

# Bridging Ethics and Execution: AI Governance Lessons from Africa and the Asia-Pacific *White Paper*



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This white paper proposes a joint framework that bridges AI ethics with practical governance and accountability mechanisms.

## 1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence is already shaping how people live, work, and interact. In Nairobi, chatbots support customer service teams; in Bangalore, predictive analytics improves healthcare delivery; in Hanoi, machine learning supports agricultural planning. These examples illustrate how AI has become a cornerstone of economic and social transformation. Alongside these advances, there are serious challenges. Bias in automated systems, lack of transparency, and the misuse of data have shown how easily technology can reproduce or magnify inequality. Many countries in Africa and the Asia-Pacific are confronting this tension: how to innovate responsibly while protecting the rights and dignity of their citizens.

Both regions share a distinctive position in the global landscape. They are not simply followers of the Global North. They are shaping their own pathways. Kenya's M-Pesa revolutionised mobile money. India's Aadhaar created the world's largest biometric identification programme. These innovations show what is possible when creativity meets constraint. But without strong governance, the same tools that empower can also harm. This paper was written from that recognition. It bridges policy and practice, offering a framework that respects local realities while engaging with global standards. The purpose is simple: to ensure that AI development in Africa and the Asia-Pacific remains ethical, inclusive, and sustainable.

## 2. Objective and Scope

The objective of this white paper is to develop a unified framework for responsible AI governance that bridges ethical principles with practical implementation. It helps policymakers, regulators, corporates, and civil society translate high-level AI ethics into operational systems and measurable outcomes.

The framework focuses on two regions: Africa (mainly Kenya and its peers) and the Asia-Pacific (India, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam). Both are seen as connected laboratories of innovation and learning. The scope is practical. It looks at how AI governance can be embedded into existing legal and institutional systems rather than treated as a stand-alone concept. It also highlights how South-South collaboration can build a new model of global AI governance that reflects local values and realities.

### 3. Foundations of Governance

#### Clear Principles and Domestic Law

Responsible AI begins with clear principles. Global frameworks from UNESCO, the OECD, and ISO provide guidance, but true legitimacy comes from domestic law. Kenya's Constitution of 2010 enshrines privacy, equality, and justice, offering a strong base for ethical AI. The Data Protection Act of 2019 translates these rights into obligations for controllers and processors. However, gaps remain in enforcement, transparency, and liability for harm caused by AI decisions.



Image related to legal frameworks and justice

#### Ethical AI and Human Rights

##### Data Sovereignty and GRC Integration

Data sovereignty and privacy are equally important. Countries need clear policies for cross-border data transfers and domestic data protection. Laws are valuable only if matched by institutional capacity. Offices such as Kenya's Data Protection Commissioner require technical and financial resources to enforce the law effectively. Finally, AI governance must be part of every organisation's GRC structure. Risk registers, vendor contracts, procurement processes, and internal audits should include AI-related risks. Integrating these safeguards ensures that governance is not an afterthought but a core part of responsible innovation.

A risk-based approach is essential. Not all AI systems require the same level of scrutiny. High-risk applications in areas such as healthcare, credit scoring, or law enforcement must meet stricter requirements for explainability, auditability, and accountability. Lower-risk uses can be monitored through lighter controls. Proportionate regulation protects rights without stifling innovation.

#### Human Rights and Fairness

Human rights and fairness should guide every AI deployment. Systems must be transparent, their logic understandable, and their outcomes open to challenge. Using local datasets reduces bias and ensures that AI reflects the diversity of real communities.



Image representing data security and sovereignty

## 4. Africa's Emerging Model

### Kenya's National AI Strategy

Kenya's National AI Strategy 2025-2030, launched under the Ministry of Information, Communications and Digital Economy, anchors AI within the national Vision 2030 and Digital Master Plan. It focuses on digital infrastructure, governance, and innovation, supported by ethics, equity, and public-private partnerships. The challenge lies in implementation. While the policy is comprehensive, the institutions tasked with delivering it require more resources and technical expertise.



Image representing Rwanda's focus on technology

AI offers a chance to accelerate development and reduce inequality, yet it also exposes gaps in ethics, regulation, and institutional readiness.



Image of Africa with digital network overlays

### Nigeria and South Africa

Nigeria and South Africa represent the continent's legal anchors. South Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act offers one of the most mature frameworks on the continent, while Nigeria has signalled its intent to embed AI in its digital economy strategy. Yet both countries face implementation gaps and capacity challenges.

Rwanda's National AI Policy, approved in 2023, blends ethical vision with practical delivery. It is supported by a national data protection law enforced by the Cyber Security Authority. Rwanda's government has invested in developing fifty AI tools for public services and in training judges, lawyers, and technologists in digital ethics. This focus on human capacity is one of Rwanda's greatest strengths.

