



G20

SOUTH AFRICA 2025



Solidarity

Equality

Sustainability

CONCEPT NOTE

TASK FORCE 3: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, DATA GOVERNANCE AND INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

December 2024 – November 2025

For the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to yield unprecedented economic and social opportunities and contribute to solving some of the most significant planetary challenges, its dynamic evolution needs to be accompanied by enabling policy and regulatory shifts. AI technologies, exemplified by advanced systems like generative, interactive, and world-model AI platforms, have demonstrated the capacity to enhance output, not least in productivity and efficiency gains, foster innovation, and analyse large volumes of data to help solve complex problems. Currently, as AI is evolving under less-regulated conditions, there is evidence of AI amplifying inequality, which could impact the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This Task Force creates an opportunity for the Group of Twenty (G20) to establish a platform for continued dialogue and collaboration among G20 members, along with engagement with the broader international community to navigate the complex landscape of AI and unlock its full potential in service of humanity. It is an opportunity to respond to the fragmented approach and address shortcomings in international AI governance, so as to effectively address the multifaceted risks associated with AI while maximising the benefits to support inclusive and sustainable social and economic transformation. This concept note considers the opportunities, challenges, and possible priorities for the G20 members to shape the future of AI development and use for the global public interest. The ambition is to contribute to the evolution of safe, secure, ethical, and trustworthy AI ecosystems to which there are commitments in the G20, but also to ensure that they are reliable, development-orientated, and more equitably inclusive and just. AI safety laws and institutes that have been rolled out to mitigate AI safety and security risks will be able to deal with concerns in these important but narrow areas, but without addressing these issues in the context of the broader social and economic issues facing developing countries, mitigation of risk will be limited.

Digital inequality and data injustice, which are more pronounced in the Global South, are at the heart of the currently highly uneven development of AI. According to the United Nations' (UN) International Communications Union (ITU), around 2.9 billion people globally—conservatively one-third of the world's population—remain without internet access, facing significant barriers to effective participation in the digital economy and society. Without digital skills and AI capabilities, many developing countries risk becoming a site of data extraction within the wider AI value chain. In this context, AI advancements are likely to exacerbate a trajectory of social inequalities associated with digital life.

The rapid evolution and integration of AI into everyday life has also opened the door for significant rights abuses, ethical, security, privacy, and broader governance concerns. The abuse of AI serves as a wake-up call to the inherent risks and harms that arise in the absence of rights-protecting guidelines, rigorous security measures, and robust governance frameworks that mitigate not only the uneven impact of

harms but also the uneven distribution of opportunities associated with advanced data-driven technologies both between and within countries.

Issues such as automated threats to information integrity, privacy breaches, algorithmic bias, algorithmic opacity, the absence of representative data sets, deepfakes, automated gender violence, and content that harms human rights and information integrity highlight the urgent need for effective governance and regulation. Current ethical guidelines and rights-referencing frameworks largely talk of harms to individuals' rights, primarily experienced as breaches in privacy, but there is currently little that either acknowledges or seeks to regulate collective and systemic harms, including:

- to Indigenous and other marginalised communities
- categories of people at the intersection of multiple inequalities, including race, gender, class, and location
- exploitative labour practices from extractive critical mineral industries to AI data labelling and content regulation factories, and the de-skilling of workers
- news media, authors, and artists' intellectual property rights
- the exponential environmental damage from mega power and water consumption to operate giant servers for AI and blockchain technologies which disproportionately disadvantage African countries, many already with deficits in water and electricity supply
- arbitrary or disproportionate regulation of allegedly harmful content affecting millions of Africans.
- extreme market concentration, ineffective consumer protection
- insufficient access to data, computer and skills development for local job creation and innovation
- the public's entitlement to accountability and transparency.

Further, globally, the collection and use of non-personal data remain almost completely unregulated. Yet, when accumulated at scale, and concentrated as it is currently in a handful of corporations, data confers almost unlimited power to govern people's lives and extract value. Without internationally agreed norms, regulation and other interventions, data has become a site of injustice—exacerbating inequality and marginalisation. It is also important to understand the extent to which the wider macroeconomic system impacts the development of AI and whether there are systems, rules, and mechanisms that can be put in place to ensure equitable access to AI for it to be transformative and inclusive.

