

Advocacy Brief

# Inclusive AI Governance

A Framework for African Public Servants

The logo for QTrust, featuring a stylized 'Q' with an orange diagonal bar and the word 'Trust' in a bold, sans-serif font.

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# Acknowledgement

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# Executive Summary

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming economies, governance systems, and public service delivery around the world. Across Africa, governments are exploring AI applications in sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, financial services, and public administration to improve service delivery and accelerate development. However, the adoption of AI also raises critical governance challenges. Without deliberate policy safeguards, AI systems can reinforce existing inequalities, exclude marginalized populations from digital benefits, and undermine fundamental rights through biased algorithms, opaque decision-making, and intrusive data practices.

This advocacy brief builds on insights from AI governance masterclasses delivered by Qhala Trust for policymakers in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa. These programs brought together public servants from diverse ministries and regulatory bodies to examine the opportunities and risks associated with AI deployment in African contexts. Discussions during these sessions consistently revealed two key realities: first, policymakers are increasingly expected to make decisions about AI technologies despite limited technical literacy; and second, many existing global AI governance models do not adequately reflect African social, economic, and cultural contexts. These findings underscore the urgent need for governance frameworks that are grounded in local realities while safeguarding fundamental rights and promoting inclusive development.

Drawing from these lessons, this advocacy brief advances a framework for **inclusive AI governance rooted in a rights-based approach, the mitigation of digital exclusion, and the integration of African values into technological governance**. Inclusive AI governance recognizes that AI systems must be designed and governed in ways that protect human dignity, promote equity, and ensure that technological benefits reach all members of society. This requires policy approaches that prioritize citizen participation, gender inclusion, equitable access to digital infrastructure, and the development of locally relevant data and innovation ecosystems.

The brief outlines key priorities for African governments and development partners, including strengthening AI literacy within public institutions, developing governance frameworks grounded in human rights principles, investing in local data and infrastructure, and fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration across government, academia, civil society, and the private sector. By adopting inclusive governance models, African countries can ensure that AI becomes a tool for advancing sustainable development and social equity rather than deepening existing divides.

# 1. Introduction

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Across Africa, governments are increasingly exploring the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to address complex development challenges and improve public service delivery. AI applications are emerging in sectors such as healthcare diagnostics, agricultural productivity, financial inclusion, education, and public administration. However, the rapid adoption of AI technologies also raises significant governance questions about how these systems should be regulated, monitored, and aligned with public interest.

Insights from AI governance masterclasses conducted by Qhala Trust with policymakers in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa illustrate the urgency of these questions. The masterclasses brought together public servants from diverse ministries, regulatory bodies, and policy institutions to explore how AI systems are shaping governance and development across the continent. Participants examined practical examples of AI deployment in public services and discussed the policy decisions required to ensure that these technologies are implemented responsibly. These discussions revealed a growing recognition among African policymakers that AI governance is no longer a future concern but an immediate policy priority.

At the same time, the masterclasses highlighted a critical challenge: many policymakers are being asked to regulate or deploy AI technologies without sufficient understanding of their technical foundations or societal implications. Participants frequently noted that while governments are eager to leverage AI for development, there is limited institutional capacity to evaluate potential risks such as algorithmic bias, data privacy violations, misinformation, and the exclusion of marginalized communities from digital systems. These knowledge gaps reinforce the importance of strengthening policy capacity and embedding AI governance within broader digital transformation strategies.






The discussions also emphasized that AI governance frameworks must reflect the realities and values of African societies. Many existing global AI governance models have been developed in contexts with different economic structures, technological infrastructures, and social dynamics. African policymakers therefore face the challenge of designing governance approaches that both safeguard fundamental rights and promote inclusive development. This includes ensuring that AI systems do not deepen existing inequalities, exacerbate digital exclusion, or marginalize communities that already face barriers to digital participation.

A rights-based and inclusive approach to AI governance offers a pathway forward. Such an approach prioritizes human dignity, equity, and public accountability while recognizing that technological innovation must serve broader societal goals. It also acknowledges the importance of African values like Ubuntu (I am because We are) which include community-centered decision-making, social justice, and equitable access to opportunities. When embedded within governance frameworks, these principles can help ensure that AI technologies contribute to sustainable development rather than reinforcing existing structural inequalities.