### Continental Level: African Union

At the continental level, the African Union's draft AI Strategy seeks to harmonise policies, create shared data spaces, and foster regional cooperation. The goal is to ensure that Africa's digital transformation remains inclusive and grounded in human rights. The task ahead is to move from vision to execution.

## 5. Asia-Pacific's Governance Landscape

### Asia-Pacific's Pragmatic Approach

The Asia-Pacific region offers a different but equally instructive approach. Here, innovation often precedes legislation. Governments encourage experimentation through sandboxes, soft-law instruments, and voluntary codes. India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act of 2023 provides the statutory framework for data privacy, while NITI Aayog's Responsible AI for All strategy promotes fairness, transparency, and accountability. India's regulatory sandboxes allow AI applications in financial services and healthcare to be tested under controlled conditions before wider release.

### Regional Cooperation: ASEAN

At the regional level, ASEAN's Guide on AI Governance and Ethics, published in 2024, offers principles of transparency, accountability, and human-centricity. Although non-binding, it has encouraged dialogue and coordination across member states. This pragmatic, collaborative spirit defines the Asia-Pacific's distinctive governance culture.

Malaysia's creation of the National AI Office in 2024 represents a turning point for regional coordination. The Office develops national policy, oversees public-private partnerships, and supports investment in AI infrastructure. Amendments to Malaysia's data protection laws and the development of a Data Sharing Bill reflect a commitment to continual legal adaptation.



Image of a futuristic Asia-Pacific city

### Focus on Sovereignty and Workforce

Indonesia's draft AI framework focuses on data sovereignty and localisation, while Vietnam's AI Strategy to 2030 targets workforce development, aiming to train tens of thousands of AI and semiconductor professionals. Both countries recognise that governance is only as strong as the people who carry it out.

## 6. Converging Lessons from Two Regions



### Africa's Rights-Driven Model

Africa and the Asia-Pacific share the same goal: to govern AI responsibly under conditions of rapid change and uneven resources. Yet their paths differ. Africa has prioritised rights, inclusion, and legal clarity, while Asia-Pacific has focused on speed, experimentation, and infrastructure.

### Asia-Pacific's Practice-First Model

These are not opposing models but complementary ones. Africa's law-first approach ensures protection and legitimacy. Asia-Pacific's practice-first approach ensures agility and innovation.

### A Hybrid Framework

When combined, they create a hybrid framework that balances ethics with execution. Kenya's and India's experiences show that legal safeguards can coexist with innovation. Malaysia's institutional coordination parallels Rwanda's ethical governance. The key is learning across regions rather than in isolation. Both regions face the same challenge: how to move from strategy documents to daily practice. That transition requires operational tools, institutional capacity, and shared standards.

## 7. From Framework to Action

01

### 1. Align Laws and Identify Gaps

Translating governance into reality requires a clear roadmap. Countries must begin by aligning their existing laws with emerging AI obligations, identifying gaps in areas such as explainability, liability, and redress. Legal amendments should focus on clarifying responsibilities and ensuring access to remedies for harm caused by automated systems.

02

### 2. Strengthen Institutions & Infrastructure

Institutions need strengthening. Regulators and oversight bodies must have the technical expertise to audit algorithms and assess compliance. Judges and lawyers require training in digital evidence and AI risk. Universities and professional associations can play a vital role in building this knowledge base. Infrastructure is another priority. Reliable connectivity, sustainable data centres, and secure cloud systems are prerequisites for equitable digital transformation. Public-private partnerships can accelerate progress while maintaining accountability.

03

### 3. Build Trust and Collaborate

Public trust depends on transparency and participation. Citizens should know when AI is being used in public services, have channels to contest decisions, and be involved in shaping the rules. Regular consultations and transparency portals can build confidence. Governance must also be adaptive. AI evolves quickly, and regulation must keep pace. Periodic reviews, audits, and fairness assessments should be part of every national framework. Finally, collaboration between Africa and the Asia-Pacific can strengthen both. Shared initiatives, joint research, and regional dialogues can position the Global South as a powerful voice in global AI standard-setting.



Image of diverse professionals in a meeting

## 8. Conclusion

### A Defining Moment

Africa and the Asia-Pacific stand at a defining moment. Both regions have shown that progress and ethical governance can go hand in hand. Their approaches differ, but the goal is the same: innovation that empowers people.

### The Path Forward

Kenya's ambition, India's reforms, Malaysia's coordination, and Rwanda's ethical clarity show what the Global South can achieve. The next step is delivery, turning strategies into real safeguards and ambition into trust.

If both regions keep learning from each other and align governance with broader institutional frameworks and GRC where relevant, they can lead the global movement for ethical and inclusive AI. The future of AI governance will not be shaped only in Brussels or Washington but also in Nairobi, New Delhi, Kuala Lumpur, and Kigali.



Image of AI governance for protection



## References

References available upon request.

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