

IMPACT REPORT

AI Policy Summer School

South Africa

17 – 18 February 2026 | University of Cape Town, South Africa
Day 1: Virtual (Zoom) | Day 2: In-Person, Cape Town

Strengthening Multidisciplinary Capacity for Responsible AI Governance in Africa

Bridging Global AI Policy Frameworks with African Realities

Organised by Lawyers Hub | In Partnership with UCT, Research ICT Africa & DGRU

Supported by the Patrick J. McGovern Foundation

Prepared for Donors & Strategic Partners

Executive Summary

The AI Policy Summer School – South Africa, convened on 17–18 February 2026 at the University of Cape Town, marked a significant milestone in African AI governance capacity building. Delivered in a hybrid format — Day 1 virtual across the continent, Day 2 in-person in Cape Town — the programme brought together an unprecedented coalition of policymakers, regulators, jurists, academics, technologists, and civil society leaders to engage critically with the governance challenges posed by artificial intelligence.

The numbers speak to exceptional reach: 750 registered attendees from more than 10 countries, representing 613 unique organisations spanning national governments, judiciaries, diplomatic missions, universities, and the private sector. This is not merely an academic gathering — it is a convening of the decision-makers and implementers who will shape how Africa regulates AI for decades to come.

Made possible with the generous support of the Patrick J. McGovern Foundation, and delivered in partnership with the University of Cape Town, Research ICT Africa, and the Democratic Governance & Rights Unit (DGRU), the programme produced concrete outcomes: an interactive workshop mapping regional AI policy priorities, a fireside conversation on Africa's next steps, and the deepening of the pan-African AI governance network established at prior Lawyers Hub convenings.

This report presents the programme's reach, content, participant profile, and emerging outcomes, providing donors and strategic partners with a comprehensive account of the event's impact and the path ahead.

Programme at a Glance

Key Statistics



About the Programme

Background & Objectives

The AI Policy Summer School is Lawyers Hub's flagship continental AI governance capacity programme. The South Africa edition — hosted at one of the continent's leading universities — was designed to address a critical and urgent challenge: Africa is already being shaped by AI systems, yet most of the region's legal, regulatory, and governance institutions lack the structured knowledge and frameworks to respond effectively.

The programme pursued four interconnected objectives:

- Strengthen multidisciplinary understanding of AI risks, opportunities, and governance frameworks across legal, policy, judicial, and technical communities.
- Bridge global AI policy frameworks — including the EU AI Act, US approaches, Chinese models, AU AI Strategy, and UNESCO recommendations — with the specific realities of African jurisdictions.
- Foster actionable regional collaboration by convening implementation actors: ministries, competition authorities, courts, and diplomatic missions alongside academia and civil society.
- Advance rights-respecting, inclusive, and development-oriented AI policy by engaging the continent's leading voices in responsible AI, digital rights, and democratic governance.

The Summer School seeks to bridge global AI policy frameworks with African realities, foster regional collaboration, and support actionable pathways for implementing rights-respecting, inclusive, and development-oriented AI policies across the continent.

— Programme Mission Statement, Lawyers Hub / UCT

Strategic Context

Why This Matters Now

Africa is at a pivotal inflection point for AI governance. Across the continent, AI systems are already influencing credit decisions, health diagnoses, judicial processes, policing, and democratic discourse — often without adequate regulatory oversight or institutional understanding of the risks involved. At the same time, the African Union has released a continental AI Strategy, and individual nations are developing or revising national AI policies.

The gap between global AI governance frameworks and African institutional capacity is significant and widening. Most African policymakers, regulators, and legal practitioners have had limited structured exposure to AI governance — not because of lack of interest, but because accessible, practitioner-focused, Africa-relevant programming has been scarce.

253

South African Attendees

33.7% of total — largest single-country representation

49

PhD Students

Representing Africa's next generation of AI researchers and policy thinkers

6

Judges Represented

Judiciary directly engaged with AI implications for law and evidence

613

Unique Organisations

Demonstrating programme reach far beyond academic networks

Participant Reach & Diversity

Who Attended

The Summer School attracted 750 participants — an exceptional figure for a specialised AI governance programme — from more than 10 countries. The geographic spread reflects genuine pan-African reach, with strong representation from across Southern Africa alongside significant international and diaspora participation.

