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JUDGEMENT 6 OF 7

HOW SURE WE ARE: STRONG INFERENCE

The UN set up new bodies on AI, with no money

IN BRIEF

- The UN now has a scientific panel, a regular dialogue and a proposed fund on artificial intelligence (AI), and no government has pledged money to the fund.
- What holds Africa back is a shortage of electricity and of assured buyers for computing, and African governments control both.

Africa has a very small share of the world's data centres, the buildings full of computers that AI runs on. Investors hold back because power is short and demand is uncertain. African governments can change both by building grids and by buying computing services together. They do not need to wait for UN money to do it.

The reasoning

In February the General Assembly appointed a scientific panel on AI by 117 votes to 2. The United States voted against. The first Global Dialogue on AI Governance met in Geneva in July, and the second meets in New York on 3 and 4 May 2027. In November, a review conference in Geneva decides whether to start treaty talks on autonomous weapons. These meetings give African governments a seat when rules are written. They bring no money to build anything. Private money moved faster. The Gates Foundation committed at least \$1 billion over two years to AI for health, education, farming and data in less-used languages.

Africa holds 0.6% of the world's data-centre capacity, and the centres now planned will keep that share about the same. A \$1 billion data centre planned in Kenya stalled for two reasons. It needed about a third of the national grid's power, and it needed the government to commit to renting its

space. Only 5% of African AI practitioners have the computing power they need. Seventeen African countries have adopted a national AI strategy. Nigeria alone sends about \$850 million a year to cloud companies abroad, money that could pay for capacity at home.

Power and purchasing are both in African hands. Governments could buy cloud and computing services together, with conditions on where data is kept, what it costs and who can see it. That would give investors the assured demand they now lack. Reliable grid power is the other half of the answer. The stalled centre in Kenya shows what happens when either half is missing.

The evidence

- UN: no pledges have been announced to the Global Fund for AI [Source](#)
- Africa Data Centres Association: Africa holds 0.6% of the world's data-centre capacity [Source](#)
- DatacenterDynamics: a \$1 billion data centre in Kenya stalled for lack of power and a lease commitment [Source](#)
- UN Development Programme: only 5% of African AI practitioners have the computing power they need [Source](#)
- Gates Foundation: at least \$1 billion over two years for AI [Source](#)

The strongest argument against

Leaving AI out of the African Union's main priorities may be a sensible order of work, with power, internet access and data laws coming first. Africa's small share of data centres may also reflect the business choices of buyers more than failed policy.

Sector briefings behind this judgement

Sector · Strong inference

AI and technology

The UN has set up new bodies on artificial intelligence and funded none of them, while Africa's real limits are electricity and buyers who will commit to paying.

[Open the briefing](#)

Sector · Observed

Livelihoods and labour

Few young Africans earn a wage, and the routes abroad for work, study and sending money home are narrowing.

[Open the briefing](#)

Recommended moves

1 YEAR · BY SEPTEMBER 2027

CONTINENTAL

Buy government cloud and AI services together across Africa, under one open agreement

Leads: The AU Commission and Smart Africa, with Nigeria as the first country

1 YEAR · BY 3 MAY 2027 DIALOGUE

CONTINENTAL

Agree one African position on how the UN's AI fund is run

Leads: The AU Commission, with Gabon and Senegal as the first countries and the African Group in New York

100 DAYS · BY EARLY JANUARY 2027

CONTINENTAL

Publish every government agreement with large technology firms, using one African standard

Leads: The AU Commission, with Kenya as the first country

Words used on this page

UN AI panel and Global Dialogue

Two UN processes on AI agreed in 2025: a scientific panel that reports on AI's risks and uses, and a yearly meeting of governments on how to govern it. A proposed UN fund would pay for AI skills in poorer countries. [AI and technology briefing](#) ·

[Glossary](#) · [Source: un.org](#)

Data centres and compute

Buildings full of computers that store data and run AI. Their size is measured in megawatts (MW) of electricity. "Compute" means the computing power needed to build and run AI. [AI and technology briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

UN General Assembly

The meeting of all 193 UN member states, each with one vote. It meets every year from September. It can make statements, elect members of other bodies and approve the UN budget, but most of what it says does not bind governments. [Glossary](#) ·

[Source: un.org](#)

Autonomous weapons talks

Talks in Geneva under a weapons treaty on whether to ban or limit weapons that choose and attack targets without human control. [AI and technology briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

The Global Fund

An international fund that pays for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria programmes. It raises money from governments and private donors every three years. [Health briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: theglobalfund.org](#)

African Union (AU)

The organisation of 55 African states, based in Addis Ababa. Its heads of state meet each February. It can suspend members after a coup. [Glossary](#) · [Source: au.int](#)