For African governments, the task ahead is therefore not only to regulate AI but also to shape how it is integrated into society. This requires governance frameworks that protect citizens' rights, promote transparency and accountability, and ensure that the benefits of AI innovation are shared broadly across society. The lessons emerging from the AI governance masterclasses demonstrate that inclusive, context-sensitive policy approaches will be critical to achieving these objectives. The following sections build on these insights to outline key principles and policy priorities for advancing inclusive AI governance across the continent.

### Emerging AI Applications

 <p><b>Healthcare</b> Advanced diagnostics and disease prediction systems</p>	 <p><b>Agriculture</b> Productivity optimization and crop monitoring</p>	 <p><b>Financial Inclusion</b> Access to banking and credit services</p>
 <p><b>Education</b> Personalized learning and accessibility</p>	 <p><b>Public Administration</b> Streamlined government services</p>	<p>And many more sectors...</p>

### Critical Governance Questions

Rapid AI adoption raises significant questions about regulation, monitoring, and alignment with public interest

 <p><b>Regulation</b> How should AI systems be regulated to ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability?</p>	 <p><b>Monitoring</b> What mechanisms are needed to oversee AI deployment and detect potential harms?</p>	 <p><b>Public Interest</b> How can AI be aligned with societal values and serve the common good?</p>
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**Effective governance frameworks are essential to harness AI's potential while safeguarding public welfare**

## 2. Importance of AI Governance

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Artificial Intelligence is no longer a distant technological frontier. It is already shaping critical sectors such as healthcare diagnostics, financial services, agriculture, education, and public administration. Across Africa, AI applications are emerging in areas such as crop monitoring, smart transportation systems, digital financial platforms, and automated public services. This was also witnessed in the Masterclasses for policy-makers undertaken in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa.

While these technologies offer enormous opportunities, they also raise urgent policy questions. AI systems rely heavily on data and algorithms that can reproduce existing societal inequalities if not carefully governed. For instance, facial recognition systems have historically produced higher error rates when identifying darker-skinned individuals, particularly women, demonstrating how biased training datasets can produce discriminatory outcomes.

The rapid spread of generative AI technologies also introduces new risks related to misinformation, digital manipulation, and the erosion of public trust in democratic processes. During recent elections in several countries, AI-generated deepfakes and synthetic media have been used to spread false information and influence public opinion.

In response to these developments, governments worldwide are developing governance frameworks to regulate AI development and deployment. However, many existing frameworks have been developed in Western contexts and may not adequately reflect African realities, including infrastructure limitations, linguistic diversity, and socio-economic disparities

## 3. Governing AI for Development

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Despite governance challenges, Africa is uniquely positioned to leverage AI for development. Across the continent, AI applications are emerging in several critical sectors outlined in the Kenya AI strategy of 2025 - 2026:

- Agriculture: AI-powered crop monitoring and climate risk prediction systems help farmers improve yields and resilience.
- Healthcare: AI diagnostic tools expand access to healthcare in underserved regions.
- Public services: Automated service delivery systems improve efficiency and transparency in government operations.
- Financial inclusion: AI-enabled credit scoring tools expand access to financial services for underserved populations.



These applications demonstrate the transformative potential of AI for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

However, realizing this potential requires governance frameworks that ensure AI systems are:



**Inclusive**



**Ethical**



**Accountable**



**Development-oriented**

The AI masterclasses for policymakers by Qhala Trust across Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa encouraged policy dialogues with African public servants, emphasizing that governance frameworks must reflect local realities rather than simply replicating models developed in Western contexts. Moreover, one of the imperatives of the masterclasses conducted in the aforementioned countries was that 40% of the policymakers present be women. This form of affirmative action was put in place to ensure that programmes were inclusive in terms of gender representation. These discussions on representation naturally extended to a broader consideration of how artificial intelligence should be governed in inclusive and equitable ways. In the next section, we discuss those principles.

