Global Digital Compact: Examining the first Major Global Agreement on how to Manage Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Internet Data

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Abstract

This paper examines the Global Digital Compact and its efficacy in ensuring effective governance of AI and digital technologies. The paper notes that with the widespread development and deployment of AI and digital technologies, adoption of the Global Digital Compact represents a significant progress towards achieving sound digital governance for people and planet. The paper examines the key features of the Global Digital Compact and their role in ensuring sound governance of AI and digital technologies. Further, it discusses how the Global Digital Compact can be effectively implemented towards adequately managing AI and internet data in order to harness the transformative potential of digital technologies for Sustainable Development.

1.0 Introduction

Digital technologies including Artificial Intelligence (AI) are dramatically transforming our world. It has been observed that digital technologies offer immense potential benefits for the well-being and advancement of people and societies and for our planet[1]. With the appropriate policies, digital technologies can accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[2].

In particular, AI is a key digital technology that is enhancing progress towards the SDGs. It has been observed that as the global urgency to promote Sustainable Development intensifies, AI stands out not only as a technological breakthrough but also as a powerful tool to accelerate progress across all 17 SDGs for the benefit of people and planet[3]. For example, by revolutionizing healthcare, finance, education, energy, trade, water and sanitation, agriculture, transport, and

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[1] Global Digital Compact., Available at https://www.un.org/global-digital-compact/sites/default/files/2024-09/Global%20Digital%20Compact%20-%20English_0.pdf (Accessed on 06/11/2026)

[2] Ibid

[3] 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 06/11/2026)

industry, AI is driving economic and social transformation towards Sustainable Development[4]. Further, it has been observed that AI can drive progress towards SDG 16 which seeks to ensure peace, justice and strong institutions including through detecting fraud, strengthening transparency and supporting access to justice[5]. AI-driven models are also supporting climate action (SDG 13) by improving climate forecasting, supporting early warning systems and optimizing renewable energy deployment[6]. It has been pointed out that AI provide tools and systems that can support climate action, biodiversity conservation, sustainable waste management, and ecosystem monitoring towards strengthening environmental governance for Sustainable Development[7].

Despite their role in driving Sustainable Development, AI and digital technologies raise fundamental risks and concerns. The United Nations notes 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 navigated[8]. For example, without effective governance, AI can fuel biases, discrimination, inequalities, breach of indigenous data sovereignty, human rights violations and digital colonialism among other risks and challenges[9]. In addition, it has been observed that when utilising modern technologies, the privacy and security of the user is susceptible to being compromised since digital technologies can be hacked or exploited to steal information and spy on people among other malpractices[10]. In light of the foregoing, it has become increasingly vital to ensure effective governance of AI and other digital technologies in order to accelerate global progress towards the SDGs while mitigating their risks and challenges.

This paper examines the Global Digital Compact and its efficacy in ensuring effective governance of AI and digital technologies. The paper notes that with the widespread development and

[4] AI for Human Development: The United Nations' Study on the Role of Technology in Social Progress., Available at https://neodatagroup.ai/ai-for-human-development-the-united-nations-study-on-the-role-of-technology-in-social-progress/ (Accessed on 06/11/2026)

[5] United Nations Global Compact., 'Artificial Intelligence and the Sustainable Development Goals: Operationalizing technology for a sustainable future' Op Cit

[6] Ibid

[7] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization., 'AI for Environment and Ecosystems Toolkit for Policymakers' Available at https://www.unesco.org/ethics-ai/en/node/288#:~:text=While%20AI%20can%20support%20climate,dynamics%20is%20no%20longer%20optional. (Accessed on 06/11/2026)

[8] United Nations., 'Artificial Intelligence (AI)' Available at https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/artificial-intelligence (Accessed on 06/11/2026)

[9] 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 06/11/2026)

[10] Blockchain Council., '7 Key Technologies That Are Powering the Metaverse.' Available at https://www.blockchain-council.org/metaverse/technologies-powering-metaverse/ (Accessed on 06/11/2026)

deployment of AI and digital technologies, adoption of the Global Digital Compact represents a significant progress towards achieving sound digital governance for people and planet. The paper examines the key features of the Global Digital Compact and their role in ensuring sound governance of AI and digital technologies. Further, it discusses how the Global Digital Compact can be effectively implemented towards adequately managing AI and internet data in order to harness the transformative potential of digital technologies for Sustainable Development.

2.0 Efficacy of the Global Digital Compact in Strengthening Artificial Intelligence and Internet Data Governance

In light of the opportunities and challenges associated with digital technologies including AI, the Global Digital Compact was adopted as the first major global agreement on how to manage AI and internet data. The goal of the Global Digital Compact is to ensure an inclusive, open, sustainable, fair, safe and secure digital future for all towards promoting Sustainable Development[11]. In order to achieve this goal, the Global Digital Compact seeks to close the digital divide within and among nations; expand inclusion in and benefits from the digital economy for all; promote an inclusive, open, safe and secure digital space that respects, protects and promote fundamental human rights; strengthen data governance; and bolster international governance of AI for the benefit of humanity[12].

