

*Bridging the AI Divide: Infrastructure Development, Digital Literacy and Localized Large Language
Models (LLMs)*

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Kariuki Muigua*

Abstract

This paper discusses how the digital divide in AI can be effectively and appropriately bridged. The paper observes that the rapid development and adoption of AI is widening the digital divide with negative impacts on vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals, communities and nations. The paper discusses how the digital divide undermines equity, inclusivity, fairness, justice and development in the era of technology and AI. Due to its negative impacts, the paper posits that bridging the digital divide in AI is key towards ensuring that no one is left behind as technology and AI reshape the world. The paper examines how the digital divide in AI can be successfully bridged by undertaking aggressive infrastructure development, enhancing digital literacy, and utilising localized Large Language Models (LLMs) in order to make AI tools inclusive, fair, just and equitable.

1.0 Introduction

Technology has become a powerful driver of human progress and development. The United Nations observes that modern technologies can help make the world fairer, more peaceful, and more just¹. It has been pointed out that data-powered technologies have the potential to empower individuals, improve human welfare, and promote human rights². Digital technologies have advanced more rapidly than any innovation in our history providing opportunities to unlock all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³.

In particular, it has been observed that in a global economy increasingly defined by speed, efficiency and connectivity, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become one of humanity's most valuable innovation⁴. AI has emerged as a powerful technology with the potential to reimagine and actualize human progress and developments in the coming decades⁵. The adoption of AI is revolutionizing delivery of essential services including education, healthcare, water and

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¹ United Nations., 'The Impact of Digital Technologies' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/un75/impact-digital-technologies> (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ World Economic Forum.. 'As technology accelerates, what happens to the human system?' Available at <https://www.weforum.org/stories/all/technology-and-human-system/> (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

⁵ United Nations Development Programme., 'Generative Human Development: AI as a supercharger of progress in the Asia Pacific' Available at <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/blog/ai-as-a-supercharger-of-progress-asiapacific> (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

sanitation, and social protection⁶. Further, AI has the potential to help humanity tackle some of its greatest challenges including climate change, environmental degradation, pollution, food insecurity and biodiversity loss⁷.

Technology and AI have therefore emerged as driving forces of Sustainable Development. However, as digital technologies including AI reshape all sectors of society, it is vital to ensure that technological advancements benefit all countries and communities equally, leaving no one behind⁸. Inclusivity is a key ideal towards developing and deploying AI tools that consider and value diverse perspectives, needs, and experiences and ensure that the benefits of technology are accessible to all members of society⁹. Inclusivity ensures that diverse factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, culture, language, socioeconomic status, and physical and cognitive abilities, among others are taken into account in the design, development, and deployment of AI systems in order to promote equity, fairness, human rights and social justice in the era of technology and AI¹⁰. In particular, inclusivity in AI is a key agenda due to the digital divide which leaves behind vulnerable and disadvantaged groups including women, the youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities, ethnic and linguistic minorities, indigenous groups and residents of poor or remote areas¹¹. Bridging the digital divide is therefore necessary towards ensuring inclusivity in AI for equity, fairness, justice and human rights.

This paper discusses how the digital divide in AI can be effectively and appropriately bridged. The paper observes that the rapid development and adoption of AI is widening the digital divide with negative impacts on vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals, communities and nations. The paper discusses how the digital divide undermines equity, inclusivity, fairness, justice and development in the era of technology and AI. Due to its negative impacts, the paper posits that bridging the digital divide in AI is key towards ensuring that no one is left behind as technology and AI reshape the world. The paper examines how the digital divide in AI can be successfully bridged by undertaking aggressive infrastructure development, enhancing digital literacy, and utilising localized Large Language Models (LLMs) in order to make AI tools inclusive, fair, just and equitable.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Gupta. H., & Bujad. C., 'Artificial Intelligence in Environmental Governance: Opportunities and Legal Challenges' Available at <https://ierj.in/journal/index.php/ierj/article/view/5187> (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'Mainstreaming accessibility and inclusivity in AI and digital technologies' Available at <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/mainstreaming-accessibility-and-inclusivity-ai-and-digital-technologies> (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

⁹ Inclusivity., Available at <https://www.enkryptai.com/glossary/inclusivity> (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ United Nations., 'The Impact of Digital Technologies' Op Cit

2.0 Examining the Digital Divide in Artificial Intelligence

Digital divide is a term that describes the inequalities and disparities in accessing and utilising modern technologies¹². The digital divide has also been described as the gap between people who have meaningful access to digital technology and the skills to use it, and those who lack such access and skills¹³. It has been observed that the digital divide is characterized by disparities in access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) among individuals, households, businesses, and geographic areas at varying socio-economic levels¹⁴.

