

Encoding Ubuntu, Peace, Harmony, Human Rights and Collaboration into Artificial Intelligence for Africa: A Reflection

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Kariuki Muigua*

Abstract

This paper discusses how Africa can effectively and appropriately govern Artificial Intelligence (AI) towards Sustainable Development. The paper observes that AI is having a rapid and transformative approach all over Africa with its deployment and use across sectors providing solutions that are fostering Sustainable Development for people and planet. The paper examines some of the specific uses of AI in Africa's Sustainable Development agenda. Despite its positive benefits for the continent, the paper also observes that the use of AI in Africa raises several risks and challenges. It analyses some of the key risks and challenges arising from the development, deployment and use of AI in Africa. In light of its risks and concerns, the paper posits that effective governance of AI in Africa is a continental priority towards Sustainable Development. The paper suggests how this objective can be realised by encoding Ubuntu, peace, harmony, human rights and collaboration into AI for Africa.

1.0 Introduction

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹ acknowledges that technology is a powerful tool that can drive development and prosperity with positive impacts for both people and planet towards sustainability. In particular, the Agenda notes that the spread of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress and development, bridge the digital divide between developed and developing nations, and develop knowledge societies with the capacity to unlock sustainability across its economic, social and environmental dimensions². Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 recognises that technology is one of the means of implementing the SDGs and seeks to enhance international cooperation, collaboration and capacity building towards enhanced use of technology for sustainability³.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as one of the most powerful technologies that can accelerate global progress towards the SDGs. For instance, AI is revolutionizing and improving education, delivery of public services, transportation, finance, data storage, communications,

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¹ United Nations General Assembly., 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1., Available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf> (Accessed on 23/09/2026)

² Ibid

³ Ibid

healthcare, environmental governance, access to justice and law enforcement among other services thus providing numerous opportunities to unlock Sustainable Development⁴. It has been observed that AI is a powerful technology that is transforming industries, fostering innovation and redefining how we solve complex global problems⁵. Consequently, through appropriate approaches and policies, AI has the potential to advance human rights, unlock economic development, protect the environment and foster social progress⁶.

However, despite its efficacy as a driver of Sustainable Development, the emergence of AI raises several risks and challenges that can fuel injustices, inequalities and human rights violations. The United Nations observed that while AI has the potential to address some of greatest challenges facing people and planet, the rapid development, deployment and use of this technology inevitably brings with it a host of risks and challenges that need to be carefully navigated⁷. In particular, the adoption of AI in Africa and the Global South has been associated with biases, discrimination, inequalities, breach of indigenous data sovereignty, human rights violations and digital colonialism among other risks and challenges⁸. Consequently, strengthening AI governance in Africa and the Global South is key towards harnessing its benefits in the Sustainable Development discourse while addressing its risks and challenges.

This paper discusses how Africa can effectively and appropriately govern AI towards Sustainable Development. The paper observes that AI is having a rapid and transformative approach all over Africa with its deployment and use across sectors providing solutions that are fostering Sustainable Development for people and planet. The paper examines some of the specific uses of AI in Africa's Sustainable Development agenda. Despite its positive benefits for the continent, the paper also observes that the use of AI in Africa raises several risks and challenges. It analyses some of the key risks and challenges arising from the development, deployment and use of AI in Africa. In light of its risks and concerns, the paper posits that effective governance of AI in Africa is a continental priority towards Sustainable Development. The paper suggests how this objective can be realised by encoding Ubuntu, peace, harmony, human rights and collaboration into AI for Africa.

⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development., 'Governing with Artificial Intelligence' Available at https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2025/06/governing-with-artificial-intelligence_398fa287.html (Accessed on 23/09/2026)

⁵ United Nations Global Compact., 'Artificial Intelligence and the Sustainable Development Goals: Operationalizing technology for a sustainable future' Available at <https://unglobalcompact.org/compactjournal/artificial-intelligence-and-sustainable-development-goals-operationalizing> (Accessed on 23/09/2026)

⁶ Ibid

⁷ United Nations., 'Artificial Intelligence (AI)' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/artificial-intelligence> (Accessed on 23/09/2026)

⁸ Olurunju. N., 'African algorithmic governance: Benefit of a community-based approach' Available at <https://researchictafrica.net/2022/04/03/african-algorithmic-governance-benefit-of-a-community-based-approach/> (Accessed on 23/09/2026)

2.0 Artificial Intelligence and Sustainable Development in Africa: Promises and Pitfalls

AI is having a positive and transformative impact in Africa providing opportunities towards unlocking Sustainable Development across its economic, social and environmental dimensions. For example, it has been observed that AI is being increasingly adopted in Africa as a tool to support economic development, public service delivery, social equity, environmental governance and regional integration⁹. By investing in digital skills and infrastructure, effective governance frameworks and domestic technological capacity, Africa can appropriately and ethically harness AI to spur economic development, job creation, improved public service delivery, social progress and sound environmental protection¹⁰. AI has been identified as an emerging and defining feature of Africa's digital transformation providing opportunities to foster Sustainable Development and improved quality of life for all Africans¹¹.

The development, deployment and use of AI is therefore a key intervention towards achieving Sustainable Development all over Africa. For example, it has been observed that innovations associated with AI are enhancing sectors such as health, finance, transportation, education, and agriculture, transforming African economies and entire business models and practices¹². In particular, smart agriculture, health information technology and localized interventions, climate monitoring and adaptation, among other AI applications, are all being developed and utilized across Africa with positive impacts for the economy, society and environment¹³.

AI therefore holds the promise of accelerating progress towards Sustainable Development in Africa through enhanced economic growth, social equity and environmental protection. It has been correctly observed that through effective governance, AI can transform important sectors of Africa's economies including agriculture, education, healthcare, and finance¹⁴. For example, in agriculture, AI is being widely used to strengthen early warning systems, crop and disease

⁹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development., 'AI Governance in Africa' Available at https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-artificial-intelligence-case-studies_c517fcf5-en/ai-governance-in-africa_1ff55135-en.html (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

¹⁰ Role of Artificial Intelligence in Africa's Development., Available at <https://ict.go.ke/role-artificial-intelligence-africas-development> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

¹¹ The Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law (CIPIT)., 'The State of AI in Africa Report' Available at <https://aiconference.cipit.org/documents/the-state-of-ai-in-africa-report.pdf> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

¹² Munga. J., & Quansah. S., 'Understanding Africa's AI Governance Landscape: Insights From Policy Practice and Dialogue' Available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/posts/2025/09/understanding-africas-ai-governance-landscape-insights-from-policy-practice-and-dialogue> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

¹³ Ogenga. F., & Stanley. A., 'Regulating Artificial Intelligence in Africa: Strategies and Insights from Kenya, Ghana, and the African Union' Available at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/regulating-artificial-intelligence-africa-strategies-and-insights-kenya-ghana-and-african> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

¹⁴ AUDA-NEPAD., 'AI for Africa: Artificial Intelligence for Africa's Socio-Economic Development' Available at <https://www.nepad.org/publication/ai-africa-artificial-intelligence-africas-socio-economic-development> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

diagnostics, provide climate-smart advisory services and agri-fintech solutions¹⁵. AI technologies such as precision farming are enabling farmers in Africa to optimize resources and maximize crop yields¹⁶. In addition, satellite imagery, drones with high-resolution sensors, and geographic information systems help monitor crop health, soil moisture, and nutrient levels in real time thus improving decision-making processes in the agricultural sector in Africa¹⁷. In addition to agriculture, it has been observed that the integration of AI into financial services in Africa is supporting fintech and banking services thus driving Africa's development agenda¹⁸. Further, the integration of AI into education is enhancing individualized learning, ensuring access to education for vulnerable learners including persons with disabilities, supporting development of comprehensive and responsive curricula, and streamlining administrative tasks in learning institutions¹⁹. AI is also improving health outcomes in Africa through enhanced detection of diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis while also fostering access to medical and health information through online health platforms²⁰.

