

Are strategies on AI merely dressed up in digital hype?

Bamuturaki Musiguzi brings down the curtain on this six-part series on generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) by looking at how governments and multinational bodies are developing policies and strategies to regulate AI use.

It was from July 18 to 19, 2024 when the African Union (AU) Executive Council endorsed the Continental AI Strategy during its 45th Ordinary Session in Accra, Ghana. The strategy underscores Africa's commitment to an Africa-centric, development-focused approach to AI, promoting ethical, responsible, and equitable practices.

The continental Artificial Intelligence (AI) strategy calls for unified national approaches among AU Member States to navigate the complexities of AI-driven change, aiming to strengthen regional and global cooperation and position Africa as a leader in inclusive and responsible AI development.

It was in Accra that Uganda first made a commitment to uphold ethical AI. During the third Unesco Global Forum on the Ethics of AI (GFEAD), held in Bangkok, Thailand, from June 24 to 27, 2025, Uganda reaffirmed its global commitment to ethical AI.

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— International Authors Forum

Godfrey Baluku Kabbyanga, the Minister of State for ICT and National Guidance, made it abundantly clear that “for Uganda, AI must serve as a bridge—not a barrier—to opportunity, dignity, and shared prosperity.” The conviction, noted Ambrose Ruyooka, the head of research and development at the ministry, was informed by the fact that the country was “not starting from zero.” Uganda, Ruyooka opined, “has taken deliberate steps, including readiness assessments, scoping, and now building institutional capacity to ensure ethical and inclusive AI governance.”

Which is just as well. On a global scale, AI is driving significant advancements in technology and business. It is already used in a variety of industries, from improving healthcare diagnostics to enabling human relationships through social media and producing labour efficiencies through automated jobs, the International Authors Forum (IAF) ob-



An AI version of the song *Masavu* was created in 2024. In the fast-evolving digital age, generative AI has emerged as a transformative force, presenting new opportunities for creativity, but also raising critical questions about the future of art and the role of human artists. PHOTO/FILE

serves. In the fast-evolving digital age, generative AI has emerged as a transformative force, presenting new opportunities for creativity but also raising critical questions about the future of art and the role of human artists. Artists and designers are embracing AI-generated art and aesthetics, blurring the lines between human and machine, the International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies (IFACCA) noted in its newsletter edition Number 439, August 17, 2023.

In Brazil, a recent car ad which resurrected a treasured Brazilian musician who unexpectedly died in 1982 has generated much debate over the ethics of AI and its impact on the music industry. However, this is also exposing the technology's inbuilt biases and misrepresentations, IFACCA added.

IAF says these rapid changes present serious ethical concerns, as AI systems may embed biases and jeopardise human rights. “These AI-related risks have already begun to threaten the creative industries and risks further undermining creators' rights. [...] While AI's influence on the cultural and creative sectors is undeniable, what is clearly emerging as essential is for stakeholders to collaborate and establish ethical and legislative frameworks that protect the rights of artists while fostering an environment that nurtures creativity and inclusivity in the digital age.”

AI ethical guardrails

In its 2024 Creative Economy Outlook report, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) acknowledges that the digital transformation of creative industries poses challenges, especially regarding the use of AI. These challenges relate to quality, consumer welfare, copyright, market concentration and competition, jobs, and development asymmetries. According to UNCTAD, the quality of AI-produced content needs further assessment. The quality of AI products relies on the per-

formance of its algorithm, and on the database the algorithm uses.

An AI system can be fed with some data rather than others. It can prioritise some patterns, albeit to the detriment of others, to optimise the commercial objectives of its promoters. This has triggered concerns about how algorithms can reduce cultural diversity. This is because some cultures and languages may be left out of the databases training the algorithms, with the risk of monoculture or bias. Fortune Business Insights estimates that the global AI market is projected to reach \$1,770b (\$Sh6.5 trillion) by 2032. Per Unesco, AI economic gains are expected to be strongest in China and North America by 2030, representing 70 percent of AI's global economic impact. AI has a “winner takes it all” dynamic that needs to be regulated: concentration of AI in the hands of few high-income countries will likely leave developing countries far behind.

A report by Goldman Sachs says AI will affect about 300 million jobs across major economies. Secretary-General of the UN António Guterres says the misuse of AI technology presents a global threat and demands a coordinated global response. He adds that individuals have used AI to target UN peacekeeping missions and aid operations. The rapid growth of AI is a head of ethics and regulations. This has led to the OpenAI CEO Sam Altman saying it's essential to curb the risks of increasingly powerful AI.

