



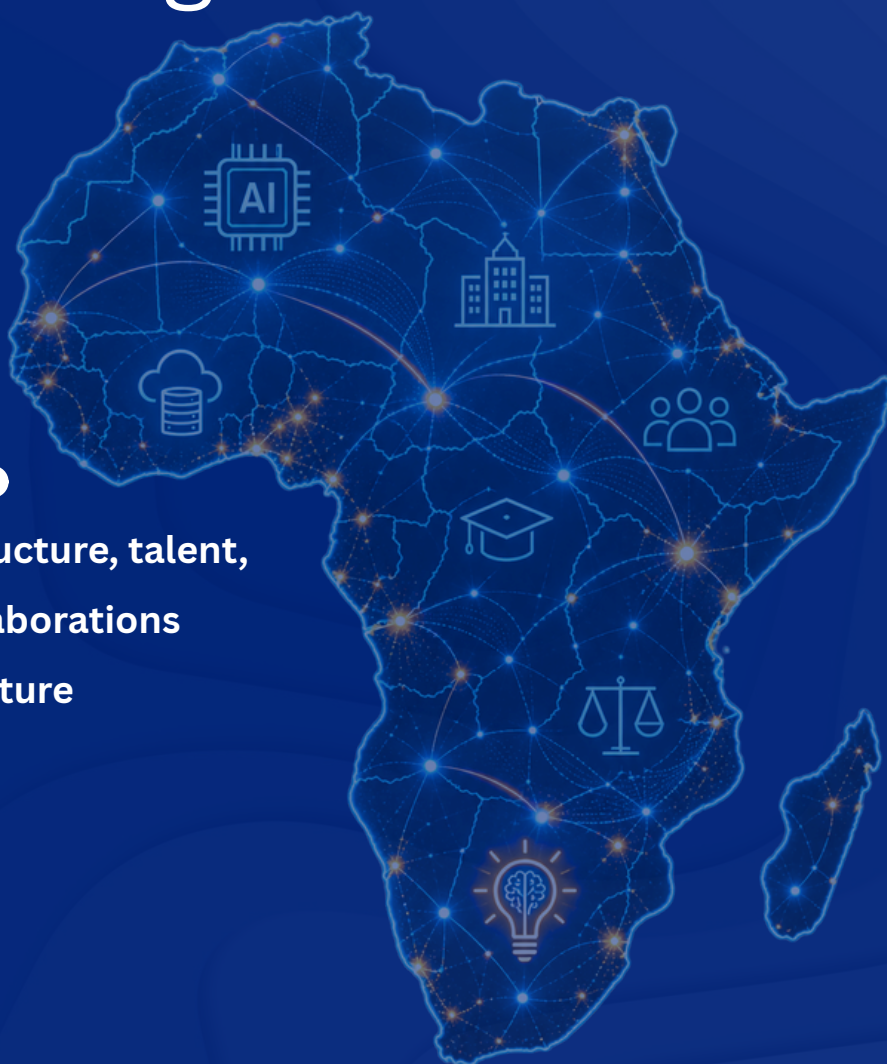
Convergence

Africa's AI Ecosystem

in the making

2026

Mapping the infrastructure, talent,
governance and collaborations
shaping Africa's AI future





ABOUT US

At ConvergenceAI, we are dedicated to fostering the adoption of AI in Africa, mainly for economic growth and transformation through innovation, research and development, advising policies, and collaboration with key stakeholders. We aim to utilize AI as a catalyst for holistic growth and economic transformation on the continent.

This report was gathered through desk research and analysis of various African initiatives using data from the [ConvergenceAI Data Intelligence platform](#).

Website: www.convergenceai.io

Email: info@convergenceai.io

Address:

Nigeria: 6, Adewale Kuku, Gbagada, Lagos.

United Kingdom: Parsonage Rd, Manchester, England. M28 3SD

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Executive Summary

Artificial Intelligence is reshaping economies, industries, and societies worldwide, and Africa is building its place in that shift. Governments are publishing national AI strategies, universities are expanding AI education, startups and innovators are deploying AI-enabled solutions, and investments in digital infrastructure continue to grow. Africa's AI progress is mostly measured through AI readiness indices that benchmark countries against the methodologies of these frameworks. These assessments answer a useful question: how far a country sits from defined benchmarks.

This report asks a complementary question: **how are African countries' AI ecosystems actually taking shape?** Drawing on ongoing data from the [ConvergenceAI Data Intelligence Platform](#), it maps who is building these ecosystems, where activity concentrates, and how the enabling pillars of infrastructure, talent, and governance are developing, revealing a landscape best understood as an ecosystem in the making.

The scale of that formation is now measurable. The platform at the time of this report has documented:



355+

AI-enabling infrastructure facilities



210+

AI capacity-building initiatives



94+

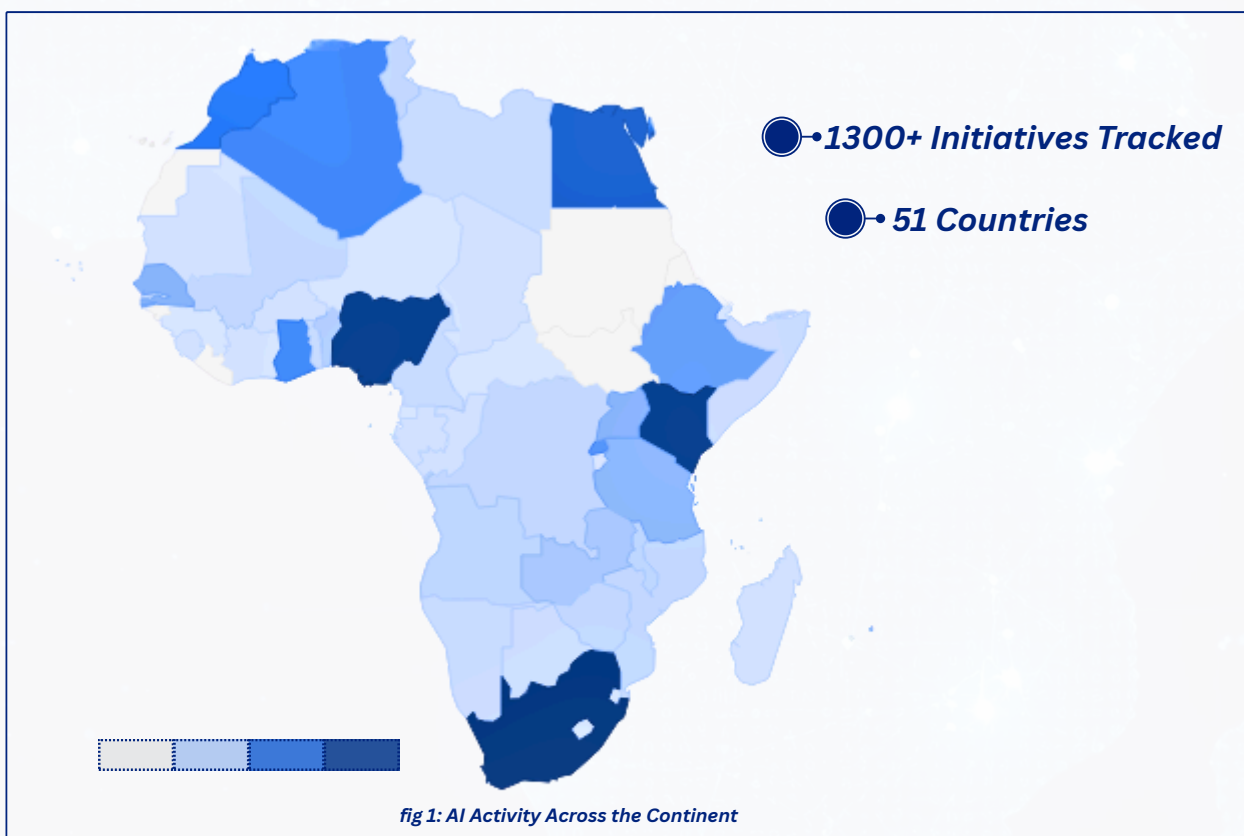
AI/Data Protection policies/strategies



53+

Dedicated Governance Institutions

Four findings stand out. Much of Africa's AI infrastructure is being adapted from existing digital assets rather than built from scratch; telecommunication facilities, enterprise data centers, and innovation hubs are becoming AI infrastructure. Talent development appears to be outpacing local compute: universities and training programs are expanding faster than the infrastructure and industry that would absorb their graduates. Governance is arriving early: many countries are establishing strategies, sectoral rules, and dedicated institutions at an early stage of market development, inverting the sequence seen in mature ecosystems where regulation typically follows the market. And there is no single model: some countries lead with governance, others with education, others with startup ecosystems, different pathways, all in motion.



