

Reforming data regulation to advance AI governance in Africa

CHINASA OKOLO

Fellow, Center
for Technology
Innovation,
Governance Studies,
Brookings Institution
[@ChinasaTOkolo](#)

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As artificial intelligence (AI) development accelerates globally and concerns regarding its use grow, the need for AI governance has reached an unprecedented level of urgency. With only seven African nations ([Benin](#), [Egypt](#), [Ghana](#), [Mauritius](#), [Rwanda](#), [Senegal](#), and [Tunisia](#)) having drafted national AI strategies and none implementing formal AI regulation, substantial efforts are required to advance AI regulatory frameworks on the African continent.³⁴ It is also crucial to recognize that data plays a fundamental role in AI development and warrants regulation. Approximately [36 out of 54 African countries](#) have established formal data protection regulations, offering a potential foundation upon which robust AI legislation can be constructed.³⁵ To bolster AI governance initiatives, African nations should consider data governance as a viable pathway toward regulating AI, facilitating its responsible utilization and development as this transformative technology continues to evolve.

Data protection regulation, such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), has laid a strong foundation for the EU to develop and draft the EU AI Act, which is expected to be fully implemented by 2026.³⁶ However, the advent of large language models and the increasing utilization of data workers have changed prevalent narratives around the production and use of data. Given these new complexities, existing data governance initiatives within Africa must be revamped to comprehensively cover aspects such as data quality, privacy, responsible data sharing, compliance, transparency, and labor protections for data workers. Additionally, African countries have context-specific challenges that differ significantly from those within the West, highlighting a need to understand how to develop culturally aligned and feasible governance solutions.³⁷ By balancing [lessons from the recent ratification of the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection \(Malabo Convention\)](#) and advancing research on regional and country-specific needs, African nations can work toward data policies that serve the needs of African governments, companies, and consumers.³⁸

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