

AI Diplomacy Guide for Africa

A Resource for Navigating AI Diplomacy

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Overview

Purpose and Context

This guidebook was developed to provide African diplomats, policymakers, officials, technical advisors, and designated representatives with clear, practical guidance for effective participation in international AI discussions and governance. It serves as a hands-on resource that can be utilized in various AI forums and events. Our goal is more active and effective engagement of African stakeholders in international AI dialogues and governance.

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Tech Governance Project (TGov)

TGov is a non-profit initiative committed to promoting responsible emerging technologies in Africa through research, capacity building, and strategic stakeholder collaboration, with a focus on Artificial Intelligence and Biotechnology.

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1 Introduction

Artificial Intelligence is governed not only within national borders but also through regional, global, informal, and private sector mechanisms. Effective global AI governance requires international cooperation—through partnerships, alliances, and coordinated positions—to ensure that the rapid evolution of AI reflects shared challenges and diverse interests. For Global South countries, including those in Africa, active participation in global AI fora is essential to ensure that international frameworks are inclusive of the continent’s development priorities, values, and unique perspectives. This guide was developed to empower African diplomats, policymakers, statespersons, technical advisors, and designated representatives to engage effectively in International AI discussions and governance.

Part 1 of this guide provides strategic context and advocacy focus, highlighting the importance of a unified African voice in shaping a fair and inclusive AI. Part 2 covers engagement platforms and partnerships, while parts 3 and 4 concentrate on sharing guides before, during, and after forums and events.

2 Strategic Context & Advocacy

The African Union (AU), through its Continental AI Strategy, has clearly recognised this need. It highlights that Africa’s voice must be strengthened in global AI governance discussions to ensure that decisions made at the international level benefit, rather than overlook, African contexts. Yet the AU also identifies a number of persistent barriers to full participation:

- **Limited representation**, with most global processes hosted by and for countries in the Global North;
- **High travel costs** and logistical challenges make it difficult for African delegates to attend key meetings;
- **Information gaps**, with little visibility of which events and decisions matter most for the continent;
- **Capacity challenges**, where African policymakers and diplomats may lack access to the technical knowledge or policy infrastructure to engage effectively;
- **Brain drain**, as African experts often participate in international forums through institutions outside the continent.

To address these challenges, the AU has made a series of high-level recommendations. These include strengthening coordination across African countries, building capacity for AI diplomacy, ensuring Africa’s interests are reflected in global rules and standards, and integrating AI into national and regional foreign policy agendas. The AU also encourages African countries to host

global events, form strategic partnerships through platforms like the G20, and proactively shape the global discourse on frontier AI issues.

This guide aims to support those efforts by offering a clear, easy-to-read reference on relevant AI governance platforms and principles for effective participation in these platforms. By filling in information gaps and serving as a practical tool, it is intended to assist policymakers, researchers, and civil society actors engaging in Africa's growing AI diplomacy.

2.1 Potential Agendas for African Advocacy in Global AI Discussions

As global AI rules and norms rapidly evolve, African countries have an opportunity—and a responsibility—to advocate for governance priorities that align with the continent's development, rights, and security goals, reflecting the diverse priorities of member states, while seeking common ground where possible. The following are some high-level agenda areas where African engagement in international fora can shape a more equitable, secure, and inclusive AI future.

Military AI & Lethal Weapons (LAWS)

- Advocate for strong global oversight of military and weapons-grade AI.
- Prevent the use of AI that could worsen conflict in fragile regions.

AI-Generated Misinformation

- Push for international rules on labelling and verifying AI content.
- Protect democratic processes from fake news and deepfakes.

Fair Benefit Sharing

- Ensure Africa gains from global AI advances.
- Support models that share AI's economic benefits and reduce inequality.

Avoiding a Reckless AI Race

- Call for cooperation and safety in the US–China AI competition.
- Prevent Africa from becoming a testing ground or battleground.

AI Developer Responsibility

- Promote global rules on who is accountable when AI systems cause harm.
- Protect African markets from dangerous or unregulated technologies.

Boosting AI Research & Collaboration

- Support public-private partnerships in agriculture, health, and climate AI.

- Work with global bodies (GPAI, WEF, AI4D Africa) to build local talent and innovation.

Data Sovereignty

- Advocate for fair rules on how African data is stored, shared, and protected across borders.