These patterns are visible when perceived through the lens of ***how its ecosystem is forming***.

AI Sovereignty

Discussions of AI development have increasingly centered on the concept of AI sovereignty: the ability of countries to shape, govern, and benefit from AI systems in ways that align with their own economic priorities, development plans, public interests, and societal values. Alongside this concept, a range of AI readiness and responsible-AI frameworks have emerged to assess how prepared countries are to participate in the AI economy. These frameworks evaluate multiple dimensions of national AI ecosystems, including digital infrastructure, scientific and educational capacity, legal and regulatory frameworks, investment ecosystems, data availability, and workforce capabilities.

This work has been foundational. Readiness and responsible-AI indices establish a rigorous, comparable evidence base for AI governance and capability across the continent, make national gaps visible to policymakers and funders, and set the standards against which progress can now be measured. They answer an essential question: how does a country compare against established benchmarks of AI maturity? This report builds on that foundation by asking a complementary one:

how are African AI ecosystems actually forming?

A formation lens looks at the landscape from a different angle, focusing on what is already taking shape and how it is moving. For many African countries, this view is particularly revealing, because their ecosystems are developing in distinct ways. Startups are deploying AI solutions while national strategies are still being drafted; governments are training civil servants before specialized compute arrives; universities are producing AI graduates faster than local infrastructure can absorb them. None of this fits a model in which each enabling condition must be in place before the next can develop, and seeing it clearly requires a lens built for formation.

This report therefore approaches Africa's AI landscape as an ecosystem in formation: one in which multiple components evolve simultaneously, often at different speeds and in response to one another. Read this way, the picture is of ecosystems taking shape along different pathways, each with its own sequence, strengths, and emerging gaps.

Understanding African AI development in this way reframes the analytical question. Alongside asking how ready a country is, it becomes useful to ask how the different parts of its AI ecosystem are evolving, how they interact, and where imbalances between them create opportunities or constraints.

This perspective also broadens the interpretation of AI sovereignty. Sovereignty is not only the existence of national regulations or ownership of advanced computing infrastructure. It emerges through a country's growing capacity to develop local expertise, shape governance approaches, cultivate innovation ecosystems, invest in critical infrastructure, and participate meaningfully in the global AI economy- capacities that develop together rather than in a fixed order.

Seen as dynamic systems in formation, AI ecosystems come into clearer view. This lens acknowledges uneven development without classifying countries as unready, and it captures the interactions between institutions, markets, researchers, entrepreneurs, and governments that collectively shape AI adoption across the continent. These interactions are what the sections ahead examine.

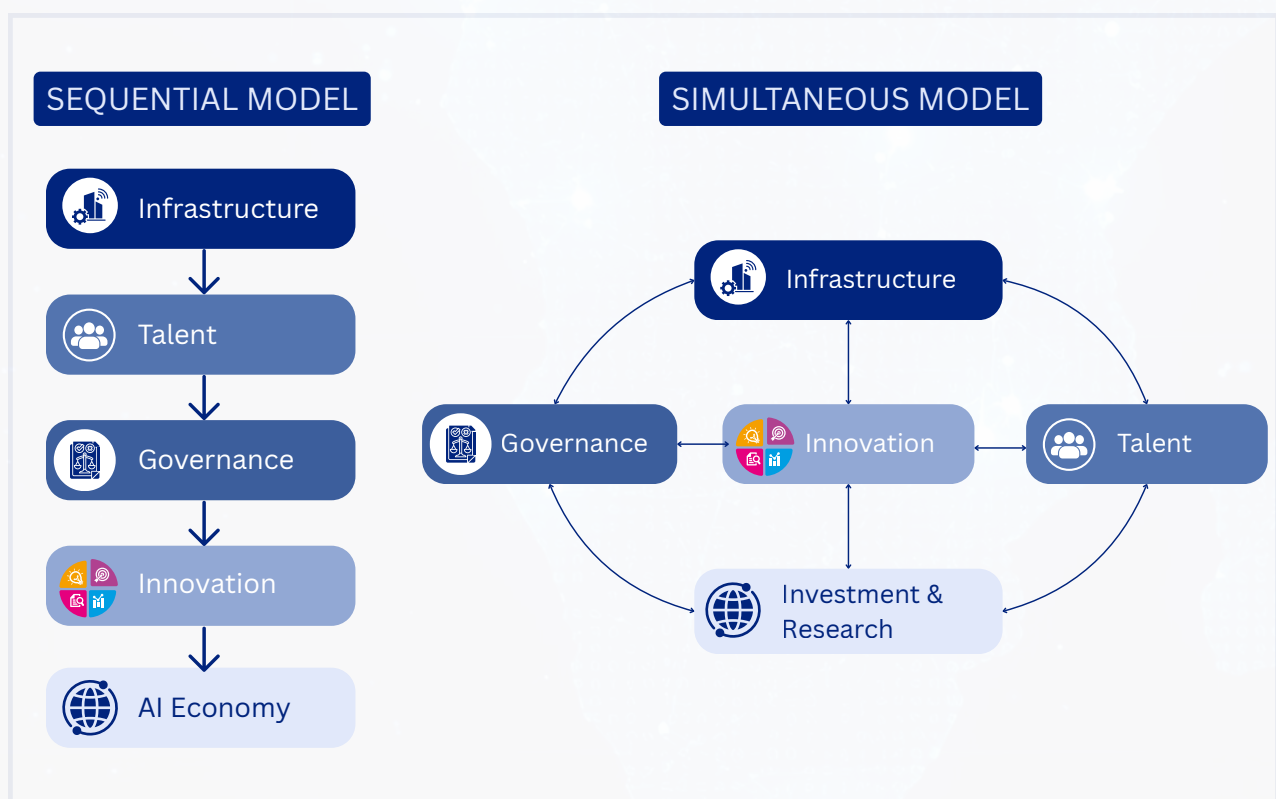


fig 2: Sequential vs Simultaneous Model

Mapping the Ecosystem

The convergence of multiple stakeholders has defined the continent's AI ecosystem. Governments, universities, startups, multinational technology companies, research institutions, investors, and development partners are contributing to a growing network of AI activity. The scale and maturity of these activities vary significantly between countries, but the collective picture is of an ecosystem becoming broader, more interconnected, and increasingly diverse.

Who is building?

Data from the ConvergenceAI Data Intelligence Platform captures 4 actors (**the public sector, private sector, Academia, and non-profit organizations**, including partnerships such as public/private, private/academia, and public/academia) and initiatives across African countries, spanning 4 categories: 'AI/data and sectoral regulation', 'AI Innovations', 'AI Infrastructure', and 'AI capacity building.'

