



2026 GFRAi
Global Forum on
Responsible AI

Beyond Universal Models:
Designing Adaptable
Responsible AI Frameworks
Grounded in Data Justice

March 2026
The Hague University of Applied
Sciences (The Netherlands)



Acknowledgements

About the Global Forum on Responsible AI (GFRAI)

The Global Forum on Responsible AI (GFRAI) is an international convening platform dedicated to advancing dialogue on ethical, inclusive, and context-sensitive AI governance. Conceived as a travelling global platform, GFRAI brings together policymakers, researchers, industry leaders, standards experts, and civil society actors from across regions to examine how AI governance frameworks can be designed to be both globally relevant and locally meaningful.

Founded by the Ottawa Responsible AI Hub, GFRAI is a travelling forum designed to be hosted in different countries globally, in collaboration with universities and research institutions. It is positioned not as a one-off event but as the beginning of an ongoing process of collaboration, knowledge exchange, and co-creation across diverse contexts. Its inaugural edition, held in March 2026 at The Hague University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands was convened under the theme “Beyond Universal Models: Designing Adaptable Responsible AI Frameworks Grounded in Data Justice.” As a recurring platform, GFRAI provides a critical space for advancing more effective, equitable, and globally relevant approaches to governing AI.

About the Ottawa Responsible AI Hub (ORAH)

The Ottawa Responsible AI Hub (ORAH) is a nonprofit organisation dedicated to advancing responsible, inclusive, and equity-centred approaches to artificial intelligence in Canada and globally. ORAH serves as a convening platform for researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders working at the intersection of AI governance, digital equity, and public interest technology.

Through its flagship initiatives including the Ottawa Responsible AI Summit (ORAIS), the Ottawa Responsible AI Talks Series, the Global Forum on Responsible AI, and capacity-building programmes such as AI for All, ORAH fosters cross-sector dialogue, advances practical governance solutions, and supports community-driven approaches to AI literacy and participation. ORAH is founded on the belief that responsible AI requires sustained engagement with the so-

cial, ethical, and political dimensions of technology, and a genuine commitment to ensuring that AI systems serve the broader public good.

About The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law (HiiL)

The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law (HiiL) is an independent organisation focused on making justice more accessible and people centred. HiiL works with governments, international organisations, justice innovators, and communities to design and scale justice solutions that address the real legal needs of people around the world.

HiiL brings together legal expertise, data, and innovation to expand access to justice, particularly for those in under-resourced or fragile contexts. As a co-host and knowledge partner of GFRAI 2026, HiiL contributed critical insights on the intersection of AI, law, and access to justice, reinforcing the forum's commitment to ensuring that AI governance frameworks remain grounded in equity, human rights, and lived experience.

About The Hague University of Applied Sciences

The Hague University of Applied Sciences (De Haagse Hogeschool) is one of the Netherlands' leading universities of applied sciences, offering practice-oriented education and research across a wide range of disciplines. Located in The Hague, the international city of peace, justice, and security, the university is deeply committed to addressing complex societal challenges through applied knowledge and cross-sector collaboration.

The university's work in applied data science and artificial intelligence reflects its mission to educate responsible, globally minded professionals capable of navigating the ethical, technical, and social dimensions of emerging technologies. As the host institution of GFRAI 2026, The Hague University of Applied Sciences provided an ideal setting for international dialogue on responsible AI, bridging academic inquiry with real-world governance challenges across diverse regional perspectives.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the co-hosting institutions.



About this Report

In March 2026, the Ottawa Responsible AI Hub (ORAH) and The Hague University of Applied Sciences co-hosted the inaugural Global Forum on Responsible AI (GFRAI) 2026 at The Hague, the Netherlands, in partnership with The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law (HiiL).

The forum convened policymakers, researchers, industry leaders, standards experts, and civil society actors from across Europe, Africa, North America, and Asia. Anchored on the theme *“Beyond Universal Models: Designing Adaptable Responsible AI Frameworks Grounded in Data Justice,”* participants examined how AI governance frameworks can be designed to be both globally relevant and locally meaningful.

This 39-page report synthesises insights from the full forum programme, including opening reflections, a keynote address, the Flagship Global Dialogue, audience Q&A, and panel discussions. Rather than a chronological account, it adopts a thematic and analytical approach, distilling key insights, emerging tensions, and practical directions for the future of responsible AI governance.