In addition, the Global Digital Compact establishes key principles towards governance of AI and internet data. These principles include participation of all states in AI and data governance; international cooperation in AI and data governance with focus on supporting developing nations in order to ensure that no one is left behind; respect for all human rights including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, and fundamental freedom; gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the digital space; promoting environmental sustainability by leveraging digital technologies for Sustainable Development while minimizing their negative environmental impacts; ensuring diversity including linguistic and cultural diversity in the digital space; responsibility, accountability, transparency and human-centric approach across the life-cycle of digital technologies including AI; and multi-stakeholder cooperation involving governments, the private sector, civil society, the technical community, academia and international and regional organizations for effective digital governance[13].

The Global Digital Compact identifies priority actions in order to strengthen digital governance for people and planet. For example, in order to close the digital divide within and among nations, this Framework focuses on ensuring universal meaningful and affordable internet connectivity for all; expanding digital literacy skills and capacities taking into account the specific social, cultural and linguistic needs of each society and persons of all ages and backgrounds; and

[11] Global Digital Compact., Op Cit
[12] Ibid., paragraph 7
[13] Ibid, paragraph 8

developing digital public goods and digital public infrastructure that are resilient, safe and inclusive in order to enhance access to economic and social opportunities for all[14]. In addition, in order to expand inclusion in and benefits from the digital economy for all, the Global Digital Compact seeks to ensure equitable and affordable access to digital technologies; promote an open, fair, inclusive and non-discriminatory digital environment for all that enables micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises to access and compete in the digital economy; maintain stable and resilient supply chains of global digital products and services; encourage international cooperation in order to promote digital knowledge development and access to research capacity; and promote innovation and entrepreneurship, including among women, youth, and other underrepresented entrepreneurs and facilitate their access to markets through the use of digital technologies[15].

Further, in order to protect human rights in the digital space, the Global Digital Compact urges digital technology companies and developers to respect international human rights and principles, including through the application of human rights due diligence and impact assessments throughout the technology life cycle[16]. In addition, the Global Digital Compact urges countries to ensure that the development and implementation of national legislation relevant to digital technologies is compliant with obligations under international law, including international human rights law[17]. The Framework also seeks to strengthen internet governance by maintaining a safe, secure and enabling online environment for all towards upholding human rights[18]. Further, due to human rights abuses in the digital space in form of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, the Global Digital Compact seeks to ensure digital trust and safety by countering and addressing all forms of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, which occurs through or is amplified by the use of technology, all forms of hate speech and discrimination, misinformation and disinformation, cyberbullying and child sexual exploitation and abuse[19].

The Global Digital Compact also seeks to strengthen data governance and security and urges all countries to develop and strengthen national data governance laws and policies for a safe, secure and trustworthy digital space[20]. The Framework also recognises that empowering individuals, groups and communities with the ability to consider, give and withdraw their consent to the use of their data in the digital space and the ability to choose how those data are used, including through legally mandated protections for data privacy and intellectual property is key towards

[14] Global Digital Compact., Op Cit
[15] Ibid
[16] Ibid
[17] Ibid
[18] Ibid
[19] Global Digital Compact., Op Cit
[20] Ibid

strengthening data governance and security[21]. It also seeks to ensure data collection, access, sharing, transfer, storage and processing practices are safe, secure and proportionate for necessary, explicit and legitimate purposes, in compliance with international and national laws[22].

The Global Digital Compact also provides recommendations towards strengthening global AI governance. These include the full and equal representation of all countries, especially developing countries, in global AI governance; sharing best practices and promoting collaboration among nations on AI governance; promoting transparency, accountability and robust human oversight of AI systems; utilising safe, secure and trustworthy AI systems that advance, protect and preserve linguistic and cultural diversity and that take into account multilingualism throughout their life cycles; and capacity-building with focus on enabling developing countries to adopt AI systems that reflect their local priorities and linguistic and cultural diversity[23].

The Global Digital Compact is therefore a major Agreement that can promote sound digital governance. This Framework has been described as a global win towards effective digital cooperation and governance for Sustainable Development[24]. Since the Global Digital Compact is grounded in human rights and international law, it provides a comprehensive framework that can ensure a safe, secure, transparent and trustworthy digital space that promotes development while upholding fundamental rights and freedoms[25]. The Global Digital Compact correctly acknowledges that new and emerging technologies such AI and the data that powers them are relatively ungoverned and unregulated at the global level thus raising fundamental risks and challenges[26]. It seeks to address this gap by providing a Framework that can guide how AI and internet data is managed with focus on closing the digital divide, ensuring inclusion and fairness in the digital economy, protecting human rights in the digital space, strengthening data governance, and ensuring sound governance of AI[27].