Distribution of who is building

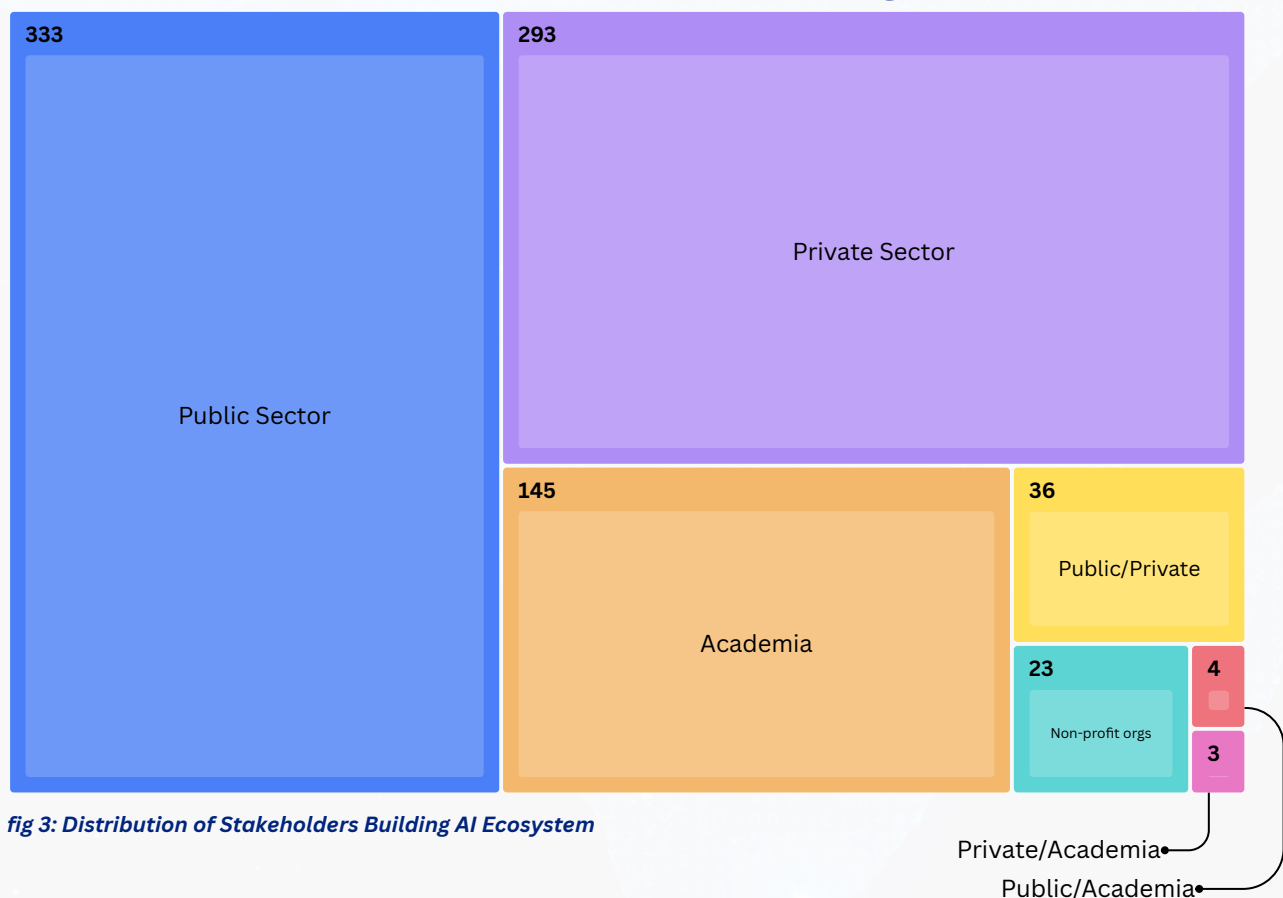


fig 3: Distribution of Stakeholders Building AI Ecosystem

Contribution of Different Actors Towards the Ecosystem

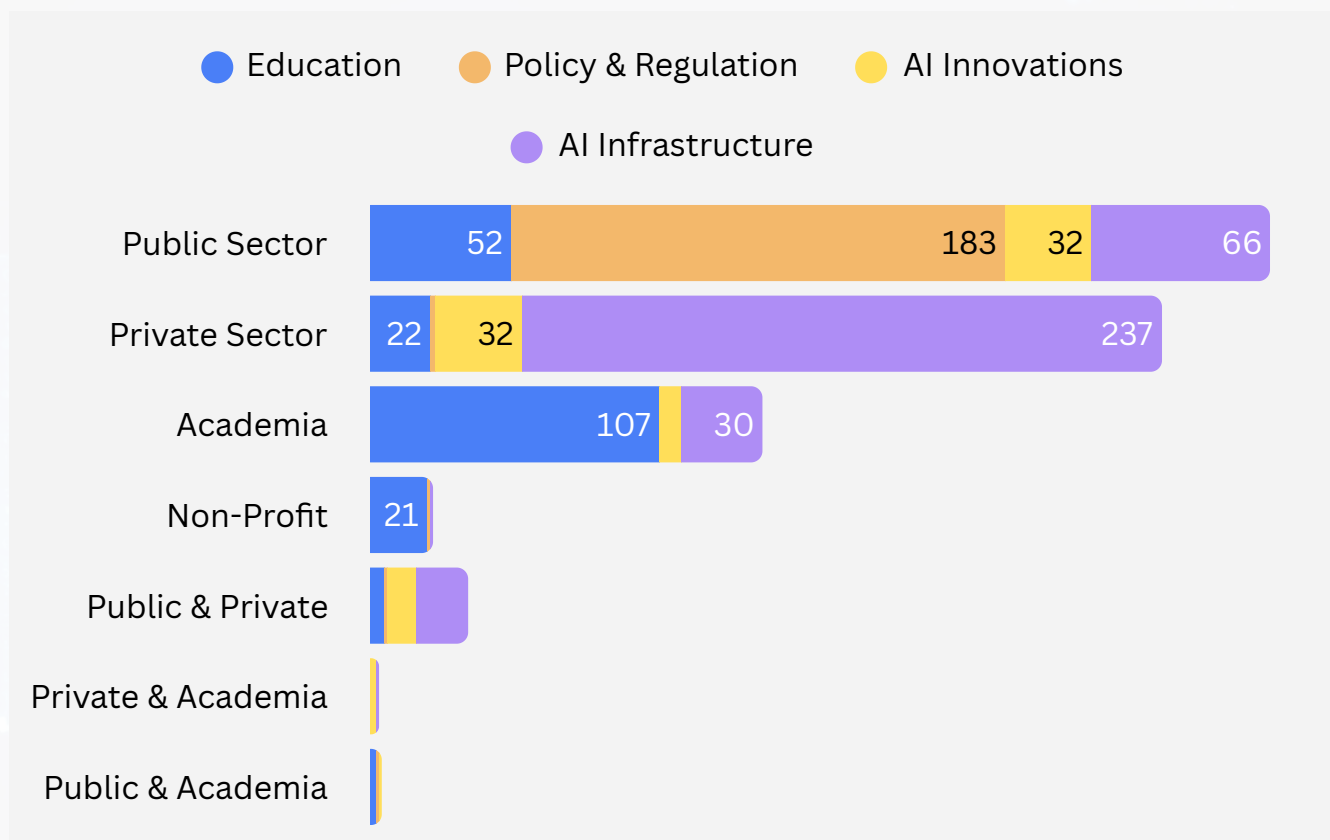


fig 4: Contributions of Different Actors Towards AI Growth.