In addition to unlocking economic development, AI can also support social equity towards Sustainable Development. For instance, the United Nations observes that AI has the capacity to empower traditionally marginalized and disadvantaged groups in Africa and the Global South including women, the youth and indigenous and local communities to access economic and social opportunities towards justice, equity, human rights and fairness²¹. Further, AI is also strengthening environmental governance in Africa. The integration of AI tools is improving environmental governance effective climate action, sound biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management, and sustainable waste management practices²². It has been observed that AI-powered tools, including remote sensing analytics, machine-learning, forecasting models, mobile-based citizen observatories, and intelligent decision-support platforms, are providing governments, the private sector and communities in Africa with improved accuracy in

¹⁵ How AI can benefit smallholder farmers in Africa: Opportunities for EU-Africa cooperation., Available at <https://ecdpm.org/work/how-ai-can-benefit-smallholder-farmers-africa-opportunities-eu-africa-cooperation> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ AI-powered fintech and banking are driving Africa's development. Here's how., Available at <https://www.developmentaid.org/news-stream/post/202004/ai-powered-fintech-in-africa> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

¹⁹ From commitment to action: Advancing the use of AI in education in Africa., Available at <https://idrc-crdi.ca/en/research-in-action/commitment-action-advancing-use-ai-education-africa> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

²⁰ Owoyemi. A et al., 'Artificial Intelligence for Healthcare in Africa' Available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8521850/> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

²¹ United Nations., 'Artificial Intelligence (AI)' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/artificial-intelligence> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

²² Moleka. P., 'AI-Driven Governance for Sustainable Resource Management and Ecosystem Resilience in Africa' Available at https://link.springer.com/rwe/10.1007/978-3-030-67776-3_83-1 (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

monitoring environmental changes, predicting environmental hazards, and optimizing interventions towards sound environmental governance²³.

Harnessing the transformative power of AI is therefore vital towards fast-tracking Africa's progress towards Sustainable Development. It has been observed that a growing number of Africa countries are development national AI policies and strategies towards integrating this powerful technology in development processes²⁴. In addition, at a continental level, the *African Union Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy*²⁵ has been developed in order to support the ethical, effective and responsive integration of AI into Sustainable Development policies and decision-making processes in Africa.

However, despite its positive impacts, the development, deployment and use of AI in Africa raises several risks and challenges that can undermine peace, justice, human rights and Sustainable Development. For example, it has been observed that digital divides, inadequate access to digital infrastructure, affordable internet connectivity and advanced compute capacity, skills shortages, poor data governance, and inadequate investments are some of the main challenges that undermine the capacity of Africa to effectively embrace AI for development²⁶. In addition, use of foreign AI models raises unique challenges for Africa. For instance, it has been observed that the adoption of AI in healthcare, education, finance, agriculture, and environmental governance among other sectors in Africa and the Global South fuels digital colonialism by reflecting foreign norms, values, philosophies and models of governance while violating indigenous cultures, values and knowledge systems²⁷. In addition, use of foreign AI models fuels breach of indigenous data sovereignty in Africa and the Global South through extraction, exploitation and commodification of indigenous data sets without collaboration with and benefits to knowledge-holders including indigenous and local communities²⁸. Foreign AI models used in Africa and the Global South also reflect algorithmic biases that can undermine peace, harmony and human rights. For example, it has been observed that the use of imported AI models in Africa and the Global South is causing biases and discrimination including through exclusion of

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development., 'AI Governance in Africa' Op Cit

²⁵ African Union., 'Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy' Available at https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/44004-doc-EN-_Continental_AI_Strategy_July_2024.pdf (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

²⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development., 'AI Governance in Africa' Op Cit

²⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'Addressing digital colonialism: A path to equitable data governance' Available at <https://community.unesco.org/inclusivepolicylab/s/thinkpiece/addressing-digital-colonialism-a-path-to-equitable-data-governance-MCILJ2OCE56JB5ZCY2ZY4M7AZUYE> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

²⁸ Perera. M et al., 'Indigenous peoples and artificial intelligence: A systematic review and future directions' Available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/20539517251349170#:~:text=Abstract,Discuss%20Literature%20under%20each%20category> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

indigenous knowledge systems and data sets, inadequate gender and racial considerations, racial profiling in criminal justice and law enforcement and mass surveillance²⁹.

