

## Submission to the Global Digital Compact

### 1. Thematic Area Input

The overarching goal of our submission is to advocate for an unsiloed approach to transnational responsible artificial intelligence (RAI)<sup>1</sup> governance, which has multidimensional overlaps with all the other recommended thematic areas in the Common Agenda Report. We are conscious of the need for succinct and concrete inputs to best inform the content of and subsequent negotiations on the Global Digital Compact (GDC). For ease of reference, the following specific action areas as per the Roadmap format, inform our main contributions:

- i. Apply human rights online.
- ii. Protect data.
- iii. Promote regulation of artificial intelligence.
- iv. Digital commons as a global public good.

### 2. Preparation Process

The Data Economy Policy Hub (DepHUB) is the first independent think-tank founded by an indigenous African woman in South Africa. We aim to influence and provide public interest recommendations for evidence-driven holistic inclusive digital transformation policy frameworks and contribute to the formulation of agile governance strategies that leverage responsible artificial intelligence for sustainable development (AI4SD) and data innovations in key growth-enhancing sectors, in sub-Saharan-Africa (SSA).

The DepHUB's GDC submission is co-developed by various contributors, was formulated in consultation with a community of multi-sectoral actors from across Africa, through a series of online and open stakeholder dialogues aimed at formulating multidisciplinary collective African voices, values, interests, visions, concerns, expectations that should become part of the increasingly global discussion on RAI, just public data value creation, and promotion of DPGs. The online dialogues took place between 22<sup>nd</sup> February and 9<sup>th</sup> March 2023.

### 3. Recommended Core Principles

We recommend the advancement of the following four core principles to support global RAI governance<sup>2</sup> that address collaborative global governance, sustainable digital development, just public data value creation<sup>3</sup>, and human-centred multicultural ethics and values:

- i. **Collaborative Transnational Governance:** Given our multidimensional global dependencies, RAI development and deployment should involve a collaborative international governance model that includes diverse stakeholders and incorporates sub-national, national, regional, and global

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<sup>1</sup> Responsible AI principles require fairness, transparency, privacy, human safety, and explainability throughout the AI value chain.

<sup>2</sup> AI governance refers to the set of laws, policies, regulations, institutions, norms, and ethical guidelines that govern the development, deployment, and use of AI. The purpose of AI governance is to ensure that AI is developed and used in a responsible, transparent, and ethical manner, taking into consideration the potential social, economic, and ethical implications of AI.

<sup>3</sup> Just public data value creation denotes that data in itself has no value and existing exclusions and bias in data sets and data-driven ecosystems inhibit who benefits from public interest data-driven decisions. Just public data value creation emphasises a human-centred approach to collecting, using, and sharing quality data for positive impact and data innovations that capture the multidimensional aspects of data as a digital public good (DPG), protect data subject's privacy, support the social contract for data, and mitigates existing multidimensional inequities that arise with datafication of socioeconomic and democratic activity.

considerations. This includes updating our individual and institutional capacities and competencies, our norms, standards and governance frameworks, our efforts to safeguard human dignity, and promote shared prosperity from the global digital economy.

Many low and middle income countries (LMICs), (most which are African) operate from relative weakness at multilateral fora. There should be formal initiatives to address issues around inclusion, coordination, financial assistance, and capacity-building on global RAI governance. More needs to be done to ensure trust in enhanced multi-stakeholder collaboration with clear action-oriented interventions. This is crucial to build truly global consensus for technical standard-setting, capacity building, network development, and for addressing existing intersectional inequities and existential risk that can be exacerbated by the development and use of AI, if there are no guardrails and risk mitigation interventions in place.

Global governance for RAI should be transversal, developed collaboratively, and in consultation with diverse stakeholders, including civil society, industry, government, and international organizations, particularly from LMICs. This promotes legitimacy, inclusivity, transparency, and accountability in the development and implementation of technical standards, regulation, policy, and legislation that shape global AI governance. Meaningful participation<sup>4</sup> ensures that RAI governance initiatives are informed by contextually relevant needs and priorities, are accountable to the public, reduce multidimensional inequities, build trust in supranational organisations, and support the principles of reformed multilateralism for the common interest.