It contains the following sections:

- 1. Introduction (pp. 4–7).** An overview of GFRAI 2026, the rationale behind the theme “Beyond Universal Models,” and the forum’s methodology and scope.
- 2. Governing AI in an Unequal World (pp. 8–11).** An examination of structural inequities in global AI governance, real-world consequences of AI failures, and the case for moving from adaptation to transformation.
- 3. Reframing Responsible AI: Data Justice as Foundation (pp. 12–16).** An exploration of data justice as a foundational lens, including critiques of paternalistic design, questions of representation, and operationalising data justice across the AI lifecycle.
- 4. Rethinking Governance: From Universal Models to Plural Architectures (pp. 17–22).** A comparative analysis of governance models, including the EU approach, multi-level governance, the question of who governs AI, and the African Union’s development-oriented pathway.

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- 5. From Frameworks to Practice: Institutional and Sectoral Perspectives (pp. 23–28).** Insights on AI literacy and capacity building, context-sensitive innovation, standards and risk governance, and the alignment of responsible AI with market incentives.
 - 6. Emerging Tensions and Unresolved Questions (pp. 29–32).** A candid look at persistent challenges including the enforcement gap, governing the “intelligence era,” AI weaponisation risks, and economic disruption.
 - 7. Toward a New Design Agenda for Responsible AI (pp. 33–37).** Core design principles emerging from the dialogue, lessons from the majority world, and strategic recommendations for policymakers, industry, standards bodies, and civil society.
 - 8. Conclusion: From Forum to Movement (pp. 38–39).** A synthesis of the forum’s call to action and GFRAI’s ongoing role as a global platform for advancing equitable, inclusive, and context-aware AI governance.



Executive Summary

The inaugural Global Forum on Responsible AI (GFRAI) 2026 convened policymakers, researchers, industry leaders, and civil society actors from across regions to examine a central question: how can AI governance frameworks be designed to be both globally relevant and locally meaningful? Anchored on the theme “Beyond Universal Models: Designing Adaptable Responsible AI Frameworks Grounded in Data Justice,” the forum explored the growing tension between the universal aspirations of AI governance and the diverse realities of its implementation.

A key insight emerging from the discussions is that prevailing approaches to responsible AI largely built on universal principles such as fairness, accountability, and transparency are no longer sufficient on their own. While these frameworks have advanced global dialogue, they often assume levels of institutional capacity, infrastructure, and regulatory maturity that are not consistent across contexts. This has resulted in a widening gap between governance frameworks and their practical effectiveness, particularly in low-resource and rapidly evolving environments.

In response, the forum highlighted **data justice** as a critical lens for rethinking responsible AI. Moving beyond compliance-driven approaches, data justice places emphasis on questions of power, representation, and inclusion examining who benefits from AI systems, who may be excluded or harmed, and whose perspectives are reflected in the data that underpins them. This shift reframes AI governance as not only a technical or regulatory issue, but also a broader social and ethical challenge.

Another central theme was the need to move from adapting existing models to **reimagining AI governance more fundamentally**. Rather than extending frameworks developed in a narrow set of contexts, participants emphasised the importance of embedding contextual understanding throughout the AI lifecycle from design and development to deployment and oversight. This includes recognising communities as active stakeholders in shaping AI systems, and ensuring that governance approaches are responsive to local realities.

The forum also pointed toward the emergence of more **plural and multi-level gov-**



ernance models, where global principles coexist with regional, national, and local frameworks. This evolving landscape reflects a shift away from the idea of a single dominant model toward a more distributed approach, in which different regions contribute distinct perspectives and priorities. In this context, governance is increasingly understood as an ecosystem rather than a uniform structure.

At the same time, discussions underscored the persistent gap between frameworks and practice. Effective AI governance depends not only on well-articulated principles, but also on institutional capacity, stakeholder engagement, and mechanisms for continuous learning and adaptation. Without these elements, even robust frameworks risk remaining aspirational rather than actionable.

Importantly, the forum highlighted that responsible AI and innovation are not in conflict. On the contrary, trust, accountability, and transparency are emerging as key enablers of sustainable innovation and long-term value creation. This alignment presents an opportunity to integrate ethical considerations more deeply into both policy and practice.