The digital divide therefore refers to inequality in access, affordability and quality of modern technologies and digital tools¹⁵. The digital divide has been identified as one of the most defining and widespread inequalities of our time¹⁶. It has been observed that billions of people all over the world lack access to robust, affordable, sustainable and inclusive internet connectivity and modern technologies and digital tools with many more lacking basic digital literacy skills¹⁷. In particular, the digital divide is prevalent in Africa and the Global South leaving behind vulnerable groups including women and girls, the elderly, the youth, and people in remote areas in an increasingly technology-driven world¹⁸. It has been observed that there is a persistent digital divide between high-income and low-income countries with countries in Africa and the Global South facing inequalities in the digital age¹⁹. The digital divide is also evident across individuals. For instance, it has been observed that men, urban residents, the wealthy, and well-educated people are able to own and use modern technologies when compared to other segments of the population especially in Africa and the Global South²⁰. This means that women, rural residents,

¹² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'Digital Divide' Available at <https://www.unesco.org/en/query-list/d/digital-divide> (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

¹³ What is the Digital Divide?., Available at <https://www.close-the-gap.org/digital-inclusion/what-is-the-digital-divide> (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

¹⁴ Naikumi. M.N., 'Addressing Kenya's Digital Divide: County Disparities and Strategies for Inclusive Growth' Available at <https://repository.kippira.or.ke/server/api/core/bitstreams/e3182523-ecd7-4d31-8a04-0d0c1221a185/content> (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

¹⁵ Muller. C., 'What is the Digital Divide?' Available at https://www.internetsociety.org/blog/2022/03/what-is-the-digital-divide/#:~:text=The%20digital%20divide%20is%20the%20gap%20between,**Health%20disparities**%20*%20**Social%20determinants%20of%20health (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

¹⁶ What is the Digital Divide?., Op Cit

¹⁷ United Nations Habitat., 'Addressing the Digital Divide: Taking Action towards Digital Inclusion' Available at https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/11/addressing_the_digital_divide.pdf (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

¹⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'Closing the digital divide for women and girls in Africa through education' Available at <https://www.unesco.org/en/gender-equality/education/digital-divide> (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

¹⁹ United Nations., 'Connectivity for everyone is key to Africa's growth and prosperity' Available at <https://africarenewal.un.org/en/magazine/connectivity-everyone-key-africas-growth-and-prosperity> (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

²⁰ van Wyk-Khosa. S., Ndumbu. R., & Kronke. M., 'Africa's digital divide is closing, but participation in the digital(ised) economy remains highly uneven' Available at <https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp->

less educated citizens, the elderly and the poor in Africa and the Global South face inequalities in the digital age²¹.

The digital divide in AI is an unwanted phenomenon that fuels injustices and inequalities. It has been observed that the rapid development, deployment and adoption of AI is widening the digital divide creating what has been termed as the 'AI divide'²². This form of digital divide manifests through the unequal access, benefits, and opportunities in AI technology across various regions, communities, and socioeconomic groups²³. The United Nations observes that the AI divide is widening where high income nations disproportionately benefit from AI advancements, while low and medium income countries, particularly in Africa, lag behind²⁴. In addition, it has been observed that marginalized groups including women and girls, people of colour, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples bear the brunt of the AI divide²⁵.

It has been correctly observed that the digital divide can amplify existing socio-economic inequalities by locking marginalized groups out of the digital transformation hindering their ability to access essential services such as education, healthcare and financial services which have increasingly become digitalized²⁶. The availability, accessibility, affordability, quality and ability to use digital technologies is strongly linked to economic growth, innovation, job creation, and inclusion, at both the national, regional and global levels²⁷. As a result, the digital divide fuels underdevelopment and injustices with disproportionate impacts on vulnerable groups including women and girls, rural residents, the poor and the elderly²⁸. In particular, it has been observed that the AI divide is a fundamental issue that goes beyond economic growth²⁹. This divide

[content/uploads/2025/08/PP95-Digital-divide-in-Africa-closing-but-participation-in-digitalised-economy-still-uneven-Afrobarometer-23aug25.pdf](https://www.un.org/content/uploads/2025/08/PP95-Digital-divide-in-Africa-closing-but-participation-in-digitalised-economy-still-uneven-Afrobarometer-23aug25.pdf) (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

²¹ Ibid

²² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'AI literacy and the new Digital Divide - A Global Call for Action' Available at <https://www.unesco.org/ethics-ai/en/articles/ai-literacy-and-new-digital-divide-global-call-action> (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

