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AI for Inclusive Development in Africa – Part I: Governance

Governance

Artificial Intelligence can accelerate digital transformation and drive economic growth –simplifying complex processes and systems, facilitating decision making, and tailoring services.

As AI solutions become more widespread in Africa, so too has awareness of how unregulated AI development can embed systemic biases, amplify inaccuracies of AI model outputs, and misuse personal data.

Today, despite the explosion of AI-based applications and startups across the continent[1], many African nations lack national strategies, institutions, and regulatory frameworks to mitigate these risks and guide the responsible development of AI technologies. This governance vacuum creates uncertainty that can stifle investment, undermine public trust, and hinder innovation in the AI sector.

To deliver on AI's potential socioeconomic benefits for all Africans, governments on the continent must develop more holistic AI governance mechanisms that engage a diverse set of stakeholders. A strong governance foundation at the national and regional levels will establish clear guidelines for AI development, provide legal parameters and standards for AI use, and foster public trust through safeguards and clear accountability mechanisms. Aligning AI governance policies in Africa to rapidly evolving global standards for AI will facilitate foreign investment and technology transfers.

African governments must take a multifaceted approach to AI governance; one that establishes strategic direction, implementing mechanisms, and regulatory and ethical frameworks for AI adoption. These efforts must build on global and regional efforts like the recently adopted UN Resolution on AI Governance and the African Union's Continental Strategy and African Digital Compact, which aim to promote safe, secure, and trustworthy AI systems.

In this paper we explore how African governments, in collaboration with regional institutions, private sector actors, and international development partners, can tackle these dimensions of AI governance to ensure responsible and inclusive AI development, deployment, and use.

AI in Africa

2400 AI Companies in Africa, 40% founded since 2017

UN Resolution on AI Governance

March 21st, 2024: The UN General Assembly adopted a landmark resolution on the promotion of "safe, secure and trustworthy" artificial intelligence (AI) systems that will also benefit sustainable development for all.

AI Strategy and Planning

National and regional strategies can accelerate and sustain the adoption of AI, providing roadmaps to guide its development, implementation and use in a way that respects societal values and norms and contributes to inclusive growth.

In 2023, the African Union convened AI experts to draft the African Union Artificial Intelligence (AU-AI) Continental Strategy for Africa, which has been released in 2024.[2] Yet, most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have yet to develop national AI strategies or policy plans. The lack of clear direction hinders collaboration and integration of AI across economic sectors, impeding coordination, prioritization, and resource allocation of AI efforts within each country and across the continent.[3]

Efforts to establish AI strategies in Africa vary, falling into the following categories: **1) early AI adopters**—countries with national AI plans or strategies adopted; **2) emerging AI adopters**—countries developing AI plans or strategies; **3) AI integrators** – countries incorporating AI governance into a comprehensive digital strategy or within an existing framework; and **4) limited adopters of AI** –countries that have no mention of AI in plans, policies, or strategies at the national level. In the first two categories, Egypt, Rwanda, Mauritius, Ghana, Senegal, Tunisia, and Nigeria stand out as the early adopters and have either created AI national strategies or are currently in the process of doing so.

In the third category, AI integrators, lies South Africa, which lacks a national AI strategy but has established a Presidential Commission on the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)[4] to develop a strategic plan for the country's 4IR vision, to become a leader in emerging technologies, notably, Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing, and smart manufacturing. Similarly, Kenya, which also currently lacks a national AI strategy, relies on existing laws related to AI and digital technologies as a regulatory framework.[5]