GFRAI 2026 ultimately marks the beginning of an ongoing global conversation on the future of AI governance. It signals a shift from viewing responsible AI as a matter of compliance toward understanding it as a continuous, context-sensitive process grounded in co-creation, inclusivity, and data justice. As the forum evolves into a recurring platform, it provides a critical space for advancing more effective, equitable, and globally relevant approaches to governing AI.

“AI Governance Shift”

OLD MODEL	NEW MODEL
Universal	Contextual
Compliance	Co-creation
Centralised	Multi-level
Technical	Socio-political



Somto Mbelu
Founder & Program Lead, Ottawa
Responsible AI Hub



Vikram Mark Radhakrishnan
Lecturer Applied Data Science and A.I.
The Hague University of Applied Sciences,
the Netherlands

1. Introduction

1.1 About the Global Forum on Responsible AI

The Global Forum on Responsible AI (GFRAI) 2026 marked the inaugural edition of a new international convening focused on advancing dialogue on ethical, inclusive, and context-sensitive AI governance. Hosted at The Hague University of Applied Sciences and convened by the Ottawa Responsible AI Hub, the forum brought together policymakers, researchers, industry leaders, standards experts, and civil society actors from multiple regions.

Conceived as a travelling global platform, GFRAI is designed to enable sustained, cross-regional engagement on the future of AI governance. It is positioned not as a one-off event, but as the beginning of an ongoing process of collaboration, knowledge exchange, and co-creation across diverse contexts.

In their opening remarks, Somto Mbelu, Founder and Program Lead of the Ottawa Responsible AI Hub, and Vikram Radhakrishnan, Lecturer in Applied Data Science and AI at The Hague University of Applied Sciences, set the tone for the forum. They emphasised the importance of participatory approaches to AI development and the need to bridge academic inquiry with real-world governance challenges. Together, their reflections framed the forum as a platform for inclusive, practice-oriented dialogue grounded in shared responsibility.



1.2 Why This Theme Matters: Beyond Universal Models


The 2026 forum was anchored on the theme: **“Beyond Universal Models: Designing Adaptable Responsible AI Frameworks Grounded in Data Justice.”** This theme reflects a growing recognition that prevailing approaches to AI governance often built on universal principles such as fairness, transparency, and accountability do not adequately capture the complexity of real-world contexts. While such principles provide important normative guidance, their application across diverse environments raises critical challenges.

As highlighted throughout the discussions, AI systems are increasingly embedded in decisions that shape everyday life from access to financial services and employment opportunities to the allocation of public resources and justice outcomes. Yet the frameworks governing these systems are frequently developed within a narrow set of institutional and cultural contexts, and then extended globally with limited adaptation.

This disconnect raises fundamental questions:

- Can governance frameworks designed in high-capacity environments translate effectively into low-resource settings?
- Whose values, data, and assumptions are embedded in these systems?
- And how can global standards remain relevant in contexts marked by different social realities, infrastructural constraints, and governance capacities?

During the opening exchanges, Zainab Malik, Senior Policy and Advocacy Advisor at The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law (HiiL), the Netherlands, underscored that while AI governance frameworks often rely on universal values, “the contexts they encounter are anything but universal.” This observation captures the central challenge the forum sought to address: **the tension between global ambition and local reality.**



The forum was designed to examine the limitations of universal AI governance models, explore the role of data justice, compare regional approaches, and identify pathways toward more adaptable and context-sensitive frameworks.


1.3 Methodology and Scope

This report synthesises insights from the full programme of GFRAI 2026, including opening reflections, keynote addresses, panel discussions, and audience contributions. The dialogue was structured to move from conceptual framing to practical considerations, enabling a multi-layered exploration of responsible AI governance.

The core of the forum was the Flagship Global Dialogue and Audience Q&A, moderated by Zainab Malik. The session brought together perspectives from academia, policy, industry, and multilateral institutions, with discussions centred on key themes including data justice, legal and regulatory frameworks, institutional capacity, and regional approaches to AI governance.




Zainab Malik
Senior Policy and Advocacy Advisor at
The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law
(HiIL)



Importantly, the forum adopted a **multi-stakeholder and multi-regional approach**, with contributions spanning Europe, Africa, North America, and Asia. This diversity of perspectives enabled a more grounded examination of how AI governance frameworks operate across different contexts, and where they fall short.