In light of the foregoing challenges, it is imperative to promote the safe, ethical, inclusive and responsible development, deployment and use of AI in Africa and the Global South for Sustainable Development.

3.0 Encoding Ubuntu, Peace, Harmony, Human Rights and Collaboration into Artificial Intelligence for Africa

Effective AI governance in Africa is key towards harnessing its positive impacts while mitigating its risks and challenges. It has been observed that AI governance in Africa is crucial towards not only designing effective regulatory and policy frameworks but also strengthening the technical, institutional, ethical and human rights systems that enable the purposeful and responsive adoption of AI³⁰. In addition, due to overreliance of AI models from the Global North, governance of this technology in Africa is key towards addressing challenges such as digital colonialism, algorithmic biases, violation of indigenous data sovereignty, and potential impacts on human rights³¹. Effective governance is therefore necessary towards ensuring safe, ethical, responsive and purposeful development, deployment and use of AI in Africa.

Encoding *Ubuntu*, peace, harmony, human rights and collaboration into AI is a suitable approach that can ensure effective regulation and governance of AI in Africa for sustainability. For instance, it has been observed that the Africa philosophy of *Ubuntu* which focuses on interconnectedness, provides a framework for the adoption of AI systems that foster peace, harmony community cohesion and justice in Africa³². *Ubuntu* refers to an African philosophy and worldview that places emphasis on 'being self through others'³³. In addition, *Ubuntu* has been described as a form of humanism which can be expressed in the phrases 'I am because of who we all are'³⁴. *Ubuntu* has been part and parcel of the culture, norms and values of the African people since time immemorial due to its emphasis on community cohesion and well-being. It urges individuals and

²⁹ Olurunju. N., 'African algorithmic governance: Benefit of a community-based approach' Available at <https://researchictafrica.net/2022/04/03/african-algorithmic-governance-benefit-of-a-community-based-approach/> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

³⁰ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development., 'AI Governance in Africa' Op Cit

³¹ Olurunju. N., 'African algorithmic governance: Benefit of a community-based approach' Op Cit

³² Kilungu. N., 'Pluriversalism and Artificial Intelligence in Africa: Toward a Decolonial Epistemic Reconstitution' Available at <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/pluriversalism-artificial-intelligence-africa-toward-mwelu-kilungu-g-oqi1f/> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

³³ Mugumbate. J., & Nyanguru. A., 'Exploring African Philosophy: The Value of Ubuntu in Social Work.' Available at <https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4272&context=sspapers&httpsredir=1&referer#::~:te xt=Ubuntu%20can%20best%20be%20described,ngumuntu%20ngabantu%20in%20Zulu%20language> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

³⁴ Ibid

societies to embrace values such as compassion, reciprocity, solidarity, peace, harmony and reconciliation towards ensuring the well-being of all³⁵.

Inculcating *Ubuntu* into AI therefore provides an effective approach towards ensuring that the development, deployment and use of AI in Africa aligns with local values, philosophies and modes of governance. It has been observed that through *Ubuntu*, Africa can develop efficient AI solutions designed to address global and regional challenges while centering on humanistic values including peace, harmony and community cohesion³⁶. Encoding *Ubuntu* principles, norms and values into AI, can position Africa as a norm-shaper in AI governance by ensuring that the continent is not only adopting global trends in technology but also pioneering a paradigm where technology collaborates with humanity for the benefit of all³⁷. In particular, it has been argued that integrating *Ubuntu* into AI models utilised in healthcare, agriculture, and education can ensure that such models are well-suited to local needs and circumstances especially due to the communal importance of these sectors³⁸. Consequently, it has been correctly observed that prioritizing local AI models in Africa can lead to the use of indigenous epistemologies and philosophies such as *Ubuntu* towards social cohesion, peace, harmony and justice³⁹.