Algorithmic Fairness

- Advocate for bias mitigation measures that understand the sociocultural complexity of African societies.
- Ensure a discrimination-free AI system.
- Promote inclusion in how AI is designed and deployed.

3 Platforms for Engagement

3.1 Global AI Governance Platforms

The following are some of the global platforms for AI engagement and governance that can be utilized to advance priorities and agendas.

- **ITU AI for Good** – UN-led initiative promoting AI for sustainable development (health, climate, agriculture). *Relevance:* Offers a platform for African countries to showcase AI solutions aligned with SDGs (ITU 2023).
- **UNESCO AI Ethics Framework** – Global ethical guidelines on AI, adopted in 2021. *Relevance:* Provides African countries with a normative basis for human-centric and rights-based AI policies (UNESCO 2021).
- **Global AI Safety Summits** – Annual summits (Bletchley 2023, Seoul 2024, Paris 2025, India 2026) on frontier AI risks. *Relevance:* Key venues to shape international safety norms; limited but growing African participation (UK Government 2023).
- **G7 & G20 AI Processes** – Major global economic forums with AI governance agendas. *Relevance:* AU now part of G20; offers strategic access to AI policy discussions (G20 India 2023).
- **OECD & GPAI** – GPAI is a multilateral body hosted by the OECD to promote responsible AI. *Relevance:* Offers technical working groups; however, African membership is limited (OECD, 2023).
- **Internet Governance Forum (IGF)** – UN forum on digital governance, including AI. *Relevance:* Inclusive, multi-stakeholder dialogue; African IGF exists as a regional counterpart (IGF 2024).
- **International Network of AI Safety Institutes** – Collaboration on AI risk research and evaluation. *Relevance:* Kenya is a member; a strong platform to influence safety standards (Seoul Declaration 2024).

- **IEEE AI Ethics Standards** – Technical standards for ethical AI use. *Relevance:* Useful for African regulators adopting global best practices (IEEE 2022).

3.2 AU-Affiliated / Continental African Platforms

- **AU Commission & Continental AI Strategy** – Provides strategic direction on AI across the continent. *Relevance:* Anchors African priorities in global dialogues and guides national strategies (African Union 2024).
- **AfCFTA – Digital Trade Protocol** – Harmonizes digital trade, including AI regulation. *Relevance:* Supports cross-border AI innovation and unified data governance (AfCFTA Secretariat 2024).
- **Pan-African Parliament (PAP)** – AU’s legislative arm. *Relevance:* Potential to draft model laws on AI ethics, data protection (PAP 2023).
- **African Governance Architecture (AGA)** – AU platform on democracy and governance. *Relevance:* Can help integrate AI into governance and rights frameworks (AU AGA 2023).
- **Malabo Convention** – AU treaty on cybersecurity and data protection. *Relevance:* Forms a legal basis for AI-related data governance (AU 2023).

3.3 Informal / Unofficial Regional and African Platforms

- **AI4D Africa** – Network supporting African-led AI research and governance. *Relevance:* Builds capacity and aligns AI innovation with local development goals (AI4D 2023).
- **African IGF (AfIGF)** – Regional extension of IGF. *Relevance:* Encourages African consensus on digital and AI governance (AfIGF 2024).
- **C4IR Rwanda** – WEF-supported centre shaping African digital policy. *Relevance:* Pilots AI governance frameworks replicable across Africa (WEF 2024).
- **SmartBots Lab (Botswana)** – Innovation hub for AI and emerging tech. *Relevance:* Promotes domestic innovation and policy experimentation (Botswana Gov 2023).
- **Research ICT Africa (RIA)** – Policy think tank on digital governance. *Relevance:* Provides research and advocacy on AI fairness, data justice (RIA 2023).
- **Smart Africa & Africa AI Council** – Multinational digital cooperation platform. *Relevance:* Aims to coordinate AI efforts continentally (Smart Africa 2024).
- **Civil Society & Grassroots Networks** – Inclusive governance coalitions (e.g., Afro-feminist AI, SADIA). *Relevance:* Bring marginalised voices into AI policy (Nyamwire 2024).

3.4 Global South / South–South Cooperation Platforms

- **Group of Friends on AI for SDGs** – UN-based bloc co-led by Morocco. *Relevance:* Advocates AI for development in the Global South (UN 2024).