As the body responsible for national policy, the public sector naturally leads in policy and regulation, accounting for 97.3% of all initiatives in this area. The remaining 2.7% is distributed between the private sector, non-profit organizations, and academia, contributing mainly in education, finance, broadcasting and telecommunication, and justice & legal services. This distribution reflects the public sector's central mandate in setting rules, while pointing to room for deeper participation from other stakeholders whose expertise can strengthen the technical grounding and legitimacy of emerging frameworks. In **AI infrastructure**, the private sector is the dominant contributor, leading **66.9%** of initiatives, followed by the public sector at 18.6%, underscoring the private sector's central role in building Africa's AI infrastructure. Academia plays a pivotal role in capacity building, contributing 51.2% of all education initiatives, making it the primary driver of AI skills development across the continent.

Where activity concentrates

Geographically, AI activity remains concentrated in several countries, i.e., South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Morocco, and Egypt, but is visibly dispersing. Beneath this top tier, however, the data shows meaningful and accelerating activity in other emerging hubs e.g., Ghana, Ethiopia, Algeria, and Senegal), driven by support from the public and private sectors.

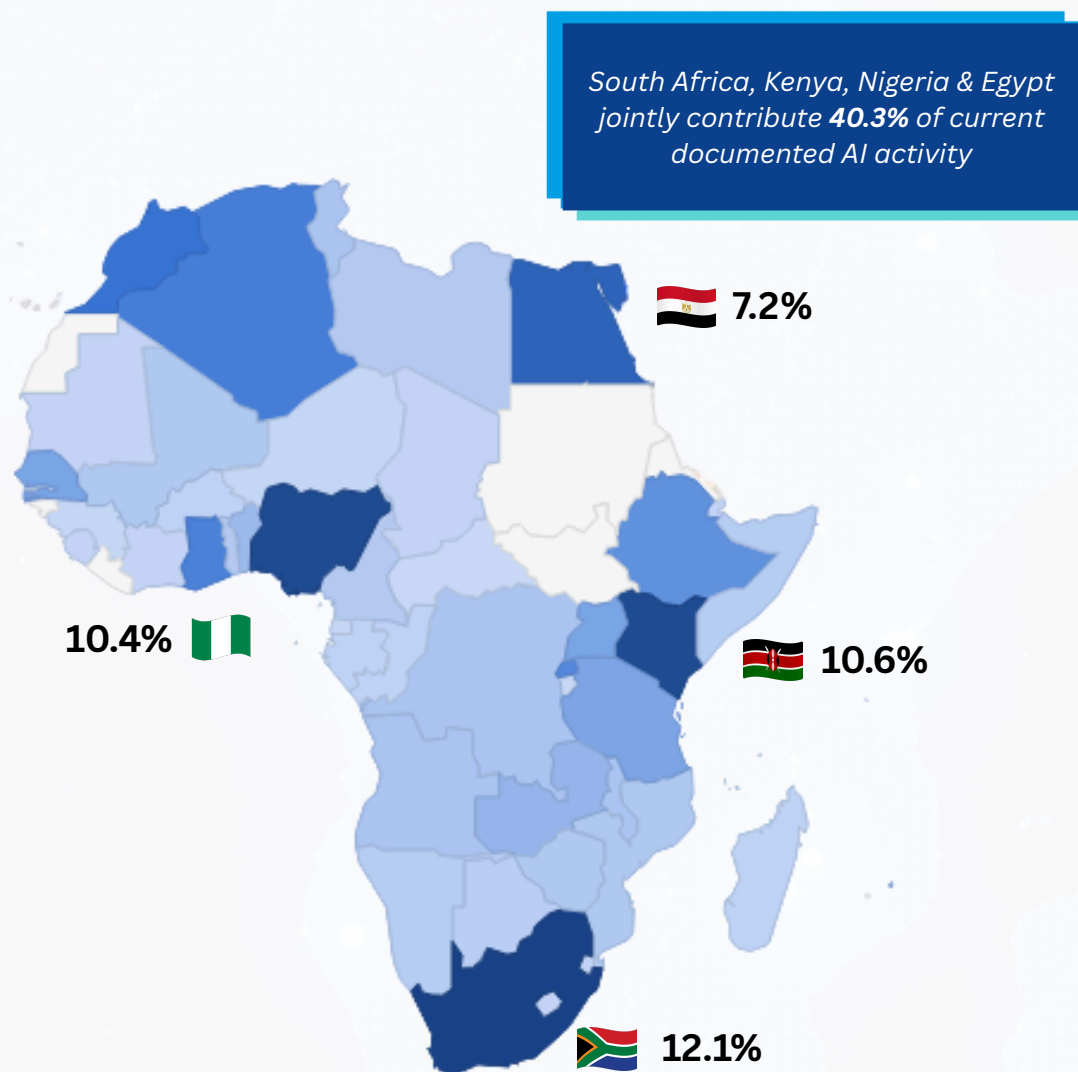


fig 5: Geographical Heatmap of AI Activity Across Africa

The Building Pillars of AI in Africa

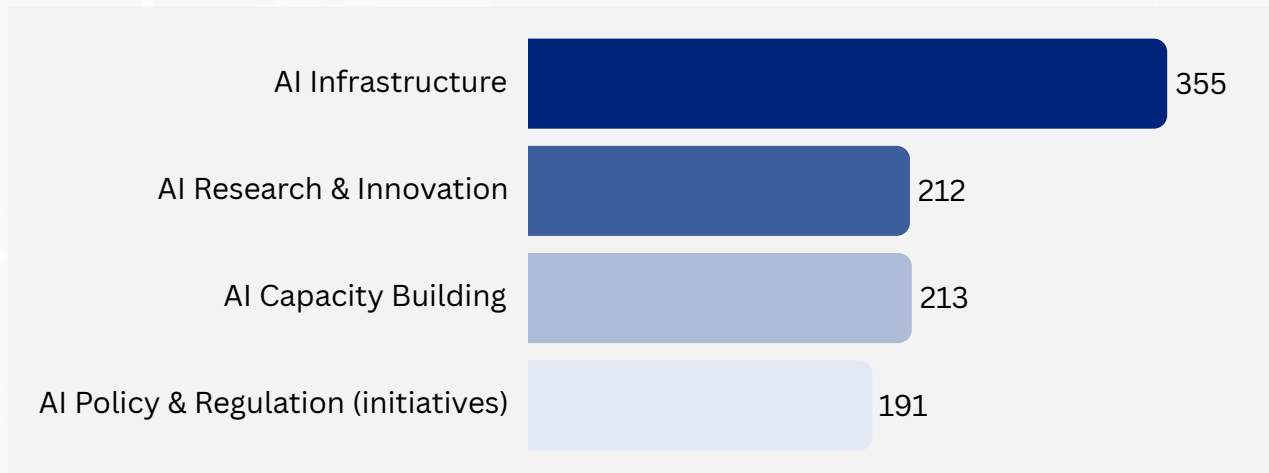


fig 6: Pillars promoting AI Growth

Infrastructure

AI relies on a robust ecosystem of enabling infrastructure. While algorithms and applications often receive the most attention, their development depends on a broader network of physical and institutional assets that make AI research, innovation, and deployment possible. Across Africa, this infrastructure is steadily expanding through investments in data centers, research institutions, AI hubs, innovation labs, incubation centers, and other specialized facilities. Together, these assets provide the foundation upon which AI ecosystems are emerging.

Unlike many advanced AI economies where infrastructure has largely been purpose-built to support cloud computing and AI workloads, much of Africa's AI infrastructure has evolved from existing digital infrastructure. [Xalam Analytics](#) notes that the continent's data center market has been shaped by earlier investments in telecommunications, enterprise digital transformation, and expanding broadband connectivity, with increasing demand for cloud services and AI driving the next phase of infrastructure development. Similarly, the [Africa Data Centers Association \(2026\)](#) observes that Africa's digital infrastructure is transitioning from traditional enterprise hosting to colocation, cloud services, and higher-density computing environments that support data-intensive applications, including AI.