In addition, encoding human rights into AI is necessary towards its effective regulation and governance in Africa. The United Nations correctly observes that respect, protection and promotion of human rights in the design, development, deployment and the use of AI is crucial towards harnessing the transformative power of this technology in the Sustainable Development discourse⁴⁰. In addition, the United Nations General Assembly has adopted a *Resolution*⁴¹ which calls for the development, deployment and use of safe, secure and trustworthy AI systems for Sustainable Development with emphasis on human rights. Upholding human rights in AI is especially key in Africa due to challenges such as algorithmic biases and discrimination. Consequently, it has been observed that laws and policies that respect indigenous knowledge systems and empower vulnerable groups including indigenous peoples, local communities, persons with disabilities and women can ensure that AI is effectively adopted in Africa while fostering inclusivity and upholding human rights⁴². In addition, it is imperative to ensure that AI

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ubuntu and AI: Africa's Bold Vision for an Ethically Inclusive Tech Future., Available at <https://futureofwork.fes.de/news/ubuntu-and-ai-africas-bold-vision-for-an-ethically-inclusive-tech-future.html> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Kilungu. N., 'Pluriversalism and Artificial Intelligence in Africa: Toward a Decolonial Epistemic Reconstitution' Op Cit

⁴⁰ United Nations., 'General Assembly adopts landmark resolution on artificial intelligence' Available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147831> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

⁴¹ United Nations General Assembly., 'Seizing the opportunities of safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems for sustainable development: A/78/L.49' Available at <https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/L.49> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

⁴² African Union., 'Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy' Op Cit

systems both globally and in Africa are developed and trained on inclusive data sets that embrace racial, cultural, gender and religious diversity in order to be free from bias and discrimination that fuel human right violations⁴³. Human-centred governance including through ensuring oversight and audit of AI tools and systems is also key towards identifying and remedying the risk of human right abuses⁴⁴.

Further, collaboration is also a key approach towards the safe, ethical, responsive and purposeful development, deployment and use of AI in Africa for Sustainable Development. For instance, collaboration involving governments, technology companies and developers in Africa is key towards designing and deploying local AI models that take into account development needs and priorities in the continent⁴⁵. In addition, collaborating with indigenous peoples and local communities in Africa in the development and deployment of AI is key towards harnessing indigenous data sets in key sectors such as education, healthcare, agriculture and environmental governance while also encoding indigenous values and philosophies including *Ubuntu* into AI policies and frameworks in the continent⁴⁶.

Through the foregoing interventions, it is possible to ensure effective governance and regulation of AI in Africa for Sustainable Development.

4.0 Conclusion

Despite its potential to accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development, AI raises several risks and challenges in Africa. Consequently, effective governance and regulation of AI in Africa is necessary towards harnessing its positive impacts for people and planet while addressing its risks and challenges. In particular, encoding *Ubuntu*, peace, harmony, human rights and collaboration is necessary towards ensuring the safe, ethical, responsive and purposeful development, deployment and use of AI in Africa for Sustainable Development.

⁴³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence' Available at <https://www.unesco.org/en/artificial-intelligence/recommendation-ethics> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

⁴⁴ United Nations., 'Protecting human rights in an AI-driven world' Available at <https://unric.org/en/protecting-human-rights-in-an-ai-driven-world/> (Accessed on 24/09/2026)

⁴⁵ 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 24/09/2026)

⁴⁶ Kilungu. N., 'Pluriversalism and Artificial Intelligence in Africa: Toward a Decolonial Epistemic Reconstitution' Op Cit

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