Geographic Distribution

Country	Attendees	% of Total
South Africa	253	33.7%
Zimbabwe	22	2.9%
Malawi	17	2.3%
Botswana	15	2.0%
Zambia	13	1.7%
Lesotho	11	1.5%
Namibia	10	1.3%
Mozambique	4	0.5%
Eswatini	3	0.4%
International / Other (East, North & West Africa + Diaspora)	402	53.6%
TOTAL	750	100%

Note: 'International / Other' includes attendees from outside the Southern Africa region — East, North & West Africa and diaspora representation, reflecting the programme's continental convening power.

Attendance by Professional Sector

The sectoral breakdown demonstrates meaningful multi-stakeholder engagement — across the exact communities that must collaborate to produce sound AI governance:

Sector	Attendees	% of Total
Private Sector & Other Professional	374	49.9%
Academia & Research	179	23.9%
Legal Profession	160	21.3%
Government & Policy	26	3.5%
Civil Society & NGO	11	1.5%
TOTAL	750	100%

Note: 'Private Sector & Other Professional' includes business, consulting, technology and roles not captured by other categories.

Notable Roles & Seniority

Category	Representative Roles
Academia	49 PhD Students, 19 Lecturers, 11 Researchers, 4 Assistant Lecturers, 3 Professors
Legal & Judiciary	9 Advocates, 8 Lawyers, 7 State Attorneys, 11 Legal Officers, 6 Judges
Leadership & Seniority	6 CEOs, 13 Directors, 6 Founders, 6 Managing Partners, 5 Executive Directors

High-Impact Stakeholder Engagement

Policy-Makers, Regulators & Diplomats

A defining feature of the South Africa edition was the direct engagement of implementation actors — the institutions and individuals with the mandate and authority to translate AI governance principles into law, regulation, and practice. The presence of these stakeholders elevates the programme beyond a learning event into a genuine policy influencing platform.

Continental & Intergovernmental	National Government	Diplomatic & Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> African Union Commission AU AI Working Group African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dept. of Communications & Digital Technologies (SA) Amhara National Regional State Justice & Law Institute (Ethiopia) Competition Commission of South Africa Ethics & Anti-Corruption Commission (Kenya) Cyber Security Authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> British High Commission – South Africa Embassy of Ireland (Pretoria) German Development Cooperation – GIZ Kenya

Programme Content

Curriculum — Day 1: Foundations & Context (Virtual)

Day 1 was delivered virtually, enabling pan-African participation without geographic barriers. Sessions built from foundational AI concepts through to comparative policy analysis, South African-specific governance challenges, and responsible AI principles — equipping participants with the conceptual vocabulary and policy frameworks needed for Day 2's deeper engagement.

Time	Session	Speaker(s)
9:30 – 9:40 am	Opening Remarks	Linda Bonyo – CEO, Lawyers Hub
9:40 – 10:00 am	Keynote: Africa's Vision for AI — Governance, Sovereignty and Continental Leadership	Ambassador Lavina Ramkissoon – Technology Diplomat (Advisory), AU
10:00 – 11:00 am	Session 2: Policy Frameworks – Comparative Analysis: EU AI Act, US, Chinese Models, AU AI Strategy, National Strategies & International Trends	Dr Tobias Schonwetter (UCT) & Prof Carys Craig (Osgoode Hall, Toronto)
11:20 am – 12:20 pm	Session 3: The AI Landscape in South Africa — Policy Development and Governance Challenges	Dr Scott Timcke – Senior Research Associate, Research ICT Africa
12:20 – 1:10 pm	Session 4: Responsible AI — Safety, Accountability, and Human Rights	Hlengiwe Dube (Digital Rights Expert) & Dirk Brand (AI Ethics & Law)

Programme Content

Curriculum — Day 2: Deep Dives, Workshop & Next Steps (In-Person, UCT)

Day 2 moved to in-person format at UCT, shifting from expert-led presentations to interactive engagement — an applied workshop on regional AI policy priorities, a judicial governance deep dive, and a high-level fireside conversation on Africa's next steps in AI policy implementation.