Telecommunications operators, internet service providers, and enterprise hosting companies initially established facilities to support connectivity, communications, and digital services. As demand for cloud computing, digital platforms, and AI-enabled applications has grown, many of these facilities have expanded into modern data centers with increasingly advanced capabilities. Rather than building entirely new infrastructure, countries are encouraged to adapt and strengthen existing digital assets to meet the growing computational demands of AI.

While these facilities continue to provide foundational services such as colocation, power, cooling, and network connectivity, an increasing number are offering cloud infrastructure, managed services, virtualized computing environments, and specialized AI compute capabilities. These services enable businesses, researchers, and public institutions to access scalable computing resources without investing in their own high-performance hardware. At the same time, research centers, AI hubs, innovation labs, and incubation centers are strengthening the institutional foundations of AI by supporting research, entrepreneurship, knowledge exchange, and technology commercialization. The maturity of AI infrastructure is determined not only by the number of facilities, but also by the capabilities they provide and the innovation ecosystems they support.

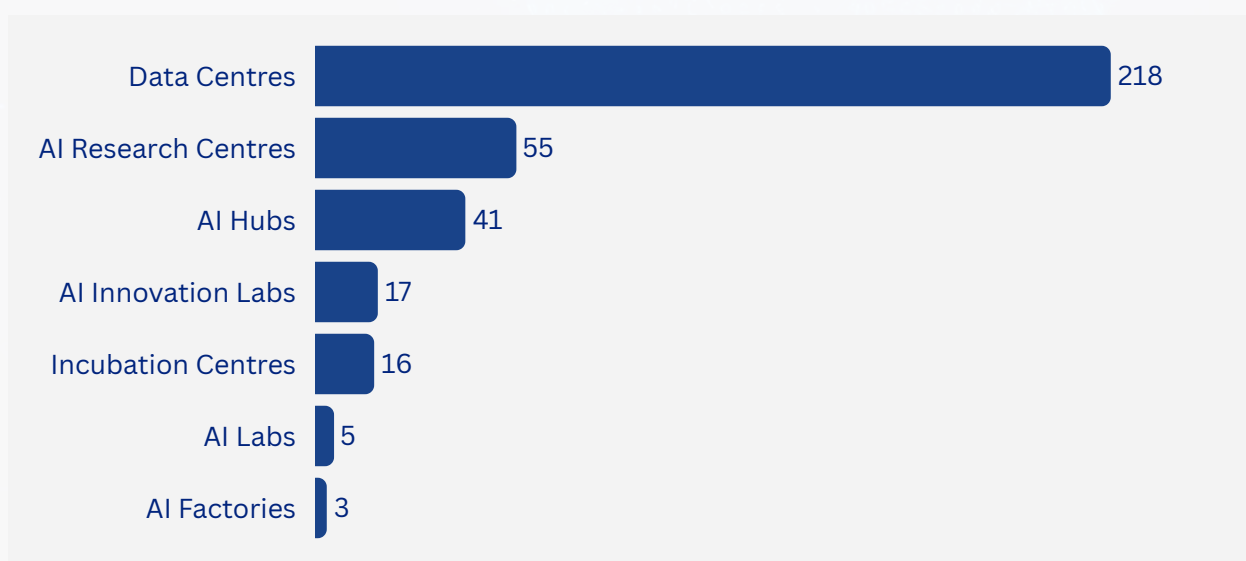


fig 7:Infrastructure Facilities Across Africa

Distribution of AI Infrastructure Around the Continent

● 355 + Infrastructure Facilities Tracked



Southern Africa - 97

Central Africa - 16

North Africa - 63

West Africa - 80

East Africa - 99

fig 8: Distribution of AI Infrastructure

Research and Innovation

AI research activity is distributed across multiple sectors rather than concentrated in a single industry. The largest concentrations of documented AI solutions are in **healthcare (30.6%)**, **education (14.5%)**, **agriculture (14.5%)**, and **public service transformation (12.9%)**, with growing activity in Tourism, Telecom, Climate, and the Environment. Innovation is consistently occurring in response to local challenges and market opportunities, producing a landscape characterized by regional specialization and cross-sector experimentation.

AI Innovation in Various Economic Sectors

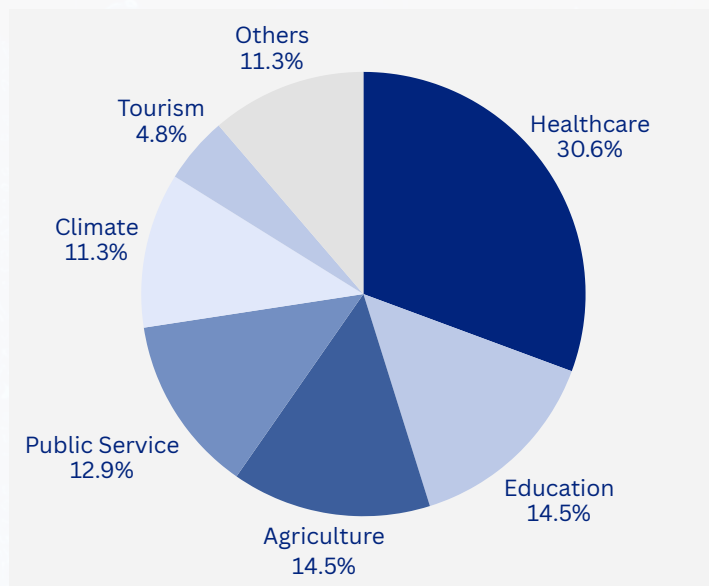


fig 9: Sectoral AI Innovation

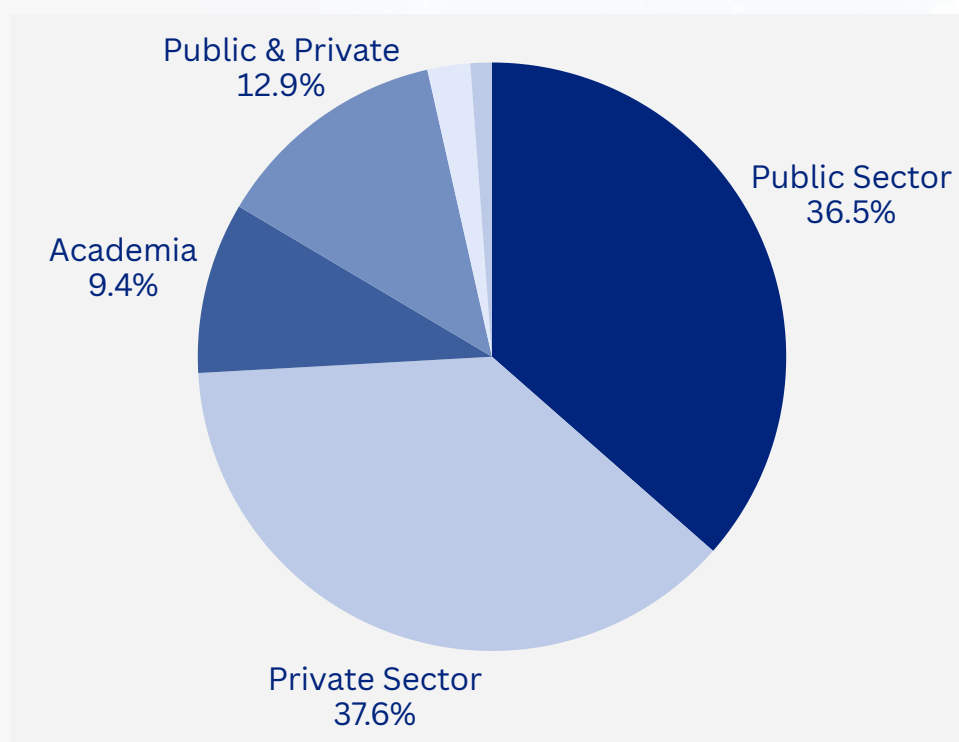


fig 10: Stakeholders Involvement in AI Innovation

Education and Capacity Building

While infrastructure provides the foundation for AI systems, talent determines a country's ability to develop, adapt, deploy, and govern those technologies. Across Africa, investments in AI education and skills development are expanding rapidly through three complementary pathways: **Universities** training the next generation of AI scientists and engineers through Certifications, diplomas, Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD programs; **bootcamps** and professional programs equipping practitioners with industry-relevant skills; and **Governments** increasingly investing in public-sector training to prepare policymakers and civil servants.