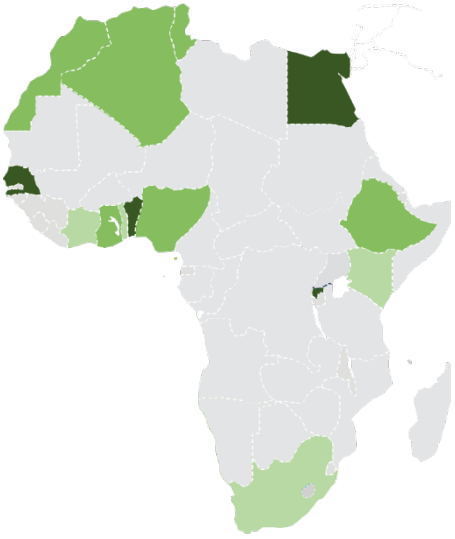
In 2021, Egypt launched its National AI Strategy and established a National Council for Artificial Intelligence. This comprehensive strategy serves as a guiding framework for the responsible and strategic adoption of AI technologies across various sectors within Egypt. Egypt's vision includes positioning itself as a thriving hub for innovation, drawing in investments, and effectively addressing critical societal challenges to stimulate economic growth. Egypt's implementation of this strategy is projected to yield a direct impact of $42.7 billion USD by 2030, equivalent to 7.7% of the nation's GDP.

Countries in the fourth and final category show limited public consideration of AI. This is often due to policymakers not perceiving AI as a priority or how their existing capabilities could support it. These countries may be prioritizing other underlying challenges to AI adoption, such as digital divides, talent gaps, and limited data and digital infrastructure, all of which can make AI seem like a distant goal.

Other reasons for these countries' slow progress in adopting AI strategies include a desire to not styme AI innovation with regulations, as well as the limited knowledge and understanding of AI's potential and its societal implications among the policymakers. A lack of awareness about AI, in particular, can impede effective decision-making and the formulation of suitable policies and regulations. This, in turn, can lead to missed opportunities to use AI to tackle social, economic, and developmental challenges.

Status of National AI Strategy and Planning (as of March 2024)[9]

- Countries that have adopted an AI National Strategy
- Countries in the process of adopting an AI National Strategy
- Countries with no national AI strategy but integrating AI into digital strategy or legal framework.
- Countries with limited or no public consideration of AI



Both the United States[6] and European Union[7] have released AI strategies that set visions, policies, priorities, and action plans for enabling AI development and commercial uptake and "ensuring that AI works for the people." These could be potential models for the African Union and national governments on the continent, as they prepare for the myriad ways that AI could impact African societies and define the roles they could play in shaping its adoption.