With its unique mandate, Unesco has led the international effort to ensure that science and technology develop with strong ethical guardrails for decades.

“Today, AI plays a role in billions of people's lives. Sometimes unnoticed but often with profound consequences, it transforms our societies and challenges what it means to be human,” Unesco says.

Unesco's two cents

In November 2021, the 193-member States at Unesco's General Conference adopted the “Recommendation on the

AI ETHICAL GUARDRAILS

- Human rights and dignity.
- Privacy and data protection.
- Non-discrimination and fairness.
- Transparency and explainability.
- Accountability and redress.
- Safety, security and reliability.
- Environmental responsibility.

Ethics of AI,” the first-ever global standard-setting instrument on the subject. It will not only protect but also promote human rights and human dignity. It will also be an ethical guiding compass and a global normative bedrock, allowing us to build strong respect for the rule of law in the digital world.

Following calls by more than 1,000 tech workers in March 2023 for a pause in the training of the most powerful AI systems, including ChatGPT, Unesco called on countries to fully implement its Recommendation on the Ethics of AI immediately. This global normative framework provides all the necessary safeguards. Unesco is concerned by many of the ethical issues raised by these innovations, in particular discrimination and stereotyping, including the issue of gender inequality, but also the fight against disinformation, the right to privacy, the protection of personal data, and human and environmental rights.

“Industry self-regulation is clearly not sufficient to avoid these ethical harms, which is why the Recommendation provides the tools to ensure that AI developments abide by the rule of law, avoiding harm, and ensuring that when harm is done, accountability and redressal mechanisms are at hand for those affected,” Unesco said in a press release.

Unesco's recommendation places a Readiness Assessment tool at the core of its guidance to Member States. This tool enables countries to ascertain the com-

petencies and skills required in the workforce to ensure robust regulation of the AI sector. It also provides that the States report regularly on their progress and their practices in the field of AI, in particular by submitting a periodic report every four years.

The then Unesco Director-General, Audrey Azoulay, said: “The world needs stronger ethical rules for AI: this is the challenge of our time. Unesco's Recommendation on the ethics of AI sets the appropriate normative framework. Our member States all endorsed this Recommendation in November 2021. It is high time to implement the strategies and regulations at the national level. We have to walk the talk and ensure we deliver on the Recommendations' objectives.”

Way forward

To date, more than 40 countries in all regions of the world are already working with Unesco to develop AI checks and balances at the national level, building on the Recommendation. Unesco calls on all countries to join the movement it is leading to build an ethical AI.

“Digitalisation and AI may be a game-changer for several creative industries. Policymakers need to monitor technological developments and update the relevant policy and regulatory frameworks that harness the opportunities and mitigate the risks for the creative industries,” UNCTAD says in the 2024 Creative Economy Outlook report.

In response to growing political, public and industry concern over the rapid proliferation of AI foundation models and calls for regulation, Unesco published a policy paper in June 2023. The paper demonstrates how the Unesco Recommendation on the Ethics of AI can help identify and clarify key ethical concerns related to AI systems, guiding policy responses. The paper suggests a procedural framework to address and mitigate risks that may arise with their use across the AI project life cycle.

“As AI continues to open up numerous opportunities to transform and revolutionise how we address global challenges and move through the world, excitement over AI systems has been tempered by growing concerns over its potential harms and ethical issues that may arise,” Unesco says.

Some of the concerns that have been raised by world leaders and experts include the use of AI by malicious parties, with the number of incidents involving the misuse of AI, such as deepfakes, increasing by 26 times since 2012 according to the AI, Algorithmic and Automation Incidents and Controversies (AIAAC), the amplification and exacerbation of existing biases, as well as the propensity of AI to facilitate the spread of disinformation and misinformation.

In response to these growing concerns, Unesco published a policy paper containing analyses of burgeoning “experimental” AI tools such as ChatGPT, which have taken the world by storm through the lens of the Unesco Recommendation on the Ethics of AI. Crucially, the paper is grounded in ethical principles and highlights the known effects of such models in relation to the principles and policy areas of the Recommendation.

The policy paper suggests how the Recommendation can act as a guide for stakeholders in addressing various concerns, proposing concrete actions and a procedural framework for designing, developing, deploying and procuring AI systems ethically. This includes facilitating the mitigation and redressal of harms that arise from AI systems, conducting ex-ante assessments, ultimately allowing stakeholders to leverage and promote the social benefits of AI platforms.