- **China–Africa Digital Cooperation** – AI capacity building and infrastructure. Relevance: Offers tech transfer but raises concerns about data sovereignty (FOCAC 2024).
- **BRICS AI Cooperation** – South-led platform for inclusive AI standards. Relevance: South Africa’s role ensures African representation (BRICS 2023).
- **Digital Cooperation Organisation (DCO)** – Global South tech alliance. Relevance: Members like Nigeria and Rwanda collaborate on AI policy (DCO 2023).
- **India-Africa / Latin America-Africa Dialogues** – Informal partnerships on tech for development. Relevance: Facilitate AI cooperation on shared challenges (G77 2023).

3.5 Bilateral AI Partnerships

Bilateral AI partnerships play a critical role in shaping policy alignment, facilitating technology transfer, and strengthening capacity. This includes cooperation with global players such as the US and China, and advanced economies like the UK and France. Equally important are intra-African partnerships—for instance, Senegal and Ghana have shared AI strategy experience, demonstrating how South–South cooperation can support locally appropriate, peer-driven policy development.

Additionally, North–South and triangular cooperation models are becoming increasingly relevant. Initiatives such as **Switzerland’s ICAIN** and **Germany’s GIZ Fair Forward** highlight how Northern actors are supporting AI capacity in the Global South through inclusive, multilateral frameworks. These efforts complement bilateral engagements by fostering shared infrastructure, research, and policy ecosystems. Contextualized examples include:

- **Germany’s GIZ Fair Forward** – Regularly facilitates pan-African workshops—such as those at Deep Learning Indaba—where AI practitioners, policymakers, and researchers from countries like Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, and South Africa exchange experiences in AI policy and multilingual data initiatives. German experts contribute by leading sessions on AI infrastructure, data governance, and open-source tools, reinforcing a triangular cooperation model of peer sharing supported by external technical input.
- **Switzerland’s ICAIN** – Supported pilots involving Data Science Africa (DSA) and ETH Zurich to tackle local issues like weather forecasting and plant disease detection across multiple African countries. Meanwhile, ETH contributes to pan-African AI education through workshops such as the AfricAIED series and collaborates with African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS) centers through visiting faculty and joint Master’s programs in AI and machine intelligence.

These types of partnerships show strong potential to improve local capacity and promote responsible innovation by combining contextual relevance with external support that stakeholders in Africa can leverage.

Digital infrastructure investments by actors such as the World Bank, European Union, and China, while not exclusively focused on AI, also play a crucial enabling role. Example includes:

- **The European Union <> Smart Africa partnership** — formalized through an administrative arrangement and grant agreement under the Global Gateway strategy—aims to promote Africa’s digital transformation. Activities focus on secure connectivity, e-governance, artificial intelligence, and digital skills, with Smart Africa coordinating efforts among its 39 member states. The EU provides financial resources, technical expertise, and policy support.

Addressing digital connectivity gaps is vital for unlocking inclusive AI use cases across Africa. Such investment partnerships should be actively leveraged and not overlooked during AI diplomacy and collaboration.

4 Initial Preparation for AI Diplomacy

4.1 Building Institutional Capacity

The points below aim to improve AI diplomacy capacity more broadly in the long term, lasting over several events, rather than focusing on the preparation and participation in any specific events.

- **Establish a Dedicated AI Diplomatic Unit:** Governments should create specialized AI diplomacy teams or designate personnel within science & tech or foreign affairs ministries with clear responsibilities for AI-related international engagement. This ensures sustainable knowledge retention, consistency in representation, and strengthened relationships with global stakeholders. By maintaining continuity with the same experts over time, countries can build trust, maximize network effects, and enhance cross-departmental collaboration. Similar models have been successfully implemented in cyber diplomacy strategies by the EU, the US, and Australia. This could also be efficiently achieved by creating “African Diplomatic AI experts,” who could be housed at the AU to address critical issues, guide engagements, and be seconded to AI diplomatic services. There’s a similar model in other areas of work in Africa, such as the “African Medicines Agency.”
- **Develop Common Positions on AI:** Coordination through regional bodies, most notably the African Union (AU), to build strong common positions on major issues, while taking into account the diverse priorities of member states and regions to present a unified voice in global AI governance. Establishing a shared policy framework ensures that African nations present a cohesive and influential stance in international AI negotiations.
- **Invest in AI and Diplomatic Training:** Strengthen the technical expertise of African representatives through specialized AI governance training programs, qualifications, and

certifications. Ensure knowledge transfer by having trained officials conduct internal briefings after attending training events. Utilize partnerships with global AI governance institutions and universities to support professional development.