Egypt's AI Journey

7.7% Increase in Egypt's GDP is expected from its new AI National Strategy

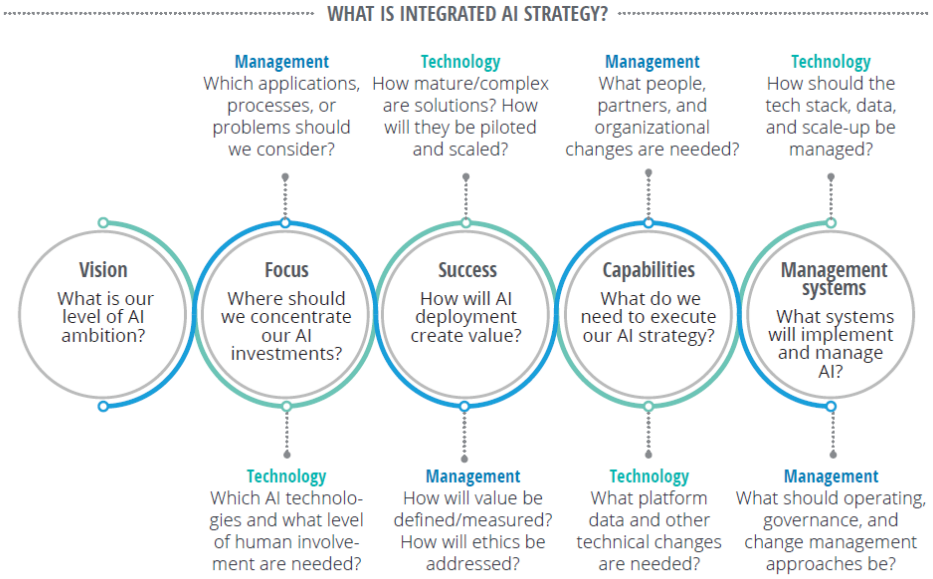
Opportunities for Consideration

- **African governments should craft national AI strategies to serve as a foundation for effective AI governance.** Public officials should consider engaging AI leaders, industry experts, corporate and international partners to create robust AI strategies that define objectives and encourage cross-sector collaboration, with clear, measurable roadmaps for implementation. Governments should ideally develop strategies and roadmaps within the context and aligned to a comprehensive economic growth strategy, guiding long-term objectives, and maximizing potential.

These guiding documents should go beyond articulating a vision; they should include analysis and decisions to set priorities, optimize resource allocation, and identify implementation needs. National strategies should align with and support implementation of the African Union's recent continental AI strategy.[8]

In a 2019 Deloitte article on AI strategy for government leaders, authors explained that "strategy isn't just a declaration of intent, but ultimately should involve a set of choices that articulate where and how AI will be used to create value, and the resources, governance, and controls needed to do so." Based on this premise, Deloitte developed an AI version of its classic strategic choice cascade framework to reflect the questions and considerations required for AI adoption (see figure below).

To be effective a government AI strategy should cover five core components – a vision, prioritized focus, a clear definition of success, capabilities needed, and supporting management systems. This framework can be applied at the national level, to use AI for improved government performance or to advance an economic growth agenda, or from a sectoral lens, for the AI strategy of a specific ministry or public agency.



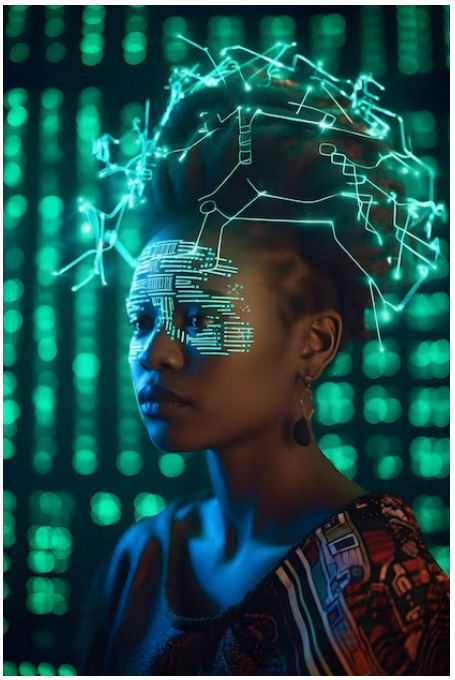
Source: Deloitte analysis.

- **Development partners can provide tailored training and capacity strengthening for policymakers to bridge the knowledge gap.** Enhancing domestic AI policymaking capabilities will empower African countries to autonomously shape AI policies that align with their distinctive requirements and ambitions. Development partners can build on existing models such as the FAIR Forward program, which initiated peer-learning activities to enhance the capacity of policymakers from Africa and Asia to respond to the benefits and challenges of AI. The program was implemented by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) from South Africa, working with researchers and policy experts from Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, among other countries.[9]

Public-Private Coordination & Implementation Mechanisms

There is often a lag and lack of institutional coordination between national AI public stakeholders and private sector players and initiatives, limiting the potential of such strategies to be effective in driving economic growth and social development. To fully harness AI's benefits, effective institutional frameworks for AI policy and strategy implementation and collaboration between the public and private sectors, are essential.

Nigeria, Rwanda, and several other countries are taking a proactive approach on this front. To promote research and development in emerging technologies, the Nigerian government established the National Centre for AI and Robotics (NCAIR).[10] This collaborative endeavor engages government agencies, businesses, and academic institutions in a shared mission, to create an African Hub for AI and Robotics. Furthermore, in May 2023, the Federal Government of Nigeria made a resolute commitment to generate one million jobs in the digital economy by providing accessible courses for professionals, in Artificial Intelligence, Cloud computing, Game Programer, E-commerce, Digital Marketing, etc.[11]



Institutions with public-private coordination mandate for AI adoption:

Egypt: Established a National Council for Artificial Intelligence to implement the national AI strategy, which serves as a guiding framework for the responsible and strategic adoption of AI technologies across various sectors.