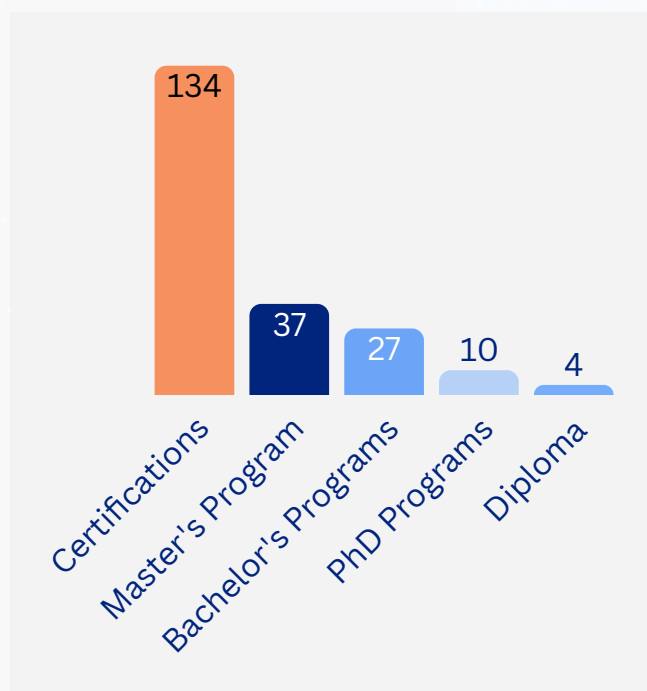


fig 12: Education Levels by qualification

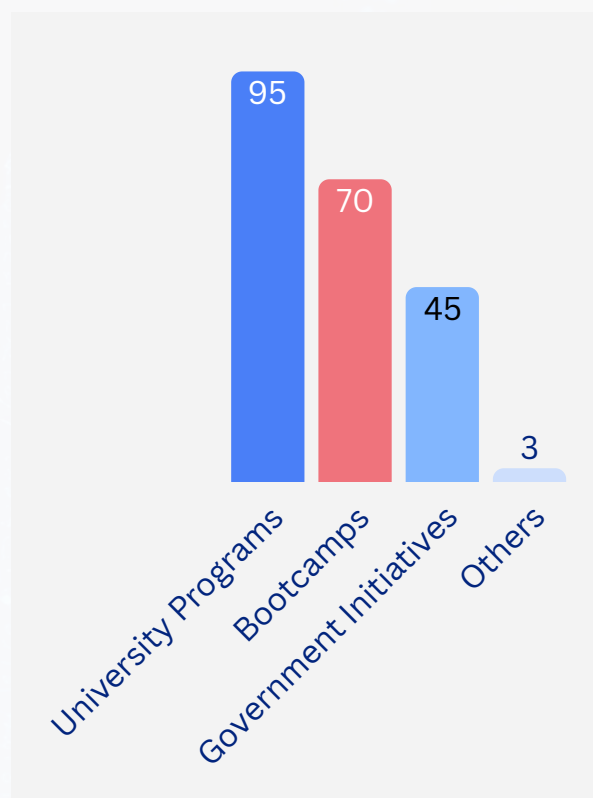


fig 11: AI Education Programs by program type.

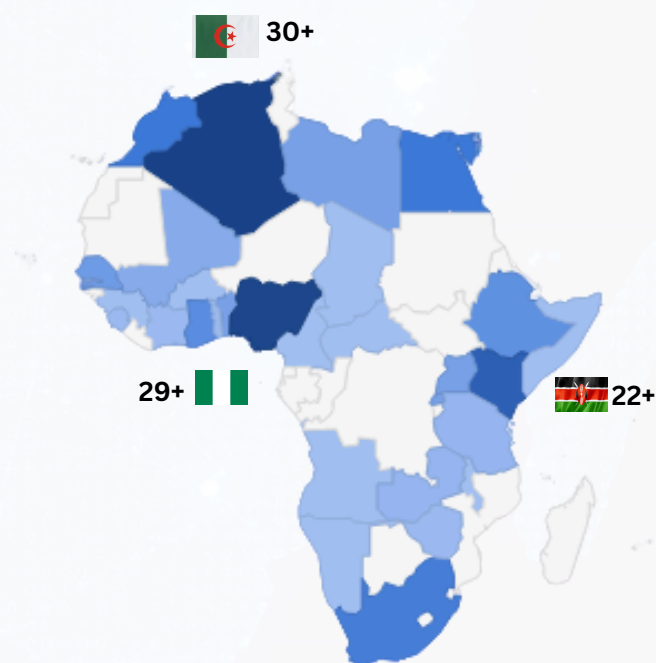


fig 13: Distribution of AI Education Across Africa

Governance

As AI becomes increasingly integrated into economies, governance has emerged as a critical pillar of national AI ecosystems. Effective governance extends beyond regulation alone; it encompasses the policies, institutions, legal frameworks, and coordination, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms that enable countries to promote innovation while managing risks, protecting public interests, and fostering trust.

African governments are adopting a growing range of approaches. Some have prioritized comprehensive national AI strategies as development plans that articulate long-term visions for adoption and investment. Others have focused on sector-specific regulation, updating existing digital policies, or establishing dedicated institutions to coordinate AI development.