In 2024, two UN General Assembly resolutions, A/RES/78/265 and A/RES/78/311, were adopted, emphasising the importance of safe, secure, and trustworthy AI systems and international cooperation on AI capacity-building initiatives. The newly adopted Global Digital Compact highlights fairness, accountability, and human oversight in AI governance while calling for action through existing mechanisms. The

UN Tech Envoy High-Level Advisory Board report on the Governing Report for Humanity highlights the imperative of global governance of AI and enabling all countries to generate AI technology. The global sourcing of AI's raw materials, from critical minerals to training data, together with the cross-border deployment of general-purpose AI, elevate governance from the national level to the international level—as does the intensifying concentration of power and wealth on a global scale—with geopolitical and geoeconomic implications.

It is imperative for the G20 to contribute to the international discourse on AI, as the multilateral system, regional organisations, multi-stakeholder structures, and other bodies seek to identify the optimal responses to address the impact and realise the developmental potential of AI technologies. Building on the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) Recommendation on the Ethics of AI, the Global Digital Compact, and other global governance frameworks advancing greater inclusion, this Task Force will explore solutions through AI and data regulation in order to ensure that AI technologies are not only developed and deployed for the benefit of all and made accessible across diverse global communities, but also by emerging and developing economies through more equitable access to data and computing power capacity development, as well as human development. International standards, such as open standards to enable open-source solutions and data interoperability, also have an important role.

So far, discussions on AI at the G20 have primarily occurred through the Digital Economy Working Group (DEWG). In 2019, during the Japanese Presidency, the G20 adopted the *Principles for the Responsible Stewardship of Trustworthy AI* and in 2023, the Indian Presidency highlighted *Harnessing AI Responsibly for Good and All* as a provision of the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration. The DEWG, under the 2024 Brazilian Presidency, has gained additional momentum with the UNESCO-supported *Enabling resources for the development, deployment and use of AI for good and for all*, which was attached as an annex to the Ministerial declaration. The São Luís Declaration on Artificial Intelligence (a joint declaration from Think 20, Women20, Labour20, and Civil Society20 in 2024) is a meaningful contribution to this area of policy development.

South Africa's G20 Presidency has the opportunity to build on the achievements of previous presidencies and to advocate for Africa's participation in fostering a global AI landscape that emphasises human rights, global governance, ethical governance, multi-stakeholder collaboration, closing the gap on digital technology's ownership, and capacity building for more inclusive growth and decent work. For global governance of AI to be effective, a multilateral “home” or mechanism needs to be devised and agreed. At the moment there are different agencies contributing towards AI, such as the ITU, UNESCO, and the office of the UN Secretary-General. Greater global coordination must be undertaken in a systematic manner so as to ensure more effective global interventions. In addition to multilateral coordination, it is also

important to ensure engagement with different stakeholders, including policymakers, the private sector, scientists, researchers, consumer groups, labour, and experts in designing and using AI solutions.

Addressing digital inequality issues and advancing gender and racial equality and cultural diversity and addressing the issues of intellectual property and public access to knowledge, information, and data will be central themes to ensure that AI serves all. We will encourage greater cooperation between African and global academic networks. Capacity building and the promotion of innovation, including grassroots innovation, is also very important to ensure that the benefits of AI serve everyone.

It can also serve to rally support among G20 members and development partners to support the implementation of the African Union's (AU) Data Policy Framework and Continental AI Strategy.

Through the Task Force, South Africa will leverage the G20 platform to highlight the barriers to AI readiness facing developing countries, including unequal, disproportionate access to digital and data infrastructure; market concentration of AI and digital technologies; constraints on the development of AI expertise and skills; constraints on access to investments, expertise, and capability; the potential impact of AI on employment throughout the value chain; limited research and institutional capacity; significant gaps and shortfalls in data and AI global governance; and the development of contextualised regulatory frameworks and implementation in developing countries.

The Task Force seeks to address digital transformation in a holistic and comprehensive manner, bringing together AI and data governance across both the Sherpa and Finance Tracks.

Linking with the Sherpa Track, and especially the DEWG, this Task Force will consider how effective global data governance would promote the rights-protecting, ethical sharing, and governance of data for the collective benefit of society. This can consider alternatives to private and commercial models of data ownership, such as ones that optimise the benefits of collaboration, community control and the equitable distribution of data's value. Data is the foundation of AI systems, and consensus is required on data governance principles, such as data diversity, data quality and personal data protection, and data ownership, as well as open data and public interest data access. The Task Force can give attention to accessing data in the public interest, for example, by regulators, researchers, and start-ups, where these resources are locked within public and private vaults. All this would lay the basis for not only trustworthy but also more just, inclusive, and accountable data governance practices that generate significant public value.