Nigeria: The Nigerian government established the National Centre for AI and Robotics (NCAIR) to engage government agencies, businesses, and academic institutions to create an African Hub for AI and Robotics.

Rwanda: The AI Hub developed a training program in collaboration with the Rwanda Space Agency (RSA), German Aerospace Agency (DLR), and the private sector in targeting machine learning programs for earth observation.

Similarly, Rwanda launched the AI Hub initiative flagship program to focus on building vibrant AI ecosystems to support startup researchers and entrepreneurs. The AI Hub developed a training program for young professionals in collaboration with the Rwanda Space Agency (RSA), German Aerospace Agency (DLR), and the private sector in targeting machine learning programs for earth observation. The program's goal is to make use of AI and machine learning to leverage geospatial data in the sustainable development of the country.[12] In addition, the Rwanda Information Society Authority (RISA) and the AI Hub established a natural language processing fellowship with the aim of bolstering the state's technical skillset among the local population.

Egypt has also created an AI council to oversee its national AI strategy, and Kenya has entrusted its national innovation agency[13] with developing and implementing IT-related policies, including those pertaining to AI and data. Meanwhile, Senegal is the only African country represented in the Global Partnership of Artificial Intelligence (GAPI), a standards body convening experts from the public and private sectors to develop governance models and shepherd global innovation.[14] These initiatives illustrate the vital role that public-private cooperation plays in advancing AI-driven economic growth.

Opportunities for Consideration

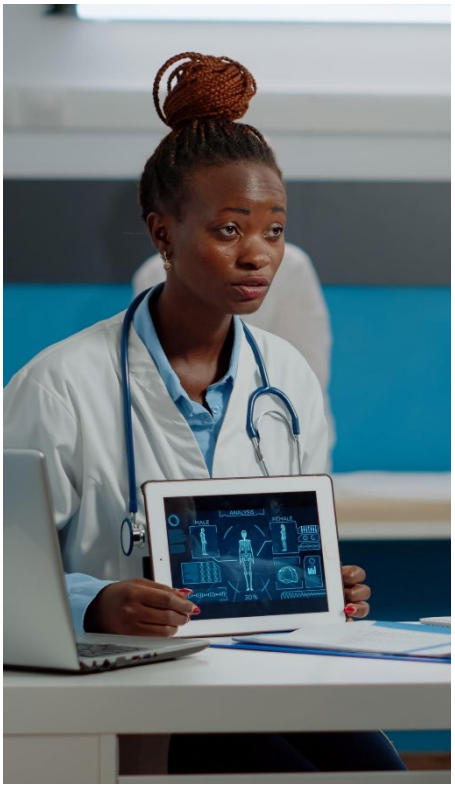
- **Government strategies should empower new or existing institutions or coordination mechanisms to drive implementation.** These institutions, whether national AI agencies or commissions, can carry the mandate of facilitating dialogue, co-creating policies, and ensuring coherent AI ecosystems. African countries can actively learn from each other and other contexts to tailor governance mechanisms to their specific needs. In the US, for example, the government established the National Artificial Intelligence Research Resource Task Force (NAIRR) to help drive implementation and facilitate dialogue among stakeholders of AI adoption.[15] The aim of the Task Force was to stand up the national infrastructure for AI development and research. The task force brings together experts from academia, industry, and government to provide insights and drive implementation.