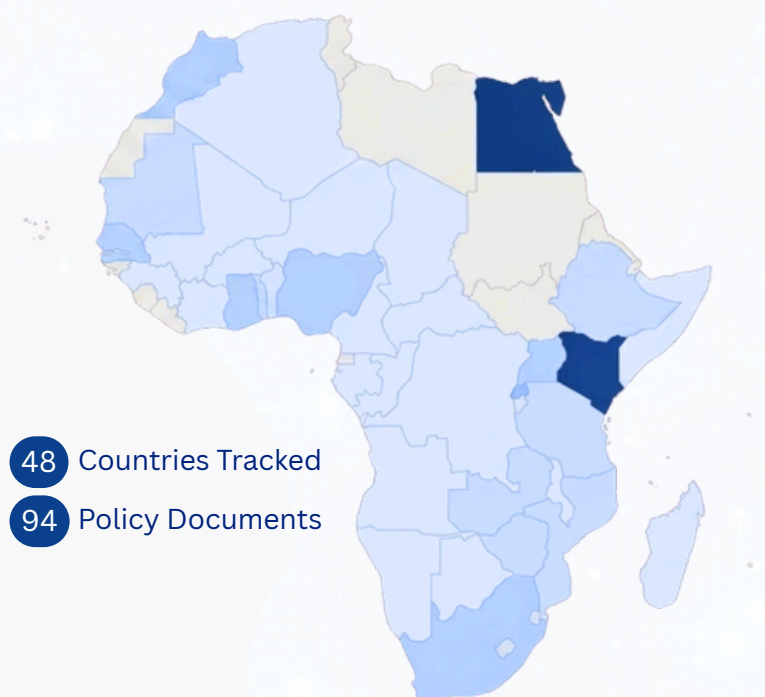


fig 14: Countries with AI/Data Protection Strategies/policies/frameworks

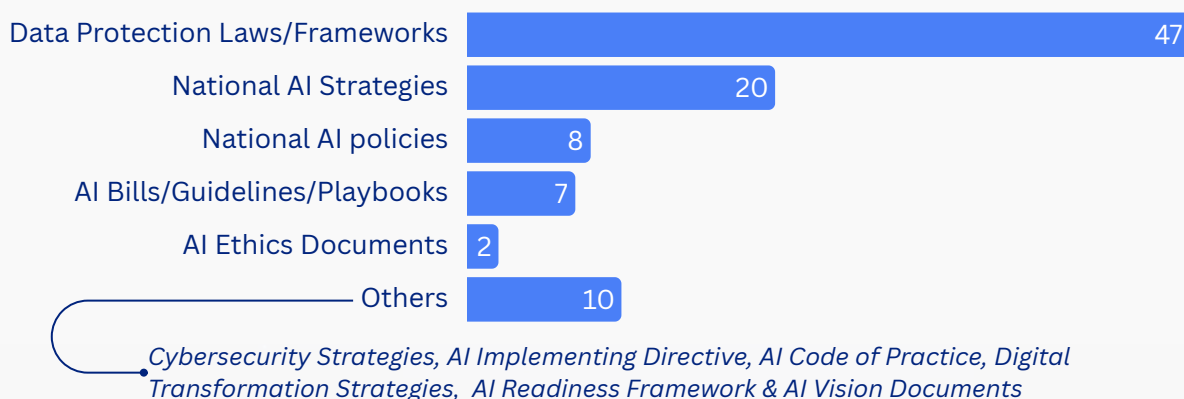


fig 15: Distribution of Policy Documents

43 Countries with Data Protection Laws

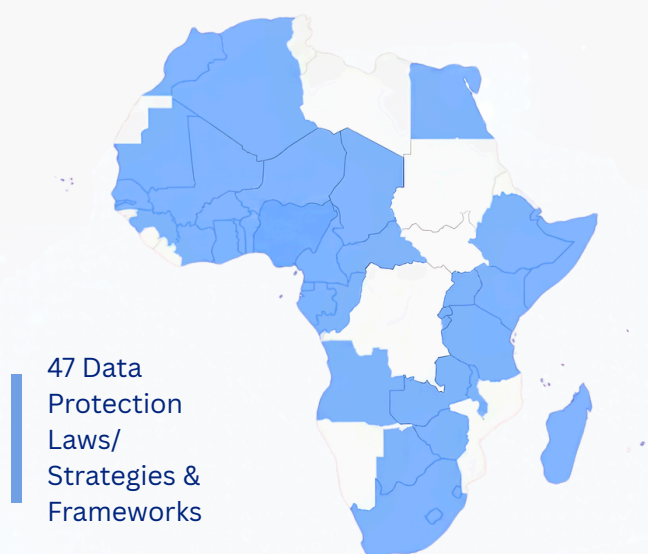


fig 16: Countries with Data Protection Laws

23 Countries with AI Strategies/Policies/Bills

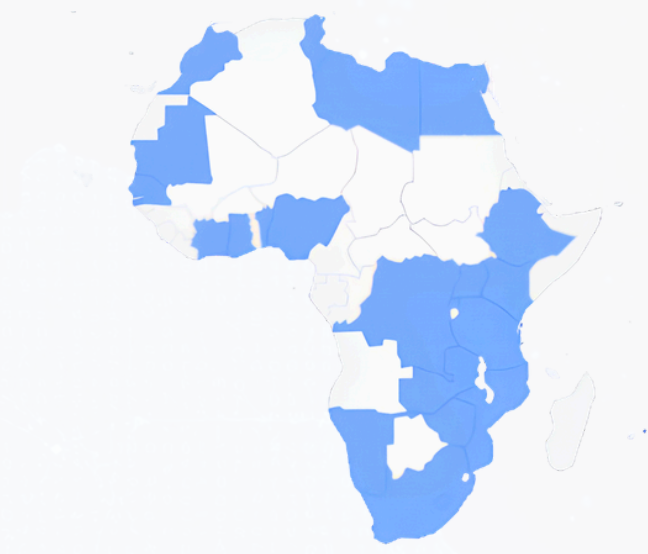


fig 17: Countries with AI Strategies.Policies/Bills

32 Countries with Data Protection Authorities



fig 18: Countries with DPAs

14 Countries with AI Regulating Bodies



fig 19: AI-Native Regulating Bodies

AI Regulation Intensity by Sector

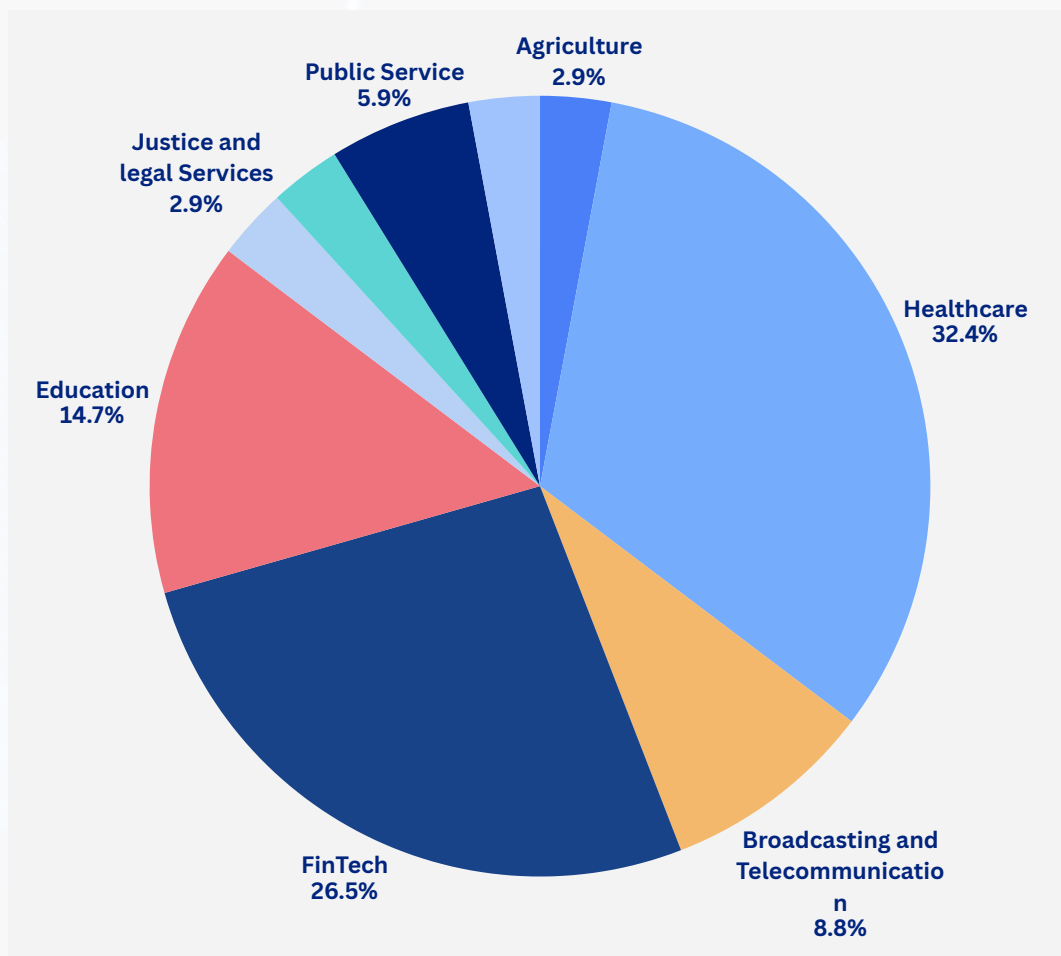


fig 20: Sectoral AI Regulation

Sectoral regulatory activity in Africa is concentrated in sectors where AI adoption has accelerated most rapidly and where the potential risks to individuals and society are highest. **Healthcare** accounts for the largest share of regulatory attention (**32.4%**), reflecting growing efforts to govern AI applications in diagnostics, patient care, health data management, and clinical decision-making. **FinTech** follows at **26.5%**, driven by the expansion of AI-powered financial services, fraud detection, and digital payments. Education (14.7%) and Broadcasting and Telecommunications (8.8%) have also attracted significant policy focus as AI becomes increasingly embedded in learning systems and digital communications. Public Service (5.9%), Agriculture (2.9%), and Justice and Legal Services (2.9%) account for smaller shares, indicating that regulatory frameworks in these areas are still emerging. Overall, the data suggests that AI governance efforts across Africa are currently prioritizing high-impact sectors where innovation, public trust, and the protection of sensitive data intersect

What the Ecosystem Reveals

Three findings from the data stand out, not because they confirm that Africa's AI ecosystem is forming, but because of what each one means for the people building, funding, and governing it.