Rather than presenting a chronological account of the event, this report adopts a **thematic and analytical approach**, distilling key insights, tensions, and emerging directions from across the dialogue. In doing so, it seeks to move beyond documentation toward **interpretation and synthesis**, capturing not only what was discussed, but what the discussions reveal about the future of global AI governance.



AI systems are increasingly embedded in decisions that shape everyday life from access to financial services and employment opportunities to the allocation of public resources and justice outcomes.



■ 2. Governing AI in an Unequal World: Bridging Global Disparities.


This section examines the structural and systemic challenges shaping global AI governance today, focusing on where existing frameworks fall short.

■ 2.1 Structural Inequities in Global AI Governance

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence has been accompanied by an equally rapid expansion of governance frameworks aimed at ensuring its responsible use. From international principles to regional regulations, these efforts have advanced important standards around fairness, accountability, and transparency. However, as highlighted during GFRAI 2026, they are emerging within an uneven global landscape, and risk reinforcing existing disparities.

A central challenge lies in the concentration of AI infrastructure and capability. The computational power required to develop advanced systems remains heavily concentrated in a small number of countries, while many regions face limited access to digital infrastructure, technical expertise, and data resources. For example, only a negligible share of global high-performance computing capacity is located in Africa, reflecting broader patterns of technological centralisation.

At the same time, AI systems are often trained on data sourced primarily from North America and Europe, yet deployed across vastly different contexts. This creates a structural disconnect between where systems are built and where they are used, raising concerns about relevance, accuracy, and fairness.



As Zainab Malik observed, AI governance frameworks often assume a level of institutional capacity, data availability, and regulatory enforcement that does not exist uniformly across regions. The result is a persistent governance gap, where standards are articulated globally but implemented unevenly in practice.

2.2 When AI Fails: Real-World Consequences

The limitations of universal frameworks are not only theoretical, they are already visible in real-world outcomes. Across jurisdictions, AI systems have demonstrated the capacity to reproduce and amplify existing inequalities, particularly when deployed without sufficient contextual understanding.

One widely cited example discussed during the forum is the childcare benefits scandal in the Netherlands, where algorithmic risk profiling led to thousands of families being wrongly accused of fraud, with severe social and economic consequences. Similarly, in the United States, the COMPAS algorithm used in criminal justice settings has been shown to produce racially biased risk assessments, raising serious concerns about fairness and accountability in high-stakes decision-making.

These cases illustrate a critical point: technical sophistication does not guarantee social legitimacy. Even when systems are designed within robust regulatory environments, they can fail when underlying data, assumptions, or institutional processes are misaligned with lived realities.

Case Study: Netherlands Welfare Scandal

Algorithmic bias


Wrongful fraud
accusations

Social harm

Case Study: COMPAS (USA)

Racial bias

Criminal justice risk
scoring



The implications are particularly significant in contexts where safeguards are weaker, and where individuals have limited avenues for recourse. In such settings, the risks associated with poorly governed AI systems are not only amplified but can become systemic, affecting access to justice, public services, and economic opportunity.


2.3 From Adaptation to Transformation

While much of the global discourse on AI governance has focused on adapting existing frameworks to different contexts, a key insight emerging from GFRAI 2026 is that adaptation alone may be insufficient.

In her keynote, Payal Arora, Professor at Utrecht University and Founder of the Inclusive AI Lab, challenged the prevailing emphasis on universal design and incremental adjustment, arguing instead for a more fundamental rethinking of how AI systems are conceptualised and governed. She highlighted that the majority of the world's population resides outside traditional centres of technological power, yet their realities remain under-represented in both data and governance structures.



Payal Arora
Professor at Utrecht University and
Founder of the Inclusive AI Lab



This disconnect calls for a shift from simply modifying existing models to **reimagining them from the ground up**. Rather than asking how global frameworks can be extended to new contexts, the question becomes: how can governance approaches be designed to emerge from those contexts in the first place?

This perspective reframes responsible AI not as a process of compliance with pre-defined standards, but as an ongoing, context-sensitive practice rooted in participation, representation, and equity. It also challenges the implicit hierarchy in global AI governance, where knowledge and standards are often assumed to flow in one direction.