## 4. Principles of Inclusive AI Governance

The foundation of Inclusive AI governance, as developed through policy dialogues with African policymakers, rests upon four core principles. These principles were consistently highlighted across all AI 101 Masterclasses conducted between 2025 and 2026. They include:

### 4.1 Local-First Policy Design:

AI governance frameworks must prioritize African contexts, languages, and societal needs. Many AI systems currently in use are trained primarily on data from Europe and North America, limiting their effectiveness in African environments. Policies should therefore support the development of local datasets and culturally relevant AI applications.

### 4.2 Inclusion and Equity:

AI governance must ensure that the benefits of technological innovation reach marginalized communities, including rural populations, women, youth, and persons with disabilities. Inclusive policies should address structural barriers such as limited connectivity, digital literacy gaps, and unequal access to technology.

### **4.3 People-Centered Governance:**

Citizens must play a central role in AI governance processes. Public consultations, stakeholder dialogues, and community engagement are essential for ensuring that governance frameworks reflect societal priorities.

### **4.4 Transparency and Accountability:**

Governments must establish mechanisms for algorithmic oversight, including AI impact assessments, transparency requirements, and independent regulatory review processes. Transparent governance frameworks help build public trust in AI-enabled systems.

## **5. Ethical Risks and Governance Imperatives**

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As Artificial Intelligence becomes increasingly embedded in governance systems and public service delivery, policymakers must confront a range of ethical risks that accompany its deployment. While AI offers transformative potential across sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, education, and financial services, poorly governed AI systems can generate unintended harms that undermine public trust, deepen social inequalities, and weaken democratic institutions. Effective AI governance frameworks must therefore proactively identify and mitigate these risks. In addition, these ethical risks were discussed at length during the AI 101 Masterclasses held between 2025-2026.

### **Key ethical risks associated with AI deployment include:**

#### **5.1 Algorithmic bias and discrimination:**

AI systems learn patterns from historical data. When datasets reflect existing societal biases or exclude certain populations, the resulting algorithms may reinforce or amplify discrimination. For example, facial recognition systems have historically shown higher error rates for darker-skinned individuals, particularly women, demonstrating how biased training data can translate into discriminatory outcomes in policing, border control, and identity verification systems.

#### **5.2 Data privacy violations:**

AI technologies rely heavily on large volumes of personal and institutional data. Without robust governance mechanisms, the collection, storage, and analysis of this data may expose citizens to privacy violations, unauthorized surveillance, or misuse of sensitive information. Public servants must therefore ensure that AI systems operate within strong data protection frameworks that respect individual rights and consent.

#### **5.4 Surveillance misuse:**

AI-enabled surveillance technologies, including biometric identification systems and facial recognition, are increasingly deployed in security and administrative contexts. While these tools may improve efficiency in certain areas, their misuse can enable intrusive monitoring of citizens and erode civil liberties if deployed without transparent governance and accountability mechanisms.

#### **5.5 Labor market disruptions caused by automation:**

AI-driven automation has the potential to transform labor markets by replacing or reshaping certain categories of work. While new forms of employment may emerge, governments must anticipate and address potential job displacement through policies that support workforce transition, skills development, and social protection.

Insights gathered from AI governance capacity-building workshops with African policymakers highlight a consistent concern: without deliberate governance frameworks, AI technologies risk reinforcing structural inequalities rather than reducing them. Participants emphasized that governance frameworks must ensure that AI deployment aligns with broader social and developmental goals.

For this reason, governments should integrate human rights protections, ethical oversight mechanisms, and accountability structures into AI policy frameworks from the earliest stages of technological development and deployment. These safeguards should include algorithmic impact assessments, independent oversight mechanisms, transparent procurement processes, and mechanisms for public participation in AI policy development.

Ultimately, ethical AI governance is not merely a regulatory exercise. It is a strategic imperative to build public trust, safeguard democratic institutions, and ensure that AI technologies contribute to inclusive and sustainable development across Africa.

## 6. Call to Action for African Governments



### 01 Build AI Literacy in Public Institutions

Policymakers require foundational knowledge of AI technologies in order to develop effective governance frameworks. Capacity-building programmes for public servants are essential.



### 02 Develop National AI Strategies

Governments should develop national AI strategies aligned with broader digital transformation and economic development agendas.