- **Enhance Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Strengthen linkages between government, academia, industry, and civil society to build consensus among key actors and develop positions based on diverse expertise and viewpoints. For example, industry stakeholders can provide insight into the practical challenges of AI implementation, while researchers and civil society can contribute perspectives on ethics and governance. Also, to minimize the dominance of one sector in the consensus-building process, the process should ensure equal weight across actors (industry, academia, civil society).
- **Leverage African Union Membership in G20:** Use the AU's G20 membership and South Africa's G20 presidency in 2025 to proactively advocate for Africa's AI priorities on a global scale. This platform provides a strategic opportunity to engage directly with the world's most influential economies. Although real influence here depends on how effectively AU member states coordinate positions in advance.

In part 4, we delve into some practical steps to take before, after, and during global AI fora and platforms to strengthen African participation, impact, and benefits.

5 Practical Guidance for Engagement

Simple guidelines for approaching participation in global AI platforms, drawing on diplomatic best practices.

5.1 Preparation Before Events

- **Research and understand the event:** Why it's important to understand the event, level of representation, topics, and themes, etc.
- **Define Clear Objectives:** Identify national and regional AI interests most relevant to the event before engaging in global discussions to ensure alignment with the broader goals of your country and region.
- **Coordination and engagement:**
 - **Permanent Missions & Embassies:** Leverage diplomatic presence in host countries to build on the ground insights, ensure they are adequately prepared for your contributions and interventions, and come to conversations using the same strategy. Moreover, they can provide insights into the practical aspects of the event itself, such as what to focus on and challenges to anticipate, etc.
 - **Engage within and across departments:** Coordination across key officials in government ministries ensures a holistic view across the government. Senior

officials sign off to ensure legitimacy and view ministerial intervention when necessary.

- **External Consultations:** Hold consultation meetings with key partners outside of your national government, including regional organisations such as the African Union and civil society organisations like AI4D Africa, as well as close partner countries, etc., to align positions before the event and to build in any additional insights not yet factored into your strategy.
- **Identify Potential Coalitions:** Build alliances with like-minded countries prior to the event and agree on unified points where relations are particularly close. Identify potential partners for coalitions at such events as well.
- **Understand Procedural Rules:** Familiarity with forum-specific rules (business proceeding, decision making, documentation, language, etc) enhances the effectiveness of participation.
- **Prepare intervention points:** Following these steps, draft concise talking points that reflect government priorities and insights from experts and officials across the government. Ensure sign-off from relevant senior officials and ministers in the case of high-level meetings, and consult with relevant permanent missions and embassies.

5.2 During Events: Effective Participation

Agenda setting

- **Present a Clear & Concise Agenda:** Define the highest priority positions to advocate for Africa's position on global AI governance, which are of the utmost importance. Draft additional priorities and points that may be discussed in side events, but focus on a very clear overarching agenda and set of priorities that can be easily understood on major issues.
- **Amplify Voice Through Joint Agendas:** Use coordinated strategies through high-level government representative engagement across African nations and with the African Union to develop joint agendas to create unified positions that will strengthen Africa's impact and your nation's impact on the global stage.
- **Remain Flexible While Maintaining Core Objectives:** Strategic flexibility can lead to better outcomes than deadlock, but it must be balanced with firm red lines. While some compromises can build alliances and unlock progress, core objectives and interests should remain non-negotiable to safeguard long-term priorities.

Understand Etiquette and Protocols

- **Follow Formal Etiquette:** Engage respectfully in high-level discussions and adhere to confidentiality standards. While maintaining the protocols established for the specific event.

- **Adapt to Cultural Norms:** Respect different cultural perspectives to enhance diplomatic relations.