Leveraging RAI governance to promote digital commons as global public goods should focus on investments on building multi-level technical capacity, institutions, infrastructure, innovation ecosystems and skills in LMICs to ensure their AI ecosystems and communities are empowered to leverage the benefits of RAI for their own development. This includes building human capital by promoting access to AI-related education and training, as well as supporting the development of local AI ecosystems to enhance contextually relevant innovations and entrepreneurship throughout the AI value chain.

- ii. **Sustainable Digital Development:** Global RAI governance should support the sustainable development goals (SDGs), including reducing poverty, promoting economic growth, ensuring environmental sustainability, and improving access to basic services such as healthcare and education. Collective action and agile governance is required at the global stage to develop common visions, values and renewed objectives for sustainable digital development (SDD).

Significant funding, capacity building, and institutional reform is needed at all policy levels to ensure there are appropriate interventions that consider the multidimensional disruptions between data-driven digitalisation and sustainability. Negative externalities of digitalisation are often accelerants of existing inequities, market inefficiencies, and unsustainable trends and must be mitigated. Global cooperation is required to co-create and ensure coordinated proactive interventions to mitigate these externalities—emission reduction and resource use, rewiring production and consumption value chains, combatting climate misinformation, reducing digital divides, and preventing rights violation, to name a few.

With regards to AI, there is an emergent need to consider the relationship between algorithmic systems, the sustainability of computing infrastructure, and arguments for climate and

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<sup>4</sup> Meaningful participation refers to the active and meaningful involvement of diverse stakeholders, particularly those from developing countries, in the governance of transnational AI.

environmental justice. These issues must be addressed by the global community in order to encourage and direct targeted investments that leverage digitalisation and frontier technologies to facilitate new knowledge commons, the circular economy, agile governance, industrial innovations, and an overall just transition to a greener economy. The UN GDC must facilitate global dialogues on RAI sustainability opportunities, impacts, and challenges of restructuring economic, climate, and environmental activity for co-creation of scalable solutions that support a just digital circular economy, with considerations of various techno-social contexts along value chains and ecosystems.

- iii. **Just Public Data Value Creation, Data Protection, and Privacy:** The data-driven digital revolution presents an unprecedented opportunity for LMICs to harness digital resources that have potential to accelerate development objectives. Consequently, improving access to and discoverability of digital public goods (DPGs<sup>5</sup>) is crucial.

Data as a DPG is vital, as the amount of data produced continues to grow exponentially with the data-driven digitalisation of socioeconomic activity. Data is critical to understanding current challenges, anticipating problems, building future resilience, and developing prospective solutions for organisations, governments, businesses, and civil society. Robust data governance guides best practices for responsible, ethical data innovations particularly in the context of leveraging interdependent data-driven digital technologies such as AI and machine learning (ML). A robust data governance framework is also an important component of enabling better quality and more granular data to achieve development goals, and ensure people's digital rights are protected through policy tools and frameworks that ensure just public data value creation and RAI.

- iv. **Human Centered, Multicultural RAI Ethics, and Values:** Development of AI technologies should adhere to human-centered ethical principles, including transparency, accountability, fairness, safety, and respect for human dignity and rights. They should be developed and deployed in a manner that maximizes the benefits to society while minimizing the risks and potential harms, particularly with regard to issues such as privacy, security, and bias.

Human-centered RAI ethics should prioritize the well-being and interests of human beings and their respective responsibilities as stewards of the earth. It also requires ensuring that AI systems do not reinforce existing biases or discriminate against certain groups of people, who face intersectional systemic marginalisation.

Multicultural ethics for AI acknowledges that different cultures may have different values and norms that need to be taken into account in the development and deployment of AI systems. This involves recognizing and respecting cultural diversity and understanding the potential impact of AI on different cultures, socioeconomic realities, and communities beyond the current dominant normative framework of values, technical standards, and governance frameworks that shape global dialogues

#### 4. Key Actions and Commitments

We recommend the following concrete action items in the GDC:

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<sup>5</sup> DPGs include not only open-source software, but open-source: content, artificial intelligence (AI) models, standards, and data.