### 03 Establish AI Oversight Institutions

Dedicated regulatory bodies or inter-ministerial committees can help coordinate AI governance across sectors.



### 04 Strengthen Data Governance Frameworks

Robust data protection laws and data governance policies are essential for safeguarding citizens' rights while enabling responsible innovation.



### 05 Encourage Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Governments should collaborate with academia, the private sector, civil society organizations, and international partners to develop inclusive governance frameworks.



### 06 Support Continental Cooperation

Regional organizations such as the African Union can facilitate policy harmonization and knowledge-sharing across African countries.

# 7. Call to Action and Opportunities for Development Partners

Development partners play a critical role in supporting inclusive AI governance across Africa.



### AI Policymaker Training Programmes

Many public servants are tasked with regulating or deploying AI systems without sufficient technical understanding of how these technologies function. Capacity-building initiatives—such as policy masterclasses, governance toolkits, and executive training programmes—can strengthen policymakers' ability to design informed, evidence-based AI policies.



### Digital Infrastructure Development

Including reliable connectivity, cloud computing capacity, and high-performance computing resources.

These foundational investments are necessary for enabling AI research, data processing, and the deployment of AI-enabled public services.



### AI Research & Innovation Ecosystems

Funding for interdisciplinary AI research, innovation hubs, and startup accelerators can foster locally relevant AI solutions that address African development challenges.



### Ethical AI Governance Frameworks

Development partners can assist governments in developing regulatory standards, algorithmic accountability mechanisms, and human rights safeguards that guide responsible AI deployment.