As the discussions made clear, moving “beyond universal models” is not only a technical or regulatory challenge, it is a **conceptual shift** that requires rethinking whose knowledge counts, whose data is valued, and whose voices shape the systems that increasingly govern everyday life.

“The limitations of universal frameworks are not only theoretical, they are already visible in real-world outcomes.”

3. Reframing Responsible AI: Data Justice as Foundation.

Building on these challenges, this section introduces data justice as a foundational lens for rethinking responsible AI. It reframes governance beyond technical compliance, focusing instead on power, representation, and societal impact.

3.1 What is Data Justice in AI Governance?

Across the GFRAI 2026 dialogue, **data justice** emerged not as a peripheral concern, but as a foundational framework for rethinking responsible AI. Moving beyond compliance-oriented notions of fairness, transparency, and accountability, data justice introduces a deeper set of questions about **power, participation, and impact**.

From an institutional and industry perspective, Derick Adil, Head of AI & Privacy Governance at Globe Telecom, and Convenor of the ISO Joint Advisory Group on AI & Sustainability, articulated data justice through four guiding questions: ***Who benefits from data? Who is harmed? Who decides how data is used? And whose voices are missing?*** These questions shift the focus of AI governance from technical optimisation to societal outcomes, emphasising that data systems are not neutral infrastructures, but reflections of underlying power structures.

Key Questions of Data Justice

01 *Who benefits from data?*

02 *Who is harmed?*

03 *Who decides how data is used?*

04 *And whose voices are missing?*

“Data systems are not neutral, they reflect underlying power structures.”



Derick Adil,
Head of AI & Privacy Governance at
Globe Telecom, and Convenor of the
ISO Joint Advisory Group on AI &
Sustainability

This framing positions responsible AI as more than a regulatory challenge, it becomes a question of **equity and inclusion in the design and deployment of digital systems**. It also underscores that governance cannot be reduced to compliance checklists; it must engage with the broader social dynamics that shape how data is generated, interpreted, and applied.

3.2 Beyond Paternalistic Design

A recurring critique throughout the forum was the tendency of existing governance approaches to prioritise protection over participation. Many systems are designed to minimise risk, particularly for marginalised users, but often rely on assumptions that limit user agency.

In the panel discussion, Payal Arora challenged this orientation, arguing that many systems are built on the premise that users, particularly in marginalised contexts, must be shielded from harm through restrictive design choices. She likened this to locking users into “safe spaces” rather than addressing the structural conditions that produce harm in the first place.



This critique highlights a fundamental tension: ***who defines what safety looks like, and for whom?*** When governance frameworks prioritise risk avoidance without accounting for user agency, they can inadvertently reinforce exclusion. For example, design decisions that limit participation in digital spaces may protect against certain harms, but also restrict access to opportunity, visibility, and voice.

Reframing responsible AI therefore requires moving away from protective paternalism toward participatory and empowering models of design, where users are not treated as passive subjects, but as active contributors to system development and governance.

This critique highlights a fundamental tension: who defines what safety looks like, and for whom? When governance frameworks prioritise risk avoidance without accounting for user agency, they can inadvertently reinforce exclusion.



3.3 Data, Representation, and the Reproduction of Inequality

The question of data justice is inseparable from the issue of **representation**. AI systems learn from existing data, but when that data reflects narrow, biased, or historically unequal perspectives, those biases are encoded and scaled through automated systems.

As highlighted in the keynote, dominant datasets often portray communities, particularly in the Global South, through limited or distorted lenses. For instance, widely available visual datasets may over-represent narratives of poverty or vulnerability, shaping how AI systems interpret and reproduce those identities at scale.