- **African governments should actively participate in global AI standards bodies**. Global standards bodies are developing and proliferating governance guidance for AI research and activities—influencing AI product and service delivery models. African governments should be an active voice at the table, allocating funding and time to these efforts to influence global decision-making and advancing their own economic and national security needs. This includes applying for membership and leadership roles in policy committees, as well as providing grants funding African experts and academic researchers in technical committees of these foras for deeper global engagement. Furthermore, African governments should work through regional bodies like the African Union to align on pan-African AI technology standards. This will strengthen the business-enabling environment for AI firms investing across borders.

- **Implementation institutions should have a mandate to foster public-private partnerships.** Establishing collaborative governance structures that bridge the gap between the public and private sectors is essential. We're seeing this in other areas of opportunity for digital enablement. For example, in Senegal the National Meteorological Agency was granted the mandate and liberty to establish PPPs as part of a weather and climate data value chain from government to end users. Public agencies charged with

Without the right processes and safeguards in place, the adoption of AI can exacerbate existing digital divides, including between expat and local populations, men and women, urban and rural residents, and along formal education level and income lines.

implementing AI strategies should be similarly encouraged and equipped to partner with the private sector to strengthen the entire ecosystem.



Regulatory and Ethical Framework

As AI relies heavily on data, including personal and sensitive information, certain laws and regulations related to data collection, transfer, protection, and cybersecurity have significant impact on the ethical and safe adoption of AI. Much of the data employed for AI tools and solutions comes from Global North users. In general, citizens in the Global North have access to more advanced digital infrastructure. This easy access to digital technologies leads to greater use of these technologies by Global North users, which in turn creates greater representation of Global North users in the data within such technologies.

As a result, datasets may reflect the demographics, preferences and behaviors of population in the Global North, potentially leading to biases when AI systems are applied at the global level. AI has the potential to further exacerbate the digital divide between the digitally underserved and the highly digitalized countries and pose risk for disadvantaged or marginalized groups because these groups may not be represented in AI training data.[16]

Similarly, across the African continent and within each country in the region, insufficient infrastructure and other factors limit access and use of digital tools and technology for certain groups more than others. Without the right processes and safeguards in place, the adoption of AI can exacerbate existing digital divides, including between expat and local populations, men and women, urban and rural residents, and along formal education level and income lines.

Furthermore, AI as a tool can be co-opted for pernicious uses, such as for promulgating mis-, dis- , or mal-information, which can have devastating effects on social and political stability. For example, mis-,dis-, and mal-information have been weaponized to increase instability in the Sahel region where low literacy rates, existing political tension, and and uptick in social media use have combined to make an already complex situation even more challenging.[17]

Additional challenges and gaps related to AI and data protection, data transfer, and cybersecurity are significant. According to UNCTAD, most African countries have already adopted a data protection law[18] or are in the process of drafting legislation. However, due to the rapid evolution of technology, regular updates are necessary. For example, Tunisia enacted a personal data protection law in 2004. Despite being advanced, this law

faces challenges, including the General Data Protection Regulation for the European Union[19] (GDRP) compliance, effective enforcement, raising awareness among businesses and the public, and adapting to rapid technological changes.

Protection of inventions also stands as a crucial regulatory challenge for AI providers. Indeed, AI's unique intellectual property challenges, particularly in algorithm protection and AI-generated content, are also emerging concerns. Today, in the majority of countries, AI software is protected only by copyright covering the source code. However, this protection can be limited as it does not extend to the underlying ideas, methods, or algorithmic functionalities.

One example of how this governance gap can manifest is in the level of caution used by AI startups in their data collection. Several interviewed startups admitted that they have used data from surveillance cameras to create their database and train their models without the required authorizations from the national data protection authorities due to a lack clarity and guidance on regulatory requirements. This reveals a critical need for better regulatory understanding and support systems to ensure that AI development aligns with legal and ethical standards.