- 1 If existing digital ecosystems are becoming AI ecosystems, the fastest route to AI capacity is not new construction but conversion.** Because Africa's AI infrastructure is evolving from telecommunications facilities, enterprise data centers, and innovation hubs rather than being purpose-built, the highest-leverage investments are those that strengthen and repurpose existing digital assets. For governments and development partners, this reframes the cost of entry: AI capacity can be accelerated by upgrading what already exists, not only by financing greenfield facilities.
- 2 If governance is arriving early, African countries have a narrow window to be rule-makers rather than rule-takers.** Establishing strategies, sectoral rules, and institutions ahead of substantial commercial AI activity inverts the sequence seen in mature ecosystems, and it is a strategic opening, not merely a curiosity. Countries setting rules before their markets mature can shape governance models on their own terms and export them regionally. For policymakers, the implication is urgency: the frameworks written now, while markets are still small, will be far harder to change once commercial interests consolidate.
- 3 If there is no single model for building an AI ecosystem, stakeholders should back national development plans.** The data shows countries leading through different pillars: some through governance, others through education and research, and others through startup ecosystems. This diversity means that evaluating every country through a formation lens helps direct support to where it is most needed. For funders and development partners, an effective posture is to identify where a country is already moving and reinforce it, while targeting the specific pillar where it lags, an approach mostly possible once the ecosystem is read as forming.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

For Policymakers and Regional Bodies

- **Convert existing digital infrastructure before financing new builds.** Because much of Africa's AI infrastructure is evolving from telecommunications facilities, enterprise data centers, and innovation hubs rather than purpose-built compute, upgrading existing digital assets is often the faster route to national capacity. The scale of the gap makes this urgent: Africa is home to 18% of the world's population but holds less than [1% of global data-center capacity](#), and far less of the GPU infrastructure that powers AI. The continent's challenge has shifted from a "connectivity gap" to a "compute gap."
- Develop integrated AI strategies that align infrastructure, talent, research, innovation, and governance within a single national vision.
- **Act on the early-governance window.** With many countries establishing rules ahead of substantial commercial activity, the frameworks written now, while markets are still small, will be far harder to change once commercial interests consolidate. Rwanda illustrates the pathway: on 20 April 2023, it became the first country in Africa to adopt a comprehensive national AI policy, later reinforced by a dedicated national AI agency to oversee development, investment, adoption, and governance, building governance architecture ahead of its market rather than after it.
- **Broaden participation in AI governance beyond the public sector.** The data shows government bodies account for 97.3% of policy and regulatory activity; drawing in private-sector, academic, and civil-society expertise would strengthen emerging frameworks.
- Strengthen institutional capacity by establishing or empowering dedicated AI coordination bodies to oversee implementation and facilitate cross-sector collaboration.
- Support harmonization of AI governance frameworks across the continent while preserving room for national approaches, so early rule-makers can shape regional norms rather than fragment them.
- Adopt adaptive governance approaches that provide regulatory clarity for emerging applications while encouraging responsible innovation.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

For Investors and the Private Sector

- **Fund the pillar running ahead of its support base.** The data shows talent development outpacing local compute; universities and training programs are expanding faster than the infrastructure and industry that would absorb their graduates. Only around [3% of the global AI talent pool comes from the continent](#). Yet, a World Bank survey of 174 African universities found only 31% offer dedicated AI programs, even as developer communities in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt [grow 25–33% a year](#). Expanding compute, cloud access, and applied-research pathways is where private capital closes the gap.
- Take part in the development of policies and strategies, with the public sector at 97.3% versus just 2.7% from private, academia, and partnerships combined ([see fig 4](#)). AI governance should be a combined effort across all stakeholders.
- Invest beyond startups by supporting the broader ecosystem, including AI infrastructure, research institutions, accelerators, and talent development programs.
- Expand access to AI compute and cloud services, enabling startups, researchers, and SMEs to develop and deploy AI solutions locally.
- Strengthen industry-academia partnerships to accelerate technology transfer, applied research, and workforce development.
- Support locally relevant AI solutions that address challenges in priority sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, education, financial services, climate, and public administration.

For Development Partners

- **Back national strengths through context-specific development plans.** The data shows no single model for building an AI ecosystem; some countries lead through governance, others through education and research, and others through startup ecosystems. The most effective support identifies where a country is already moving, reinforces it, and targets the specific pillar where it lags.

- Support ecosystem-wide investments rather than isolated projects, recognizing the interdependence of infrastructure, governance, talent, and innovation.
- Pair regions with complementary strengths. Pillar development is uneven; West Africa leads in capacity building (33.0%) while East Africa leads in innovation and research (38.5%), creating clear opportunities for peer learning, regional networks, and collaborative programs that match strength to gap.
- Strengthen national and regional institutions that coordinate AI policy, research, and capacity-building.
- Invest in shared AI infrastructure, including regional compute facilities, open datasets, and research platforms accessible across multiple countries.
- Promote inclusive AI development by supporting initiatives that expand participation across underserved regions, institutions, and communities.

For Universities and Research Institutions

- **Build on academia's proven role as the continent's primary talent engine.** The data shows academia already drives 51.2% of all AI education initiatives. The priority is to deepen that role: aligning output with the governance, ethics, and applied-domain skills the ecosystem now needs, and with the infrastructure that can absorb graduates locally.
- Expand interdisciplinary AI education, combining technical training with ethics, governance, entrepreneurship, and domain-specific applications.
- Strengthen research capacity through partnerships with industry, governments, and international research organizations.
- Align curricula with industry needs, ensuring graduates develop practical skills alongside theoretical foundations.
- Support innovation and commercialization by fostering collaboration between AI research centers, innovation labs, and university incubators.
- Promote lifelong learning through professional training, executive education, and continuous upskilling programs that respond to rapidly evolving AI technologies.

Conclusion

Across Africa, AI is no longer an emerging conversation; it is an emerging ecosystem. The evidence presented in this report shows that AI development is taking place across multiple dimensions simultaneously, with countries investing in infrastructure, expanding talent pipelines, strengthening governance, and fostering innovation in ways that reflect their unique contexts and priorities. While progress remains uneven, it is neither isolated nor static. Rather, it reflects an ecosystem that is actively taking shape across the continent.

The data reveals a continent building in parallel rather than in sequence. Countries are not waiting for every enabling condition to be in place before acting. They are adapting existing digital foundations into AI infrastructure, producing talent ahead of the compute to employ it, and in many cases writing the rules before the market arrives. These mismatches between pillars are not signs of disorder; they are the signature of an ecosystem in formation, and they are where the most consequential decisions of the next decade will be made.

As investments continue and collaboration deepens across governments, academia, industry, investors, and development partners, the foundations being laid today will shape the continent's AI trajectory for years to come. Understanding this moment as one of ecosystem formation provides a more constructive and forward-looking perspective on Africa's place in the global AI economy.

Africa's AI Ecosystem

in the making