Effective Communication

- **Use Clear, Concise, and Constructive Messaging:** When intervening in discussions, follow the "Three C's" of effective communication.
 - **Be Clear:** Speak at a steady, measured pace and avoid using jargon or overly complex language. Clarity ensures that a diverse audience, including non-native English speakers, understands your message.
 - **Be Concise:** Keep your points brief and focused. Global fora are fast-paced, and attention spans are limited. Prioritize key messages and structure them efficiently to maintain engagement. Any additional details can be followed up on later or referenced in your intervention.
 - **Be Constructive:** Frame your contributions in a way that adds value to the discussion. Instead of merely pointing out problems, propose solutions, suggest compromises, or highlight shared interests to build consensus. Constructive engagement strengthens credibility and influence.
- **Be respectful:** Acknowledge contributions from other nations and express disagreement tactfully. For example, instead of dismissing a point outright, reframe your response to show understanding before presenting an alternative perspective. Always thank the chair or moderator before speaking, reinforcing mutual respect and cooperation.
- **Adjust the communication style to the context:**
 - **Formal Settings (e.g., high-level roundtables, plenary sessions):** Maintain structured, diplomatic language and adhere to formal speaking protocols.
 - **Technical Working Groups:** While still professional, these sessions allow for a slightly more direct and technical style of communication, focusing on problem-solving and practical details.
 - **Networking & Informal Interactions (e.g., side events, receptions):** Use a more personal and friendly tone to build relationships organically. These settings are valuable for forging alliances and strengthening partnerships outside official discussions.

Relationship Building

- **Identify Common Ground:** Building alliances with nations that share similar concerns about AI governance is crucial for strengthening collective influence. While differences in opinion will naturally arise, focus on areas of agreement and leverage these to drive collaboration. Acknowledge and credit allies during meetings to elevate their positions and reinforce shared objectives, fostering trust and goodwill.

- **Maximize Networking Opportunities:** Effective diplomacy extends beyond formal meetings. Actively participate in side events, receptions, informal gatherings, and multilateral sessions to build relationships with key partners and stakeholders. Be approachable, engage in meaningful conversations, and demonstrate genuine interest in others' perspectives.
- **Best Practices for Networking:**
 - **Be proactive:** Initiate conversations and seek out key figures relevant to your country's AI interests.
 - **Exchange contact details:** Bring business cards or have a digital contact-sharing method ready.
 - **Follow up:** Strengthen connections after events through email or LinkedIn to maintain engagement.
 - **Be personable and professional:** A friendly and open approach fosters long-term partnerships while maintaining diplomatic decorum.

5.3 Post-Event Engagement & Follow-Up

Ensuring Continued Engagement

- **Document and Share Meeting Outcomes:** Compile and distribute detailed reports that summarize key discussions, agreements, and action points to national agencies, ministries, policymakers, and AI stakeholders. Where appropriate, publish non-confidential outcomes as public summaries to inform industry, academia, and civil society, ensuring institutional knowledge retention and cross-government collaboration.
- **Follow Up with Key Contacts:** Strengthen relationships by sending personalized follow-ups, scheduling virtual meetings to explore collaborations, participating in follow-up working groups, leveraging professional networks (e.g., LinkedIn, AI governance groups), and engaging with diplomatic missions to ensure sustained advocacy for Africa's AI priorities.

Lessons Learnt

- **Internal Debriefing & Institutional Learning:** Organize post-event debrief sessions with representatives and key stakeholders to share insights and lessons learned, review strategies, and institutionalize knowledge for future engagements.

Expanding Future Influence

- **Public Awareness & Media Engagement:** Communicate key takeaways through press briefings, media articles, and public reports, ensuring Africa's role in AI governance discussions is visible and well-documented.

- **Identify Future Opportunities:** Utilize insights from the event to prepare for upcoming summits, policy meetings, and AI governance discussions, and ensure continued participation in working groups and alliances. Focus attention on a long-term roadmap for sustained AI diplomacy engagement.

6 Conclusion and Key Takeaways

Artificial intelligence will increasingly shape global systems, including economies, governance, security, and human rights. Ensuring Africa's voice and interests are reflected in the rules being written today is not optional, but essential. While barriers to full participation remain, African countries are already taking steps to shape the future of AI governance through strategic coordination, capacity building, and principled advocacy.

This handbook has outlined a range of practical pathways—from diplomacy readiness to coalition building—that can help African policymakers, diplomats, and stakeholders strengthen their presence in global AI discussions. By investing in long-term relationships, shared positions, and institutional memory, African countries can move from participation to influence, helping to shape a global AI landscape that reflects the continent's development priorities, human rights values, and technological potential.

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