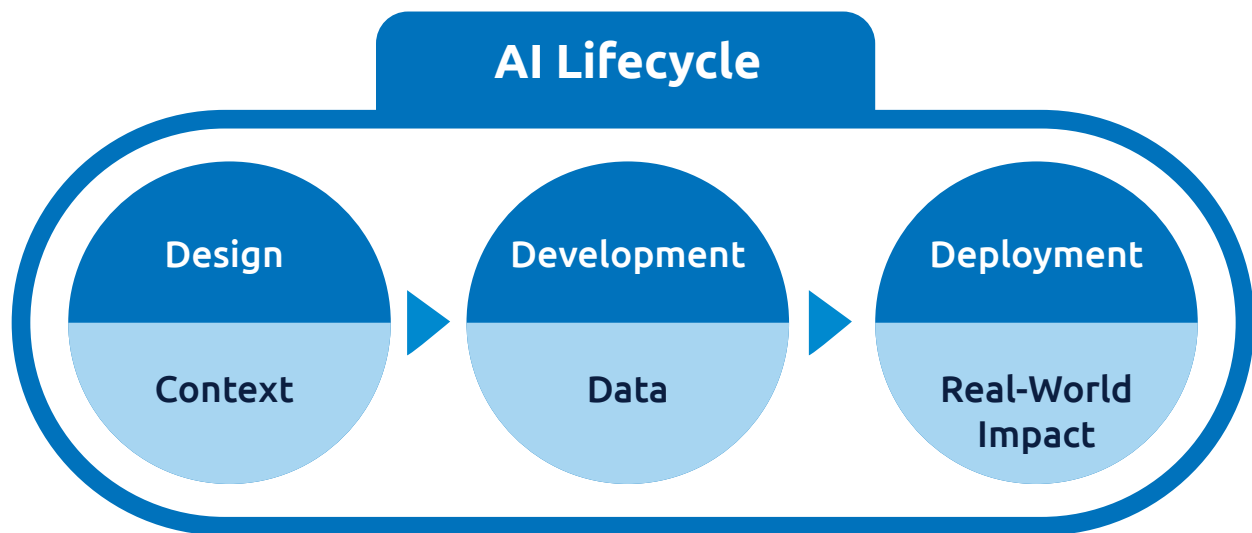
In response, participants pointed to the importance of **community-driven data creation and alternative knowledge infrastructures**. Initiatives aimed at diversifying datasets, such as efforts to revitalise open and participatory data ecosystems, demonstrate how representation can be reshaped from within, rather than imposed externally.

This shift is significant because it moves the conversation from mitigating bias to **restructuring the data landscape itself**. Rather than treating biased outputs as technical errors to be corrected, data justice calls for addressing the upstream conditions that produce those biases in the first place.

3.4 Operationalising Data Justice Across the AI Lifecycle

Building on this foundation, Payal Arora outlined three critical intervention points through which data justice can be operationalised in AI systems: design, development, and deployment.

- **Design** involves rethinking how systems are conceptualised from the outset, including whose perspectives are included in defining problems, objectives, and use cases. It requires moving beyond universal templates toward context-sensitive approaches that reflect diverse realities.
- **Development** focuses on the construction of datasets and models, emphasising the importance of data quality, contextual relevance, and representational diversity over sheer scale. This challenges the dominant paradigm that equates bigger datasets with better outcomes.
- **Deployment** addresses how systems are implemented in real-world environments, including issues of accessibility, usability, and governance. It also raises questions about enforcement, accountability, and the unintended consequences of scaling AI systems across different contexts.



Taken together, these intervention points position data justice as an ongoing practice rather than a one-time requirement. Responsible AI, in this framing, is not achieved through technical compliance alone, but through continuous engagement with the social realities that shape how data and systems are created and used.



■ 4. Rethinking Governance: From Universal Models to Plural Architectures.

This section explores how different AI governance models are emerging across regions and levels. It examines how these approaches reflect varying priorities, capacities, and pathways toward managing AI responsibly.

■ 4.1 The EU Model and Its Limits

In the global landscape of AI governance, the European Union has emerged as a leading standard-setter, particularly through instruments such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the proposed AI Act. These frameworks have played a significant role in shaping international norms around data protection, risk classification, and accountability.

However, discussions at GFRAI 2026 highlighted that **influence does not necessarily translate into universality**. While the EU model provides a structured, rights-based approach to governance, its effectiveness is closely tied to the institutional capacity, legal infrastructure, and enforcement mechanisms available within its jurisdiction.

As Marietje Schaake, International Policy Director, Cyber Policy Center observed, one of the key challenges lies in the **gap between regulatory ambition and enforcement**. Even within the EU, enforcement has often lagged behind legislative progress, raising concerns about the long-term credibility of governance frameworks when implementation is inconsistent.



