

African Voice on AI

Research Policy Framework (Version 001b)

Purpose of the Policy

The objective of this research policy is to provide a structured, strategic framework for African Voice on AI (AVAI) in developing, conducting, and sharing AI-focused research that advances ethical, inclusive, and community-centered AI solutions. This policy outlines our approach to research integrity, data governance, ethics, inclusivity, and collaboration, aiming to establish AVAI as a leader in responsible AI research in Africa and beyond.

1. Research Integrity and Transparency

Objective: Ensure all research conducted under AVAI adheres to the highest standards of scientific rigor and ethical responsibility, promoting transparency, reproducibility, and accountability.

- **Open Research Practices:** AVAI supports open-access publications and encourages data sharing whenever feasible, in alignment with privacy and ethical guidelines, to allow for independent verification and public accessibility.
- **Peer Review and Quality Control:** All AVAI research outputs undergo a thorough peer review process, either through external academic journals or internal committees, to ensure methodological rigor, accuracy, and clarity.
- **Conflict of Interest:** Researchers must disclose any potential conflicts of interest, including funding sources, collaborations, or personal investments, that could affect the impartiality of research outcomes.

2. Ethical and Inclusive AI Research

Objective: Ensure that AVAI research adheres to ethical standards, emphasizes inclusivity, and reflects African values and societal needs.

- **Ethical AI Principles:** AVAI's research follows the principles of Responsible AI, including fairness, transparency, privacy, accountability, and non-discrimination. The organization's Ethical Review Board will evaluate all research proposals to verify alignment with these principles.
- **Cultural Sensitivity and Relevance:** AVAI prioritizes research that addresses real-world challenges in African communities and respects cultural values, languages, and local norms. This includes integrating culturally relevant data and actively involving community stakeholders in the research design process.
- **Diversity and Representation:** AVAI is committed to fostering diversity in its research teams, encouraging the inclusion of researchers from various demographic, educational, and geographical backgrounds to bring diverse perspectives to AI challenges.

3. Data Governance and Privacy

Objective: Promote secure, transparent, and accountable handling of data used in AI research, especially data that pertains to African individuals and communities.

- **Data Privacy and Protection:** AVAI abides by data protection laws, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and local data protection laws. Data is anonymized, securely stored, and only collected with informed consent.
- **Contextual Data Relevance:** In accordance with UNECA recommendations on AI data ecosystems [6], AVAI's data collection strategy emphasizes using locally sourced data to ensure AI models are relevant to African contexts.
- **Bias Detection and Mitigation:** Research teams are tasked with regularly auditing datasets for biases. Identified biases are addressed through data balancing techniques, algorithmic adjustments, or, where necessary, new data collection to minimize discriminatory effects.

4. Community Engagement and Collaboration

Objective: Facilitate community input and cross-sector partnerships to ensure AVAI research reflects African priorities and strengthens the continent's AI ecosystem.

- **Stakeholder Participation:** AVAI actively involves African communities, local organizations, and policymakers in research planning and execution phases to understand their needs and perspectives. This may include hosting community consultations, workshops, and regular feedback sessions.
- **Cross-Sector Partnerships:** AVAI seeks partnerships with academic institutions, government agencies, and private sector entities to advance knowledge sharing and resource pooling. Key partners may include the African Union, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and prominent African universities.
- **Public Awareness and Education:** AVAI is committed to making AI research accessible by creating simplified educational content, holding public seminars, and using digital media to share research insights with non-specialist audiences.

5. Policy for Sustainable Research Funding

Objective: Secure diversified funding to support long-term, impactful AI research that aligns with AVAI's mission and values.

- **Funding Sources:** AVAI pursues a mix of funding sources, including government grants, non-profit partnerships, corporate sponsorships, and international development funds. The organization maintains full transparency regarding funding sources to avoid conflicts of interest.
- **Ethical Funding Guidelines:** Funding is accepted only from organizations that uphold AVAI's ethical and community-centered AI mission. AVAI reserves the right to decline funding that may compromise research independence or create ethical concerns.

- **Resource Allocation:** Research funding is allocated based on project relevance, potential impact, and alignment with AVAI's strategic priorities. Regular audits will ensure transparent use of funds.

6. Policy Review and Continuous Improvement

Objective: Ensure the AVAI research policy remains relevant and responsive to emerging ethical, technological, and societal trends in AI.

- **Annual Policy Review:** The policy is reviewed annually by the Research Policy Committee, which consists of AVAI's senior researchers, ethics board members, and external advisors. Feedback from stakeholders and staff is incorporated to address any emerging issues or improvements.
- **Compliance Monitoring:** A compliance officer oversees adherence to this policy, handling violations through corrective actions or, if necessary, escalations to the executive team.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** AVAI encourages feedback on its research practices from internal and external stakeholders, including African communities, to ensure continuous alignment with its values and mission.