²³ Ibid

²⁴ United Nations., 'Mind the AI Divide: Shaping a Global Perspective on the Future of Work' Available at <https://www.un.org/digital-emerging-technologies/sites/www.un.org.techenvoy/files/MindtheAIDivide.pdf> (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

²⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'AI literacy and the new Digital Divide - A Global Call for Action' Op Cit

²⁶ United Nations University., 'Examining the Causes and Consequences of the Digital Divide(s)' Available at <https://unu.edu/merit/blog-post/examining-causes-and-consequences-digital-divides> (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

²⁷ World Bank Group., 'Digital Transformation Drives Development in Africa' Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2024/01/18/digital-transformation-drives-development-in-afe-afw-africa> (Accessed on 15/10/2026)

²⁸ van Wyk-Khosa. S., Ndumbu. R., & Kronke. M., 'Africa's digital divide is closing, but participation in the digital(ised) economy remains highly uneven' Op Cit

²⁹ United Nations., 'Mind the AI Divide: Shaping a Global Perspective on the Future of Work' Op Cit

impacts global equity, inclusivity, fairness and social justice³⁰. With the global economy increasingly shifting towards AI-driven production and innovation, developing countries and marginalized groups risk being left further behind, worsening economic and social inequalities and injustices³¹.

In light of the foregoing concerns, it is imperative to bridge the digital divide in AI for inclusivity, equity, fairness, justice and development.

3.0 Undertaking Aggressive Infrastructure Development, Digital Literacy and Localized Large Language Models (LLMs) to Make AI Tools more Equitable

The AI divide is a form of digital divide that undermines equity, inclusivity and justice in the age of technology. Despite revolutionizing service delivery and industries all over the world, AI is also worsening socio-economic inequalities due to uneven rates of investment, adoption and use of this powerful technology³². The AI divide risks widening global inequality since many of its core inputs such as computing power, data, and talent remain highly concentrated in a few countries and firms³³. It has been observed that most AI-specialized data centers are located in the Global North with the Global South being underrepresented in the global AI landscape³⁴.

In order to effectively bridge the global AI divide, it is imperative to undertake massive and aggressive infrastructure development especially in Africa and the Global South. It has been observed that AI development relies on compute-heavy infrastructure including data centers, graphics processing units (GPUs), and energy systems³⁵. AI infrastructure involves a combination of hardware and software components designed specifically to support AI tools and systems³⁶. It has been observed that unlike traditional ICT infrastructure, AI infrastructure is optimized to handle the intense computational requirements and large datasets that characterize AI systems and applications³⁷. AI infrastructure focuses on tasks related to machine learning, deep learning, and data processing at scale among other tasks³⁸. Investing in AI infrastructure is therefore necessary towards the successful development, adoption and use of AI tools and systems. It has been observed that with the right strategies, the Global South can build sustainable AI

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

³² International Labour Organization., 'Mind the AI Divide' Available at <https://www.ilo.org/publications/mind-ai-divide> (Accessed on 16/10/2026)

³³ How to bridge the global AI divide., Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-to-bridge-the-global-ai-divide/> (Accessed on 16/10/2026)

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ What is AI Infrastructure?., Available at <https://cloudian.com/guides/ai-infrastructure/ai-infrastructure-key-components-and-6-factors-driving-success/> (Accessed on 16/10/2026)

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

infrastructure and shape global AI governance³⁹. This requires governments to invest in AI infrastructure including energy systems and data centres, and create enabling regulatory and policy environments that can encourage private investments in AI infrastructure⁴⁰. Enhancing technology development and transfer including through North-South and South-South cooperation can also strengthen the capacity of all countries, especially countries in the Global South, to adopt modern technologies and digital tools including AI towards Sustainable Development⁴¹.

Strengthening digital literacy is also necessary towards bridging the digital divide for equity and inclusivity in AI. Digital literacy in general refers to the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies⁴². Digital literacy describes the skills and competence required to use technology safely, effectively, appropriately and responsibly⁴³. Digital literacy is an essential requirement for individuals to actively and meaningfully participate in today's digitalized global economy. It has been correctly observed that digital literacy has become indispensable for every individual all over the world since most services including education, finance, healthcare, employment, public services, and transportation are transitioning to digital platforms⁴⁴. Enhancing digital literacy is therefore vital towards building more open, inclusive, equitable and secure societies⁴⁵. In particular, it has been observed that AI literacy is key towards empowering individuals and societies as this technology becomes increasingly embedded in the digital sphere⁴⁶. AI literacy empowers individuals and societies with a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes to understand how AI tools and systems work, critically evaluate their outputs and use them ethically, responsibly and creatively⁴⁷. It has been pointed out that AI literacy supports informed decision-making about the opportunities and risks that AI presents⁴⁸. AI literacy is therefore essential