Marietje Schaake
International Policy Director, Cyber
Policy Center

When extended beyond Europe, these challenges are further amplified. Frameworks designed within highly resourced environments may not translate effectively into contexts where regulatory institutions are still evolving, resources are constrained, or digital ecosystems operate differently. This raises important questions about the risks of **de facto global standardisation**, where models developed in one region become globally dominant without sufficient adaptation.

As Marietje Schaake, International Policy Director, Cyber Policy Center observed, one of the key challenges lies in the gap between regulatory ambition and enforcement.


4.2 Multi-Level Governance in Practice

In response to these challenges, participants emphasised the need for **multi-level governance approaches** that move beyond the search for a single, harmonised global framework. Instead, governance should be understood as operating across interconnected layers, global, regional, national, and local, each with its own role and relevance.

Kanan Dhru, Researcher, Law and Technology, MultiLevel Regulation Lectorate explained that existing governance structures already reflect this layered reality. At the global level, high-level principles provide normative guidance; at the regional level, regulatory frameworks such as those emerging in Europe offer more detailed rules; at the national and local levels, context-specific policies and practices shape how AI systems are actually implemented.



Kanan Dhru
Researcher, Law and Technology,
MultiLevel Regulation Lectorate



Importantly, this approach does not assume perfect coherence across levels. Rather, it recognises that a **degree of divergence is both inevitable and necessary**. Different contexts require different interpretations of shared principles, and attempts to impose uniformity may undermine relevance and effectiveness.

This perspective shifts the focus from harmonisation to **interoperability**, where frameworks are able to interact and align where necessary, while still allowing for contextual variation.


4.3 The Question of Power: Who Governs AI?

Beyond formal regulatory structures, the forum raised a critical question: who is actually governing AI in practice?

While governments and international organisations play an important role in setting rules and standards, much of the real decision-making power resides with private technology companies that design, deploy, and control AI systems. These actors influence not only how systems function, but also how risks are defined, mitigated, and communicated.

As noted during the panel discussion, this creates a form of de facto governance, where corporate policies, internal standards, and product decisions shape the operational realities of AI more directly than formal regulation.

This dynamic raises concerns about accountability, transparency, and the balance of power between public and private actors. It also complicates efforts to establish coherent governance frameworks, as regulatory bodies must contend with rapidly evolving technologies and business models that often outpace legislative processes.



Addressing this imbalance requires not only stronger regulatory capacity, but also new mechanisms for shared governance, where states, industry, and civil society play more balanced and complementary roles.

● 4.4 The African Union Pathway: A Development-Oriented Model

Against this backdrop, GFRAI 2026 highlighted emerging governance models that offer alternative pathways. Notably, the African Union’s approach to AI strategy presents a **development-oriented framework** that seeks to align technological advancement with broader socio-economic priorities.

As outlined by Dr. Kudakwashe Dandajena, Principal Programme Officer Technology Strategy, African Union (AU) Development Agency-NEPAD, the African Union’s AI strategy is grounded in the realities of the continent, including infrastructure gaps, capacity constraints, and the need for inclusive economic growth. Rather than replicating existing models, it draws selectively from global frameworks while adapting them to local priorities, with a strong emphasis on **sovereignty, capability-building, and long-term development.**

This approach represents what can be understood as a **“third pathway”** in AI governance—distinct from both market-driven models and highly centralised regulatory systems. It reflects an effort to balance risk management with opportunity creation, ensuring that AI serves as an enabler of development rather than a source of further inequality.



Dr. Kudakwashe Dandajena
Principal Programme Officer
Technology Strategy, African Union (AU)
Development Agency-NEPAD, South Africa

More broadly, it signals a shift toward a **multipolar governance landscape**, where different regions contribute distinct models and perspectives to the global conversation. In this context, the future of AI governance is less likely to be defined by a single dominant framework, and more by the interaction of multiple approaches shaped by diverse priorities and experiences.

The discussions in this section underscore that the challenge is not simply to improve existing governance frameworks, but to rethink the assumptions underlying them. Moving beyond universal models requires recognising the diversity of contexts in which AI operates, the multiplicity of actors involved, and the evolving balance of power between them.

In this emerging landscape, effective AI governance will depend not on uniformity, but on the ability to navigate complexity through **plural, adaptive, and context-sensitive architectures** that can respond to both global interdependence and local realities.