Considerations about finance are important for this Task Force, drawing from the Finance Track of the G20 without duplicating. Examples of issues that merit attention are exploring measures for mobilising public and private investments in data and AI-related infrastructure, digital public infrastructure, and digital skills, including in disadvantaged regions. Resourcing to accompany enabling environments for innovations and the development of African technology companies that can enter global markets is a further opportunity for this Task Force to explore. The matter of a global fund for AI merits discussion, and attention is needed to stimulate AI investments in sectors such as agriculture, media, education, and health.

Further key deliverables will include the launch of an "AI for Africa" initiative to accelerate the extension and implementation of the AU Data Policy Framework and Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy. This initiative will seek to realise the talent on the continent, build critical capabilities for job creation, publicly available AI-ready datasets, digital data, including computer infrastructure, including green energy, foster research and innovation, accelerate AI adoption in priority sectors, and socially and economically just policy development and implementation. Considering the lack of women in the field of AI, particularly in Africa, this initiative will also include a capacity-building programme for African women on AI. The AI for Africa Initiative will be launched at an AI for Africa Conference, co-hosted by the South African G20 Presidency, the AU, and UNESCO, together with the ITU and other knowledge partners, on the margins of the AI Task Force Ministerial. It will be supported by a call for voluntary and in-kind commitments from G20 members and the private sector, alongside backing from international organisations such as UNESCO, the ITU, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the UN SG Tech Envoy's Office, and the World Bank and regional organisations such as the AU, the African Development Bank, and the UN Economic Commission for Africa, together with specialised forums such as the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI), and civil society participation, enhancing African contributions to global governance and regional and national policy. The initiative will work with leading African grassroots organisations such as Deep Learning Indaba, Data Science Africa, and Masakhane Research Foundation, which have been mobilising for continent-scale changes.

Three high-level workshops will be organised. The first will entail a Data Governance Dialogue, with the support of our knowledge partners, to strengthen the data governance underpinnings of AI as highlighted in the Global Digital Compact and the UN Governing AI for Humanity Report with the intention of converging understandings between members of relevant engagement groups, Sherpa, and Finance tracks. The second will demonstrate rights promoting ethical and responsible applications of AI for innovation and for sustainable development with ITU, UNESCO, the UN Development Programme, the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence, South African AI hubs, and other role players, including for the public sector, with a resulting report on public interest practices. The third workshop will

focus on the use of AI in science, consistent with the objective of mitigating against the expansion of the global scientific divide. This could be done in partnership with the G20 Research and Innovation Working Group (RIWG). This workshop will focus on AI to support the implementation of science, technology, and innovation strategies in Africa.

A Technology Policy Assistance Facility will be developed with the support of UNESCO to assist countries in the development of national AI strategies, policies, and laws for countries, as well as knowledge sharing to ensure linkages to the research and policy work that is already available. This acknowledges the opportunity for the G20 to advance a collaborative, multilateral, and multistakeholder approach in AI governance in a manner that supports the SDGs and promotes equality. The Task Force can profitably expand on the parameters of this output, ensuring it complements rather than duplicates other international initiatives.

Finally, the Task Force will reflect on relevant outcomes emerging from across the Working Groups where AI and data governance are being addressed in specific contexts (including employment, the environment, education, cultural industry, research and innovation, information integrity, the digital economy, trade, agriculture and the finance track) for incorporation into a high-level Ministerial statement on AI, Data Governance and Innovation for Sustainable Development. This statement will position the G20 in developing and disseminating rights-promoting, ethical, transparent, and collaborative, sustainable, accountable, resource-efficient, environmentally friendly, and just AI ecosystems.

These initiatives will be organised in conjunction with G20 members, our leading national and international knowledge partners, and key stakeholders. The AI Task Force programme will be accompanied by an extensive programme of side events, which will be supported by UNESCO and the ITU and others, addressing policy, international standards, and capacity building initiatives. This programme will also look at AI to support the SDGs. Details of this programme will be shared, for information purposes, during the first meeting of the Task Force on 25 and 26 February 2025.