- i. Create a **World Data and RAI Governance Institution**, a representative multilateral structure that is reflective of contemporary geopolitical realities is required to address threats from frontier and emerging technologies, growing wealth asymmetries, the disruptive role of non-state actors, and intensifying geopolitical competition. Significant efforts are needed to improve the coherence and consistency of various interdependent global systems to alter the architecture for global sustainable digital development, equitable economic growth, and shared prosperity from the data-driven digital economy.
- ii. Create a **Global RAI Governance Inclusive Framework** to facilitate the dialogue and governance on norms, technical standard-setting and legal frameworks for co-defining key RAI governance frameworks for digital sustainability in collaboration with standard setting entities, member states and private actors.

Formal action-oriented inclusive frameworks are required to ensure meaningful participation from diverse stakeholders for a truly global consensus on AI governance that is trustworthy, human rights-based, promotes peace, and supports sustainable economic development in a manner that reflects global interdependencies, various socioeconomic realities, and the rich diversity of our modern interdependent global society.

Create funding mechanisms, technical capacity building, and varied education programmes to strengthen capacity, skills and reflexivity needed to advance digital sustainability with the flexibility for signatories of the Inclusive Framework to contribute to global RAI governance that supports mechanisms to adapt RAI best practices to their contextual realities.

- iii. Support **RAI for Sustainable Digital Development**. Encourage strong commitment and strong alliances across state and non-state actors to enhance an unsiloed approach to, stimulate demand, technical standard setting and responsible investments in green digital infrastructures, products and services, and innovations that are contextually relevant to various socioeconomic realities.

As part of the *Coalition for Digital Environmental Sustainability (CODES)*, the DepHUB supports the CODES GDC Submission<sup>6</sup> to reorient resources towards applied digital innovations for sustainable development, and advance sustainable development to the forefront of a just digital transition.

- iv. Promote **Sustainable Open Source Innovations and Just Digital Public Goods**. Utilize data for advancing the common good, globally. Develop a public good framework for various data, including climate and environmental data to leverage sustainability assessments and global stock-taking. Leverage existing networks and technical standards to ensure DPGs are open and accessible to all, with no barriers to entry and can be adapted to various innovation ecosystems. Leveraging DPGs for local innovation ecosystems should be transparent, accountable, and their code should be publicly available for inspection and use to support data interoperability and RAI technologies developed as DPGs. Harmonise technical standards to utilise quality data for advancing a DPG framework. Specify guidelines and actions needed for just public data value creation, sustainable digital development, promoting DPGs, and to inform institutional updates within

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.sparkblue.org/codes-gdc-submission>

interdisciplinary mandates with cross-cutting policies, research agendas, and legislative frameworks at local, national, and global levels.

- v. **Develop Financing Mechanisms to Advance Sustainable RAI Solutions.** Developing financing mechanisms to advance sustainable RAI solutions requires a coordinated effort amongst different stakeholders and a commitment to promoting sustainability and RAI practices. As part of the Global RAI Governance Inclusive Framework, a decentralized, innovative financing mechanisms like crowdfunding, micropayments or payments for ecosystem services can be developed through the new recommended World Data and RAI Governance Institution. This can facilitate harmonization, adoption, and monitoring of financial reporting standards that promote sustainable investments for a just green-digital twin transition.

Establish funding opportunities, such as grants, loans, and venture capital, that prioritize sustainable RAI initiatives to incentivize investment in RAI initiatives that promote sustainability and RAI practices. Leverage existing funding mechanisms, such as public-private partnerships, impact investing, and crowdfunding, to support sustainable RAI initiatives to increase the resources available for sustainable RAI and broaden the range of stakeholders involved in financing RAI initiatives. Monitor and evaluate the impact of financing mechanisms on the development and deployment of sustainable RAI solutions to identify best practices and areas for improvement to ensure that sustainable RAI financing mechanisms are achieving their intended goals.

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## 5. Signatories

**Maha Jouini on behalf of the African Center for AI and Digital Technology ( ACAIT). Nouakchott Mauritania .**

**Angella Ndaka on behalf of The Centre for African Epistemic Justice(CAEJ). Nairobi, Kenya.**

**Michael Zimba representing African Union High-Level Panel on Emerging Technologies (APET)**