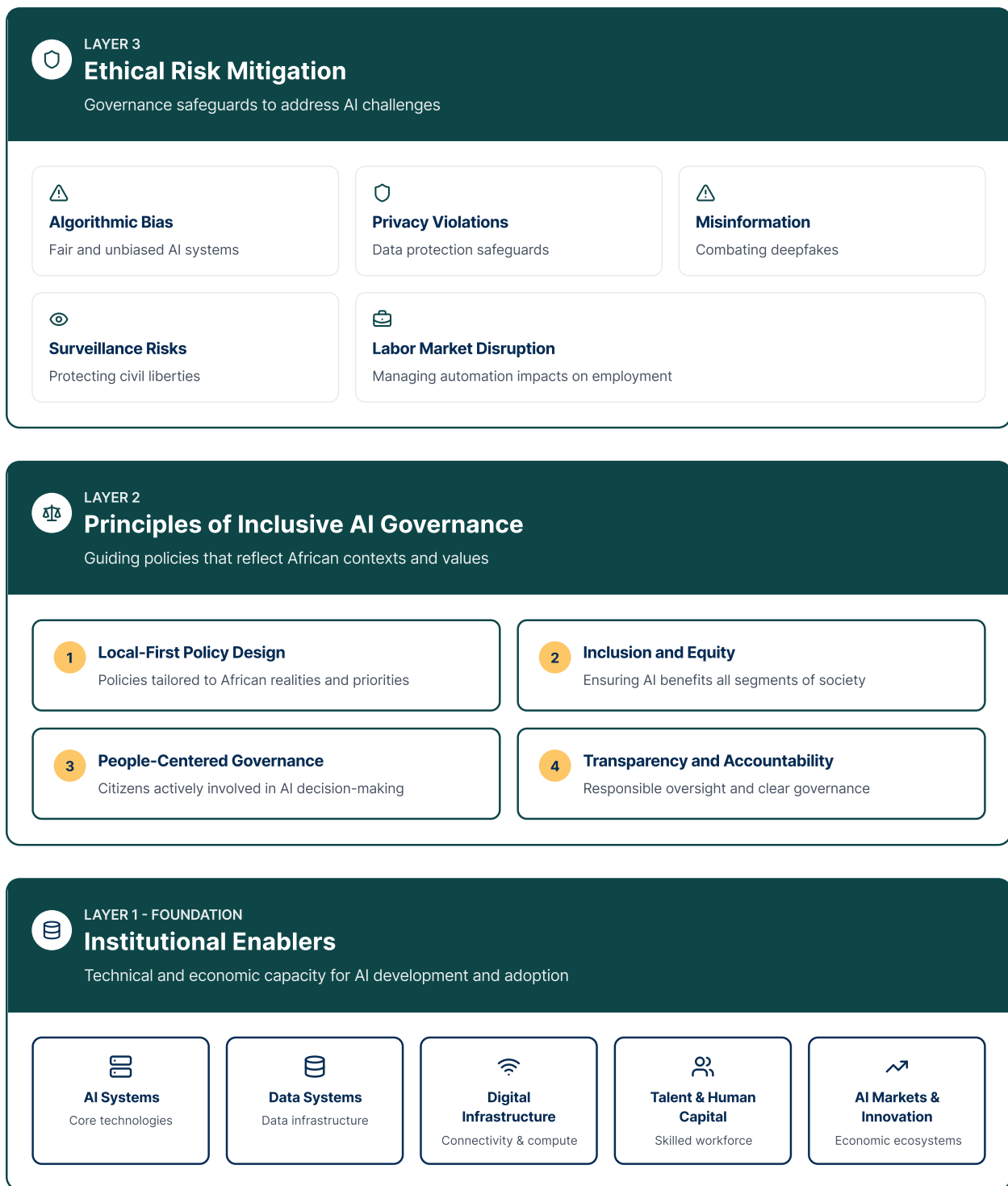


### Regional Collaboration Platforms

Donors can help establish regional collaboration platforms that facilitate knowledge-sharing, policy coordination, and capacity-building across African countries.

Supporting these initiatives aligns directly with broader development priorities, including economic growth, digital transformation, democratic governance, and inclusive development.

# 7. Proposed Conceptual Framework



The Inclusive AI Governance Framework for African Public Servants outlines how governments can guide AI development to produce equitable and socially beneficial outcomes.

The framework is structured in three interconnected layers. At the foundation are the institutional enablers of AI systems, data systems, digital infrastructure, talent and human capital, and AI markets and innovation ecosystems, which provide the technical and economic capacity needed for AI development and adoption.

Built upon this base are the principles of inclusive AI governance, including local-first policy design, inclusion and equity, people-centered governance, and transparency and accountability, which guide policymakers in designing AI policies that reflect African contexts, involve citizens in decision-making, and ensure responsible oversight.

The third layer focuses on ethical risk mitigation, identifying key governance safeguards to address challenges such as algorithmic bias, privacy violations, misinformation and deepfakes, surveillance risks, and labor market disruption from automation.

By integrating these safeguards into policy frameworks, governments can protect citizens while enabling innovation. When these three layers function together, they produce the framework's desired outcomes: responsible and ethical AI deployment, improved public trust in digital technologies, inclusive economic growth driven by AI innovation, strengthened democratic governance and citizen protection, and greater African participation in the global AI economy.

## 5. Conclusion

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Artificial intelligence presents both a transformative opportunity and a profound governance challenge for African societies. As AI technologies increasingly influence economic activity, public service delivery, and democratic processes, governments must ensure that their adoption aligns with broader goals of human rights protection, inclusive development, and social justice. The experiences from AI governance masterclasses conducted with policymakers in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa demonstrate that while there is strong interest in leveraging AI for development, there are also significant knowledge gaps and governance uncertainties that must be addressed through deliberate policy action.

An inclusive approach to AI governance is therefore essential. Policies must ensure that AI systems respect fundamental rights, reduce rather than reinforce existing inequalities, and reflect the cultural, social, and economic realities of African societies. This includes addressing digital exclusion by expanding access to infrastructure and digital skills, promoting gender and regional equity in AI development, and ensuring that citizens have a meaningful voice in shaping technology governance. Equally important is the recognition that African countries should not simply replicate governance models developed elsewhere but should instead develop frameworks grounded in African values, priorities, and developmental aspirations.

Ultimately, the future of AI governance in Africa will depend on the capacity of public institutions to guide technological change responsibly and inclusively. Strengthening AI literacy among policymakers, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and embedding rights-based safeguards into governance frameworks will be critical steps in this process. By investing in inclusive and locally grounded governance systems today, African countries can position themselves not only as adopters of AI technologies but also as leaders in shaping a more equitable and human-centered digital future.

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