Time	Session	Speaker(s)
9:30 – 10:15 am	Session 1: Legal Issues of AI	Dr. Andrew Rens – Research ICT Africa
10:15 – 11:00 am	Session 2: Electronic Evidence in the Age of AI — Deepfakes & AI-Generated Evidence	Justice Dr. Adam Mambi – Judge
11:20 am – 12:00 pm	Session 3: Just AI Framework Evaluations of AI Strategies in Africa; Judicial Governance and AI Regulation	Tshepiso Hadebe (RIA); Dr Joelle Barnes & Dr Mathilda Twomey-Woods (JIFA, UCT)
12:00 – 12:45 pm	Session 4: AI, Democracy and Digital Governance in Africa	Hanani Hlomani – TechLaw Strategist

Time	Session	Speaker(s)
1:30 – 2:20 pm	Interactive Workshop: Identifying Regional AI Policy Priorities	Dr. Andrew Rens – Research ICT Africa
2:20 – 3:00 pm	Expert Presentation: Cross-Border AI Governance — Data, Sovereignty & Regional Cooperation	Alison Tilley – Judges Matters
3:00 – 3:45 pm	Fireside Chat: From Principles to Practice — Implementing AI Policy in Africa & Charting Africa's Next Steps	Dennis Ramphomane (AU AI Working Group) & Dr More Ickson Manda (Director, National Cyber Infrastructure)
3:45 – 4:00 pm	Closing Ceremony	Lawyers Hub / UCT / Research ICT Africa & DGRU

Expert Faculty & Speakers

The programme convened an exceptional faculty spanning international AI law, African governance, digital rights, judicial expertise, cybersecurity, and technology diplomacy:

Speaker	Role	Organisation
Ambassador Lavina Ramkissoon	<i>Technology Diplomat (Advisory)</i>	African Union
Linda Bonyo	<i>CEO & Founder</i>	Lawyers Hub
Dr Tobias Schonwetter	<i>Associate Professor</i>	University of Cape Town
Prof Carys Craig	<i>Professor of Law</i>	Osgoode Hall, York University, Toronto
Dr Scott Timcke	<i>Senior Research Associate</i>	Research ICT Africa
Hlengiwe Dube	<i>Digital Rights Expert</i>	Independent
Dirk Brand	<i>Legal Consultant – AI Ethics, Law & Data Protection</i>	Independent
Dr. Andrew Rens	<i>AI Law & Policy Researcher</i>	Research ICT Africa
Justice Dr. Adam Mambi	<i>Judge</i>	Judiciary
Tshepiso Hadebe	<i>Researcher</i>	Research ICT Africa (RIA)
Dr Joelle Barnes	<i>Researcher – JIFA</i>	University of Cape Town
Dr Mathilda Twomey-Woods	<i>Researcher – JIFA</i>	University of Cape Town
Hanani Hlomani	<i>TechLaw Strategist</i>	Independent
Alison Tilley	<i>Governance Expert</i>	Judges Matters
Dennis Ramphomane	<i>Senior Policy Expert</i>	AU AI Working Group

Speaker	Role	Organisation
Dr. More Ickson Manda	<i>Director – National Cyber Infrastructure System</i>	Government of South Africa

Impact & Outcomes

The AI Policy Summer School – South Africa generated both concrete, measurable outcomes and important longer-term shifts in African AI governance capacity:

Immediate Programme Outputs

- ✓ 750 professionals from 10+ countries received structured, expert-led exposure to AI governance frameworks, including the EU AI Act, AU AI Strategy, and rights-based AI principles.
- ✓ An applied regional AI policy priorities workshop produced a mapped, participant-generated picture of Africa's most urgent AI governance needs, with policy brief development to follow.
- ✓ Direct engagement of implementation actors — judges, competition regulators, cybersecurity authorities, and diplomatic missions — ensures learning is connected to institutions with the power to act.
- ✓ UCT strengthened as a continental anchor institution for AI law and policy education, attracting participants from across Africa and the diaspora.
- ✓ Research ICT Africa's 'Just AI' framework was presented and discussed, advancing evidence-based evaluation of AI strategies across the continent.
- ✓ The Pan-African AI Policy Network — initiated at the West Africa Summer School — was further deepened and extended through new Southern African connections.

Broader Strategic Impact

- ✓ Judicial engagement at scale: with 6 judges in attendance and dedicated sessions on AI and electronic evidence, the programme is actively shaping how Africa's courts will approach AI-related legal questions.
- ✓ Cross-border AI governance: the focus on data sovereignty and regional cooperation is directly relevant to ongoing policy negotiations within SADC, the AU, and bilateral agreements.
- ✓ Next-generation capacity: 49 PhD students engaged with AI governance frameworks, building a pipeline of Africa-based AI policy researchers.
- ✓ Francophone-Anglophone bridge: international participation from across the continent continues to build the cross-linguistic policy community needed for coherent African AI governance.