³⁹ How to bridge the global AI divide., Op Cit

⁴⁰ How to bridge the global AI divide., Op Cit

⁴¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change., 'Technology Development and Transfer' Available at https://archive.ipcc.ch/ipccreports/far/wg_III/ipcc_far_wg_III_chapter_08.pdf (Accessed on 16/10/2026)

⁴² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'Digital Literacy' Available at <https://connect.unesco.org/home/TVETipedia+Glossary/lang=e/show=term/term=digital+literacy> (Accessed on 16/10/2026)

⁴³ What is Digital Literacy: Definition and Uses in Daily Life., Available at <https://www.learning.com/blog/what-is-digital-literacy-definition-and-uses-in-daily-life/> (Accessed on 16/10/2026)

⁴⁴ Center for Strategic & International Studies., 'The Digital Literacy Imperative' Available at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/digital-literacy-imperative> (Accessed on 16/10/2026)

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development., 'Empowering Learners for the Age of AI' Available at https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/empowering-learners-for-the-age-of-ai_65cd27d4-en.html (Accessed on 16/10/2026)

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid

towards enabling a safe, successful and sustainable AI adoption and use, especially as AI agents increasingly take on tasks once reserved for humans⁴⁹. It is therefore necessary for both public and private actors to enhance AI literacy including through targeted education, training and capacity-building programmes in order to equip individuals, organisations and societies with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed to bridge the digital divide through the safe, appropriate, responsible and ethical use of AI tools⁵⁰.

Embracing localized LLMs is also key towards bridging the digital divide by make AI tools more inclusive, equitable, responsive and appropriate. LLMs are a category of deep learning AI models which are trained on huge amounts of data, therefore making them capable of understanding and generating natural language and other types of content to perform a wide range of tasks⁵¹. These AI tools have the ability to process vast amounts of data and learn complex patterns in a particular language⁵². Due to their immense capabilities, LLMs have been described as a shift from traditional AI models which focus on perception and understanding⁵³. These models are being employed in a wide range of industries such as AI assistants in customer service, transcription, healthcare, procurement management and manufacturing⁵⁴. Despite their immense advantages over traditional AI models, LLMs also risk worsening the digital divide. For instance, it has been observed that LLMs used in Africa and the Global South fail to take into account indigenous and local languages, culture, and data sets leading to biased and discriminatory outcomes⁵⁵. It is therefore necessary to develop and deploy localized LLMs which reflect the cultural, ethical and linguistic needs in Africa and the Global South⁵⁶. By embracing localized LLMs, it is possible to bridge the digital divide by ensuring that billions of people in the Global South can effectively access information and services in key sectors including education, healthcare, agriculture, and environmental governance through data sets trained on indigenous and local languages, values and culture⁵⁷.

⁴⁹ World Economic Forum., 'Why AI literacy is crucial for safe, inclusive and strategic AI transformation' Available at <https://www.weforum.org/stories/emerging-technologies/ai-literacy-and-strategic-transformation/> (Accessed on 16/10/2026)

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ What are Large Language Models (LLMs)?., Available at <https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/large-language-models> (Accessed on 16/10/2026)

⁵² AI Demystified: Introduction to Large Language Models., Available at <https://uit.stanford.edu/service/techtraining/ai-demystified/llm> (Accessed on 16/10/2026)

⁵³ Large Language Models Explained., Available at <https://www.nvidia.com/en-us/glossary/large-language-models/> (Accessed on 16/10/2026)

⁵⁴ What are Large Language Models? LLMs Explained., Available at <https://cohere.com/blog/large-language-models> (Accessed on 16/10/2026)

⁵⁵ African-language Large Language Models (LLMs) present major opportunities for the continent., Available at <https://medium.com/code-for-africa/african-language-large-language-models-llms-present-major-opportunities-for-the-continent-8a92a69518b3> (Accessed on 16/10/2026)

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Ibid

4.0 Conclusion

With AI being widely adopted across the world, it is imperative to ensure that this powerful and transformative technology leaves no one behind. In particular, there is to bridge the digital divide for equity, inclusivity, justice and fairness in AI. Achieving this ideal involves undertaking aggressive infrastructure development, enhancing digital literacy and utilising localized LLMs.

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