Adoption of the Global Digital Compact is therefore an important step towards achieving sound governance of AI and internet data. It has been observed that the explosive growth and adoption of AI tools around the world has yet to be matched by effective, internationally agreed rules, policies and frameworks on how this powerful technology is to be governed[28]. Consequently, the

[21] Ibid
[22] Ibid
[23] Ibid
[24] Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data., 'The Global Digital Compact: A win for digital cooperation' Available at https://www.data4sdgs.org/blog/global-digital-compact-win-digital-cooperation (Accessed on 07/11/2026)
[25] Ibid
[26] Global Digital Compact., Op Cit
[27] Ibid
[28] United Nations., 'UN moves to close dangerous void in AI governance' Available at https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/09/1165898 (Accessed on 07/11/2026)

Global Digital Compact addresses this gap by providing a universal Framework that ensure sound governance of digital technologies including AI and the data that operates them. It has been observed that the Global Digital Compact provides multilateral solutions that can strengthen AI and data governance for the benefit of both present and future generations[29]. It is therefore necessary to implement the Global Digital Compact towards strengthening governance of AI and internet data.

3.0 Implementing the Global Digital Compact towards Effective Governance of Artificial Intelligence and Internet Data for Sustainable Development

With AI and digital technologies being widely adopted around the world, ensuring sound governance of these technologies and the data they rely on is necessary towards transforming nations, societies and the environment for Sustainable Development. For example, with the right policies, AI and digital technologies can transform education, delivery of public services, transportation, finance, data storage, communications, healthcare, environmental governance, access to justice and law enforcement thus providing numerous opportunities to unlock Sustainable Development[30]. However, AI and digital technologies are also associated with risks and challenges such as skewed and biased data sets, digital colonialism, inadequate transparency and accountability, breach of data sovereignty, digital divides, errors and the potential for human right violations thus creating the need for good governance[31]. Adoption of the Global Digital Compact is therefore a significant achievement since it is the first major global Agreement on how to manage AI and internet data.

It is therefore necessary to implement the Global Digital Compact towards transforming AI and internet data governance for Sustainable Development. In particular, closing all digital divides is necessary towards delivering an inclusive and fair digital economy. The digital divide fuels injustices and inequalities with developing countries and marginalized groups being left behind as the global economy increasingly shifts towards AI-driven production and innovation[32]. It is therefore necessary to bridge the digital divide including through enhancing internet connectivity for all, making digital tools more accessible and affordable, increasing investment in

[29] A Global Digital Compact – an Open, Free and Secure Digital Future for All | Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 5., Available at https://www.diplomacy.edu/resource/a-global-digital-compact-an-open-free-and-secure-digital-future-for-all-our-common-agenda-policy-brief-5/ (Accessed on 07/11/2026)

[30] 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 07/11/2026)

[31] Ibid

[32] 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 07/11/2026)

digital public goods and digital public infrastructure, and supporting women and youth innovators and small and medium enterprises[33].

Protecting human rights is also necessary towards ensuring sound governance of AI as envisaged under the Global Digital Compact. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to embrace transparency, explainability and human oversight of AI tools and systems towards addressing their human rights implications[34]. Training AI and digital technologies on inclusive and accurate data sets is also necessary towards mitigating the human rights impacts associated with algorithmic biases[35].

There is also need to strengthen the participation of developing countries in global AI and data governance for equity, justice and fairness. It has been observed that since most AI systems are designed in the Global North, they may perpetuate bias and prejudices in the Global South unless they are tuned to fit with local circumstances[36]. Further, it has been pointed out that most AI systems and models often reproduce colonial language hierarchies, undermine indigenous data sovereignty in the Global South, and marginalize indigenous languages, philosophies and knowledge systems[37]. It is therefore necessary to strengthen the voice of developing countries in global AI governance including through empowering them to develop local AI models which embrace their culture, ethics, local languages, philosophies and knowledge systems[38].

Effective implementation of the Global Digital Compact also involves strengthening governance of internet data. Without adequate safeguards, personal data can be misused undermining human rights. Consequently, there is need to strengthen governance of internet data including through sound national data protection laws and inculcating safety, security and ethics in AI and digital technologies to ensure that they protect personal data[39].

4.0 Conclusion

Adoption of the Global Digital Compact is a pivotal moment for the world since it is the first major global Agreement on how to manage AI and internet data. It is therefore necessary to

[33] United Nations., 'Global Digital Compact' Available at https://www.un.org/global-digital-compact/en (Accessed on 07/11/2026)

[34] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development., 'AI Principles' Available at https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/ai-principles.html (Accessed on 07/11/2026)

[35] Ibid

[36] Orero. L.O., & Kaaniru. J., 'Automated Decision-Making Policies in Africa' Available at https://cipit.strathmore.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Policy-Brief-Design-Automated-Decision-Making.pdf (Accessed on 07/11/2026)

[37] Pluriversal AI: Language Justice, Infrastructures, and Global Inequalities., Available at https://www.tuni.fi/en/tau/research/pluriversal-ai-language-justice-infrastructures-and-global-inequalities (Accessed on 07/11/2026)

[38] 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 07/11/2026)

[39] Global Digital Compact., Op Cit

implement the Global Digital Compact by closing all digital divides, ensuring an inclusive digital economy, protecting human rights in the digital space, strengthening global AI governance, and promoting sound data governance in order to maximize the benefits of AI and digital technologies towards Sustainable Development.

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