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AI Governance in Africa

For Cohere Labs Africa Regional Meeting



Get to know me

**RE-IMAGINING AFRICA'S FUTURE THROUGH
ETHICAL AI POLICY & GOVERNANCE**

Betty W. Kyalo is an AI policy strategist, digital equity advocate, and thought leader committed to crafting inclusive, community-rooted AI governance ecosystems across Africa. With a background in Business and IT, and international exposure through academic exchanges in France and Sweden, Betty brings a global perspective grounded in local truths.

Where are we?

Over **70%** of the labeled training data used by major AI companies comes from outsourced labor in Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria. Those annotators often live below the poverty line, have no rights over the data they create, and remain invisible in AI governance conversations.

Company	Location	Annotation Detail
OpenAI (via Sama)	Kenya, Uganda	< \$2/hr for content moderation & LLM fine-tuning
Meta (via Sama, Appen)	Nairobi, Accra	African data workers trained hate speech filters for Facebook
Google (via CloudFactory)	Lagos, Nairobi	Labeled satellite data, faces, languages — avg \$1.30/hr
Amazon Mechanical Turk	Nigeria, Remote	Thousands of microtasks; no minimum wage or protection
Microsoft (outsourcing firms)	Ghana	Annotated speech, accents, handwriting for Azure ML

Our unique governance challenges



- **Policy Lag:** Less than 15 African countries have national AI strategies.
- **Capacity Gaps:** Few AI regulators or ethics boards.
- **Data Colonialism:** Extractive use of African data with no governance returns.
- **Legal Plurality:** Formal laws co-exist with customary norms, often overlooked in AI models.

The Battle: Innovation vs Regulation

Can we protect people without slowing progress?



Rapid AI development

Attracting global investment

Open experimentation

Economic growth incentives

Ethical oversight

Local cultural and legal protections

Accountability and redress systems

Social justice, equity

Governance Frameworks for Africa's AI Future

Africa must adapt and shape AI governance frameworks to match its social, cultural, legal, and economic realities. Below are three complementary models that can inform regional and national approaches.

1. Lifecycle Governance Model

- Governs AI from data collection → deployment → audit.

2. Rights-Based Governance

- Anchored in digital rights (access, protection, agency).

3. Polycentric Governance

- National + local + regional layers working in sync.



Lifecycle Governance Model

This regulates AI across its entire lifecycle, from data collection to model training, deployment, and post-deployment monitoring.



Stages Covered:

- *Pre-Development:* Data sourcing, consent, and representation.
- *Development:* Bias audits, documentation, and fairness testing.
- *Deployment:* Use-case approvals, societal impact assessments.
- *Monitoring:* Post-deployment evaluation, complaint handling, sunset clauses.

Why it matters for Africa:

- Prevents harmful models being deployed in public health, education, or policing before risks are understood.
- Enables early intervention in high-risk use cases (e.g. biometric surveillance or credit scoring apps).



Rights-Based Governance Model

Grounded in human rights — digital dignity, privacy, non-discrimination, access to information, and agency.

Core Rights Protected:

- Right to explanation (why AI made a decision)
- Right to opt-out (use of biometric or personal data)
- Right to redress (appeal an AI-influenced outcome)
- Right to benefit (equitable share of AI gains)

Why it matters for Africa:

- Addresses deep digital divides and low legal literacy.
- Offers a people-first governance approach aligned with constitutional rights across African states.

Polycentric Governance Models

A multi-level governance model—national, regional, local, and civic institutions working together.



Key Focus

- Coordination across jurisdictions
- Decentralized decision making
- Localized rule-making
- Civic inclusion

Why it matters for Africa:

- Adapts well to Africa's political diversity and legal pluralism

African Use

- Federal–state collaboration on AI in Nigeria, with alignment to ECOWAS standards.



Where's The Balance?

WHAT'S DIFFERENT IN AFRICA?

- **Nascent ecosystems:** Most African AI sectors are still emerging; overregulation could deter growth.
- **High-stakes impact:** AI is being deployed in sensitive areas: health, credit, security with real consequences.
- **Low policy capacity:** Few countries have the infrastructure to continuously revise complex AI rules.



POTENTIAL SUGGESTIONS

- **Proportionality:** Match rules to risk levels (e.g., stricter for facial recognition than for chatbots).
- **Regulatory Sandboxes:** Safe zones to test AI under supervision.
- **Co-regulation:** Shared oversight between state, tech firms, and civil society.
- **Agile Lawmaking:** Use sunset clauses, periodic reviews, and adaptive guidance.

Thank You Cohere Community



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