Addressing these risks is essential to creating a safe, secure, inclusive, and transparent enabling environment for ethical AI adoption and innovation in Africa. In some cases, rapid adoption of a strict regulatory framework around AI might hamper innovation. For example, in 2023 tech industry leaders in Kenya raised concerns about the government's proposed bill for the Kenya Robotics and Artificial Intelligence Society, arguing that such legislation could potentially stifle innovation, especially considering that the AI sector in Kenya is still in its nascent stages.[20] Conversely, policymakers recognize the importance of safeguarding consumers' interests by providing a legal framework for the establishment and operation of AI technologies.[21]

This situation highlights the critical need for a regulatory approach that safeguards users while also fostering technological advancement and innovation. Recently the European Union approved an AI Act that establishes a foundation of safeguareds.[22]

Opportunities for Consideration

- **Prioritize the establishment of data protection, data transfer, cybersecurity and intellectual property regulations that are robust, localized, and aligned with international standards.** Adapting these laws is crucial to address the intersecting risks posed by AI, such as algorithm protection, ownership and usage rights of AI-generated content and the use of personal data with the appropriate protection. Data must not only be secured properly, but ownership rights must also be clearly defined, recognizing both individual and collective rights. Individuals should be allowed to opt-out or remove access of having their data used as part of an AI solution. On ownership, resolving conflicts between data sovereignty and accessibility can be challenging, especially regarding national governments' control over data, but ethical use would ultimately place power into the hands of those having their data collected. Reconciling data accessibility with privacy protection is crucial.

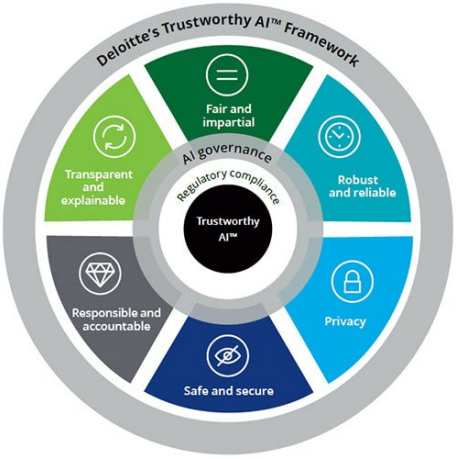
  While AI innovation relies on diverse datasets, ensuring privacy rights through measures like anonymization, masking, encryption, or differential privacy is essential. Striking a balance between accessibility and privacy requires collaboration among stakeholders and

The European Union approved the AI Act: The AI Act, approved on March 13th, 2024, "aims to protect fundamental rights, democracy, the rule of law and environmental sustainability from high-risk AI, while boosting innovation and establishing Europe as a leader in the field. The regulation establishes obligations for AI based on its potential risks and level of impact."

the development of clear ethical guidelines, security controls, and regulatory frameworks. This not only boosts consumer confidence in African organizations but also enhances their competitiveness on the international stage. Conversations about a unified regulatory framework should also be considered for African nations. Just like the European Union, which last February approved the AI Act to ensure that AI systems are safe, transparent, and accountable, fostering trust in this rapidly evolving technology.

