Our Digital Future
Principles and Policies to Build Artificial Intelligence Responsibly from Research to Practice

Summary of Workshop II hosted at the African IGF
19 July 2021 | 16:10-17:10 CAT

Driven by the call in the UN Decade of Action to work together to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), this workshop engaged stakeholders of different professional and regional backgrounds in a dialogue focusing on ways to enable people to benefit from AI technologies. The workshop was organised jointly by the IGF and Microsoft. It was moderated by Anja Gengo of the former organisation and Daniel Akinmade Emejulu of the latter. Microsoft's Max Scott acted as rapporteur. The discussion was inspired by the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG 9 (*build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation*) and SDG 16 (*promote just peaceful and inclusive societies).*

In a vibrant discussion, participants exchanged views on the promises and challenges of responsible AI globally, with a special focus on Africa. The conversation covered responsible AI in a number of different sectors: agriculture, healthcare, public services and finance.

Below is a summary of the workshop discussion:

Ms. Emanuela Girardi, Founder at Pop AI, AI expert at MiSE, Board Member of AIxIA, Board Member of Adra

What potential does AI have for sustainable development globally and specifically for Africa?

Ms. Girardi emphasized the potential AI technologies have for achieving sustainable development and addressed existing security and human rights concerns (as well as others) regarding their deployment. Noting the need for an effective policy framework, she recognized the UNESCO-adopted agreement that defines common principles and values for healthy AI development and use.

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In an open exchange with the participants, some noted that African stakeholders need to invest more in developing good policies for healthy AI. The importance of education must also not be understated, not only because a better understanding of AI issues will assist in the process of developing regulation but because it will also ensure appropriate workforce development and prepare economies for the future.

Mr. Owen Larter
Director of Public Policy
Office of Responsible AI at
Microsoft

Ms. Hiwot Tesfaye
Technical Advisor
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Microsoft

Overview of the existing and potential harms AI-based technology can have on people if not backed with responsible principles and policy.

The speakers opened their remarks by recognizing that even the simplest AI solutions can help perpetuate paradigms and inequities, which has triggered the growth of research focused on AI harms and inequity that draws a parallel between historical colonialism and the way technology can be used to export the values of advanced economies worldwide. For example, Microsoft's Office of Responsible AI (ORA) operates on a hub and spoke model for responsible AI and collaborates closely with teams in engineering and Microsoft's Aether committee to operationalize our efforts on responsible AI. Furthermore, the importance of a local level was recognized by noting that it is critical to understand responsible AI in the local and regional contexts where these technologies are being deployed.

The importance of trust was also discussed. The speakers underlined that trust must exist where AI technologies are deployed. In an open exchange with other participants, some recognized Egypt as an example of good practice with respect to working on smart AI policy.

Finally, participants discussed the value of the impact assessment framework, noting that it could help to better understand the impact AI technologies have on people. As an example on an existing practice, the Responsible AI Impact Assessment Guide from June 2022 was referneced.

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