The programme engaged directly with policy and regulatory stakeholders including the African Union Commission, national ministries, competition authorities, anti-corruption agencies, cybersecurity regulators, courts, prosecutorial offices, and diplomatic missions — demonstrating its relevance to real-world regulatory development.

— Attendance Statistics Report, AI Policy Summer School South Africa 2026

Strategic Partners & Funders

The South Africa edition was made possible through the collaboration of leading institutions committed to advancing AI governance on the continent:

Partner	Role & Contribution
Patrick J. McGovern Foundation	Lead Funder – enabling the programme's reach and depth across the continent.
University of Cape Town (UCT)	Host Institution – providing academic credibility, venue, and faculty including the Faculty of Law and JIFA.
Research ICT Africa (RIA)	Knowledge Partner – leading sessions on AI landscape, legal issues, Just AI framework, regional policy workshop, and cross-border governance.
Democratic Governance & Rights Unit – UCT (DGRU)	Rights & Governance Partner – ensuring the programme's grounding in constitutional, rights-based AI governance principles.
Lawyers Hub	Convening Organisation – programme design, faculty coordination, participant mobilisation, and network building.

Looking Ahead

Pathway to Sustained Impact

The South Africa Summer School is the second edition of Lawyers Hub's continental AI governance capacity programme, following the West Africa edition in November 2025. It demonstrates a proven model that works: high-quality faculty, multi-stakeholder convening, and structured outputs that connect learning to policy action. The next phase of the programme will build on this foundation:

- Publication of the Regional AI Policy Priorities Brief, distilling the outputs of the Day 2 interactive workshop into actionable policy recommendations for African governments.
- Expansion of the Pan-African AI Policy Network to include Southern African members and working groups aligned to the AU AI Strategy pillars.
- East Africa Edition – a third Summer School convening, extending the programme's geographic reach to Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, and the broader East African Community.
- Development of a Judicial AI Literacy curriculum, building on the strong judicial representation and interest in AI and electronic evidence issues.
- Engagement with the AU AI Working Group (represented at this edition) to integrate Summer School outputs into continental AI strategy processes.
- A digital learning platform offering ongoing access to programme content, faculty, and peer networks for alumni across all editions.

Partnership & Funding Opportunities

The AI Policy Summer School has established a proven, scalable model for continental AI governance capacity building — with demonstrated demand, exceptional participant quality, and tangible policy outputs. With continued and expanded donor support, Lawyers Hub and its partners are positioned to deepen the programme's reach and impact significantly.

Investment Area	Expected Outcome
East Africa Summer School – 2026	1,000+ participants; engagement of Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania policy communities; regional AI priorities brief.
Pan-African AI Policy Network Secretariat	Operational cross-continental network; working groups; annual summit; policy briefs submitted to AU.
Judicial AI Literacy Programme	Structured curriculum for African judges, prosecutors and legal officers on AI, evidence, and constitutional principles.
Digital Learning Platform	Ongoing access to faculty, content and peer networks for 2,000+ Summer School alumni across Africa.
Research & Policy Advocacy	Africa-focused AI governance research; submissions to AU and SADC processes; Just AI framework expansion.

About the Organising Partners

Lawyers Hub is a pan-African legal innovation organisation dedicated to building the capacity of African lawyers, policymakers, and legal institutions to engage with emerging technologies and governance challenges. Founded by Linda Bonyo, Lawyers Hub convenes practitioners, scholars, and institutions to advance evidence-based legal reform and AI governance capacity building across the continent. www.aipolicy.africa

University of Cape Town (UCT) Faculty of Law is home to world-leading research and teaching in law, including the Democratic Governance & Rights Unit and the Judicial Institute for Africa (JIFA). UCT is one of Africa's leading research universities and a convening hub for continental legal scholarship.

Research ICT Africa (RIA) is Africa's leading ICT policy research organisation. RIA provides evidence-based research to inform African ICT policy and regulatory frameworks and is the home of the Just AI Framework for evaluating AI governance in Africa.

To discuss partnership and funding opportunities, contact Lawyers Hub

www.aipolicy.africa

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