for underrepresented groups, and enhancing workforce readiness through industry-driven training.

Among the recommendations were (1) mainstreaming AI learning into primary, secondary, and tertiary education curricula, with tailored programs for rural populations, women, and persons with disabilities; (2) developing an AI skilling blueprint to inform strategic decision-making about investment in skills; (3) scaling existing initiatives like Google's AI literacy courses and Google's Hustle Academy for SMEs; and (4) building on existing initiatives like the AI for Science Master's program at the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences, AI4D responsible AI labs at African universities and African Union-led upskilling initiative. Participants also recommended integrating AI skilling into government leadership programs to ensure AI in

policymaking and public service innovation. Specific next steps include promoting AI skilling models at the upcoming Global AI Summit in Rwanda and launching industry-academic collaborations for applied AI research.

Additionally, the discussion underscored the need for harmonized AI education policies across regional economic blocs like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and Southern African Development Community (SADC).

AI scientific research in Africa

Discussions focused on mainstreaming AI into Africa's scientific and innovation ecosystems, with an emphasis on addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Participants in particular urged shifting from isolated pilot projects to systematic, large-scale applications aimed at mainstreaming AI in healthcare, agriculture, and climate resilience. Proposed actions included (1) embedding UK PhD students in African scientific labs in various disciplines; (2) creating joint funding streams for early-career researchers; and (3) launching challenge-based innovation programs led by DeepMind scientists. There were also calls for expanding research centres dedicated to AI in Africa and building robust partnerships with global scientific institutions.

There was consensus on the need to link scientific data collection with commercial viability. For example, AI adoption and research could be incentivized through innovation hubs focused on commercializing AI-based solutions. The conversation also explored

scaling AI tools like Jacaranda Health's maternal care system and piloting AI-powered digital rehabilitation models.

Frameworks on data governance for Africa

The discussions highlighted that unlocking Africa's AI potential depends on advancing balanced and harmonized data governance frameworks, cross border data transfer, promoting open data, and creating data-sharing mechanisms. There is much experimentation and debate on innovative approaches to data governance for equitable data sharing which could be applied to help unlock data in a responsible way.

Recommendations included (1) explore ways to grow the FCDO, IDRC and Google-supported Lacuna Fund to provide open datasets in critical fields like climate, agriculture, and sign language; (2) launching an advocacy campaign for open government data; and (3) building capacity within government agencies to recognize data's economic value. Kenya's White Paper on data as an economic asset, aimed at enabling policymakers learn about the ways in which AI uses and requires data, was cited as a model for similar thinking among African governments. Open cross-border data transfers were seen as essential to building robust and unbiased AI models.

In addition, attention was drawn to the need for data for inclusive AI development. To enhance data accessibility, the participants proposed developing collaborative datasets for underrepresented segments, such as sign language and indigenous languages. Establishing a continental data protection authority was

recommended to coordinate policy harmonization under the African Union's digital protocol.

AI safety and ethics for Africa

The session on AI ethics and safety stressed the need for a continental AI ethics and safety framework aligned with global standards. The participants noted that existing efforts, including UNESCO's AI ethics framework, should be connected to African-led initiatives for greater regional representation and developing clearer conceptualization of AI ethics in an African context.

Proposals included (1) considering holding a Global AI Safety Summit in Africa to establish guiding principles on AI ethics and safety in an African context; (2) embedding AI ethics experts in projects across sectors, particularly in sensitive areas like healthcare and public services; (3) expanding responsible AI assessments and corporate governance models for SMEs; and (4) exploring collaboration between Google and African researchers on benchmarking or quality assuring AI tools in a local context.

There was a call to ensure African values are represented in global AI safety standards through structured participation in global bodies like the G7. Participants urged tech companies like Google to open their AI safety tools and offer capacity-building programs tailored to African regulatory contexts.

Session 6: Partnerships: Working together to unlock the AI opportunity in Africa

Participants concluded that partnerships across sectors, borders, and disciplines are essential to unlock Africa's AI potential. The

discussion emphasized the role of targeted investments, open data initiatives, and joint capacity-building programs

A development leader outlined how his organization supports AI policy innovation hubs in 12 African countries, helping them build policy frameworks, data-sharing agreements, and language technology initiatives. USAID's digital programs promote inclusive AI ecosystems by combining digital infrastructure investments with AI-specific training programs. Their focus on last-mile connectivity ensures that AI-powered innovations reach underserved communities. Another expert discussed the role of trade policies in facilitating AI data flows, noting that Africa's trade agreements should drive at open data-sharing standards to avoid restrictive data localization practices.

Key recommendations from the session on partnerships for AI included:

- Leveraging existing, well-working partnerships and initiatives that work to promote AI development: African governments and development organizations can readily promote AI development by partnering with companies like Google and leveraging existing initiatives, like those led by Google-DeepMind to promote AI among Africa's scientific communities, Google Hustle Academy to scale AI use among SMEs, and the Lacuna Fund that promotes data for AI.

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- Building national AI skilling programs: Countries should adopt national AI skilling blueprints integrating technical, ethical, and policy training. Partnerships with universities, tech firms, and development agencies can expand these programs' reach and impact.

- Promoting cross-border data frameworks: African governments should create data-sharing standards that allow for secure, equitable cross-border data flows. Establishing a continental data protection body would reinforce compliance and harmonization.

- Investing in AI innovation funds in Africa: Public and private funders should establish targeted funds supporting African AI startups, research centers, and tech-driven businesses. Blended financing models can accelerate commercial-scale AI innovation.

- Safety and Ethics: Developing an African-led framework for AI safety and ethics.

Conclusion: Seizing Africa's AI opportunity through collaboration

The event concluded with consensus on a clear call for action: Africa must lead in defining its AI development agenda by setting bold national strategies, creating enabling policies, and pursuing international partnerships. Participants urged African governments to avoid waiting for others to develop AI and adopting foreign AI applications – and instead develop homegrown solutions that reflect the continent's unique socio-economic contexts, African ethics and values, and local languages

The urgency of acting now cannot be overstated. For Africa to become a global hub for AI innovation and promote inclusive growth and development through AI, leaders and other stakeholders must commit to promoting access to data and building policies and ecosystems that prioritize responsible, trustworthy uses of AI and skilling for Africans to innovate using AI and apply AI and be literate about AI. The future of AI in Africa is not just about technology, but about creating a digital future that empowers all Africans.

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