- **Equip local public actors with the knowledge to prevent and redress harm that results from AI implemented without a local perspective.** Engaging local actors within the ecosystems strengthens capacity both to make ecosystem-informed strategic investments and to develop effective safeguards for AI technology and data. Local actors may include host country governments, technology companies, digital rights activists, civil society organizations, local financial institutions, academic institutions, and regulatory bodies. Local actors impacted by AI should be engaged throughout the design and implementation processes. This means equipping local actors with AI literacy skills and tools that allow them to analyze and understand when and how the use of AI tools might result in unfair or unjust outcomes.
- **Improve inclusivity and stakeholder representation in AI design, deployment, governance, or policymaking, especially for underrepresented or marginalized groups.** Inclusivity and representation of African countries, contexts, and citizens is imperative to mitigating potential AI risks and harms on a global level. Within the African context, inclusion of marginalized groups or those with limited access, such as persons with disabilities, rural residents, women, and girls,[23] can better position AI technologies to address equity issues rather than exacerbating them. Designing AI using principles of gender equity and social inclusion can reduce AI bias[24] in recruitment tools that may reflect discriminatory hiring practices; in financing tools that determine discriminatory credit scores or loan approvals; or with health tools that influence diagnosis and subsequent treatment. Knowledge sharing on AI risks and harms with the public enables active collaboration, learning, and idea sharing to shape an ecosystem where the public and those traditionally excluded in other forums can engage on AI-related issues. The collective perspective creates opportunities for surfacing problems and identifying current and future risks of AI. This in turn allows for AI use that is more equitable, inclusive, and rights-respecting; accounts for, and mitigates, potential harms; and is reflective of a more global reality.
- **Adopt a human-centered, responsible, and ethical approach to AI**. Including considerations such as: 1) participation and inclusion, to engage and empower diverse and affected stakeholder in the design, development, and governance of AI, so that their needs, preferences, and values are respected and reflected; 2) accountability and transparency to establish clear and enforceable rules and standards for the behavior and performance of AI systems, as well as mechanisms for monitoring, auditing and redressing any harms or errors; and 3) fairness and justice to enable AI systems to be fair, equitable, and nondiscriminatory, so they are able to promote the social good and human rights of all people, especially those who are marginalized, oppressed, and perhaps lack access to the technology. This is an area of potential support from technical partners. Tools such as Deloitte's Trustworthy AI™ framework described below can be useful in defining parameters and standards across the various dimensions that need to be considered.

Trustworthy AI™ framework promotes the ethical use of AI within organizations. Trustworthy AI™ requires governance and regulatory compliance throughout the AI lifecycle from ideation to design, development, deployment, and machine learning operations anchored on the seven dimensions in Deloitte's Trustworthy AI™ framework—transparent and explainable, fair and impartial, robust and reliable, respectful of privacy, safe and secure, and responsible and accountable.

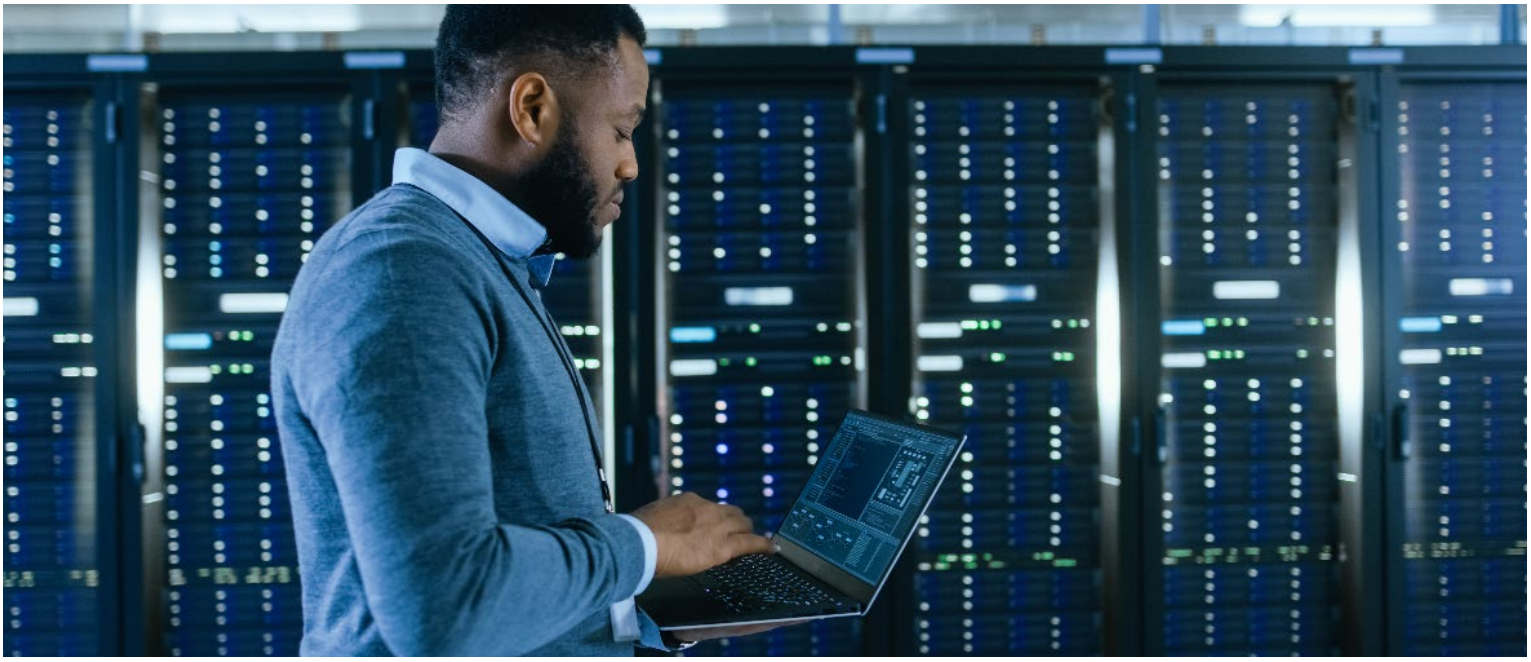


Source: Deloitte

Conclusion

Africa has an array of governance frameworks, with each country presenting a unique context for AI adoption.

Yet across the continent, it is imperative for African governments and businesses to prioritize developing robust governance and risk mitigation frameworks, including national strategies, institutional implementation capabilities, public-private coordination, and regulatory and ethical standards, to reap the potential of AI technologies. Read more about other critical AI enabling areas in the region as we continue this series on AI adoption, covering data and digital infrastructure, talent development and funding.



About the Authors

Courtney Keene is a Senior Manager at Deloitte who brings 15 years of experience working as a trusted strategic advisor on programming to strengthen local systems and promote inclusive growth. With a focus on the African continent, she has advised and led programs covering 25 African countries on agriculture, energy, governance, health, and water and sanitation. Email: ckeene@deloitte.com

Aïcha Mezghani is a Senior Manager at Deloitte Afrique in the International Donor practice, leading several projects on strengthening entrepreneurial ecosystems and conducting the design and implementation of public policies, promoting innovation and ICT sectors. Email: amezghani@deloitte.tn

Maryam Kyari is a Senior Consultant at Deloitte focused on conducting economic impact studies and devising corporate social responsibility strategies for clients across energy, real estate, disaster recovery, and education. She aligns the objectives of clients with regulatory guidelines and standard practices and develops governance structures to manage investments and grants. Email: mkyari@deloitte.com

Ibrahim Almatri is a Senior Consultant in Deloitte's Risk and Financial Advisory practice working with state and local entities in the development and execution of risk management strategies and crisis recovery efforts. Email: ialmatri@deloitte.com

Get in Touch

Kathleen O'Dell is a principal with Deloitte's Government & Public Services team and leads Deloitte's International Development practice, which includes Deloitte's work with the U.S. Agency for International Development, Millennium Challenge Corporation, U.S. Export-Import Bank, and United Nations, among others. Email: kodell@deloitte.com

Adarsh Desai is a Principal in Strategy and Analytics practice within Deloitte's Government and Public Services (GPS) group. Adarsh leads strategy and implementation of Digital, AI, Generative AI, and Data Analytics solutions for International Development Organizations and US Federal Government Agencies. Email: adadesai@deloitte.com

Mohamed Malouche is a Deloitte Advisory partner and business leader in the International Donors practice, leading work on public sector modernization, local economic development, energy, entrepreneurship, and innovation across French-speaking Africa. Email: momalouche@deloitte.tn

Carlton Jones is a Deloitte Consulting Leader in Tanzania, the Strategy Leader for East Africa, and the African Lead Client Service Partner, responsible for the USAID work in economic growth, industry and cluster competitiveness, trade and investment, and value chain development. Email: cjones@deloitte.co.tz

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