■ 5. From Frameworks to Practice: Institutional and Sectoral Perspectives.

Moving from models to implementation, this section examines how AI governance is applied in practice across sectors and contexts. It highlights the role of institutions, innovation, and capacity in translating principles into real-world outcomes.

■ 5.1 Education and Capacity Building: The Role of AI Literacy

A recurring insight across the forum was that effective AI governance depends not only on policies and frameworks, but also on the **capacity of individuals and institutions to understand, interpret, and apply them**. Without this foundation, even well-designed governance structures risk becoming abstract guidelines with limited practical impact.

From an educational perspective, Morraya Benhammou highlighted the importance of embedding responsible AI within teaching and learning environments through the AIDE (Artificial Intelligence Didactics Expertise) model. This approach is built on three pillars: **demystify, do, and debate**, enabling users not only to understand AI systems, but also to engage with them critically.




Morraya Benhammou
Senior lecturer, educational innovator,
and AI didactics specialist

A key lesson from this model is that **top-down implementation is often insufficient**. Institutional directives alone do not guarantee meaningful adoption; instead, change must be driven at the grassroots level, where educators and practitioners interact directly with end users. By empowering these actors, governance becomes a lived practice rather than a prescribed requirement.

This perspective reinforces the idea that responsible AI is not solely a technical or regulatory issue, it is also an **educational challenge**, requiring continuous learning, questioning, and adaptation.

● 5.2 Innovation in Context: Expanding Access Through Design

Beyond education, the forum highlighted how context-sensitive innovation can bridge the gap between governance frameworks and real-world needs. In particular, examples from the justice sector illustrated how AI systems can be designed to expand access rather than reinforce exclusion.



Drawing on practical experience, Ronald Lenz shared case studies from initiatives implemented in low-resource environments. In Niger, an AI-supported voice system was developed to help individuals navigate legal issues using basic mobile phones, bypassing barriers related to literacy and smartphone access. In Tunisia, a chatbot was introduced to support small business owners in understanding regulatory requirements and drafting contracts in local language contexts.



Ronald Lenz
Director Innovation, The Hague Institute of Innovation and Law - HiIL
Netherlands

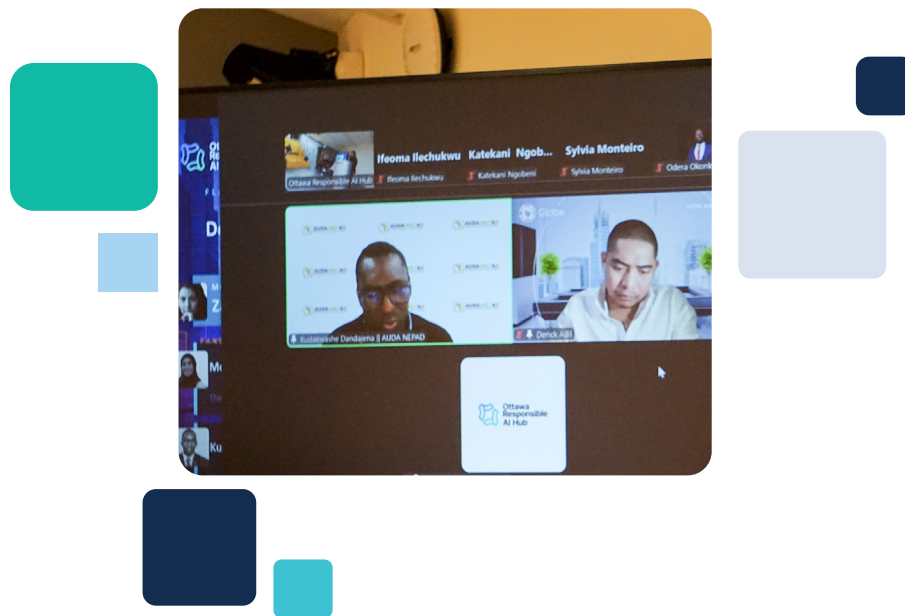
These examples demonstrate that **responsible AI is not only about mitigating risk, but also about expanding opportunity.** When systems are designed with local constraints and user needs in mind, they can improve access to essential services and contribute to broader social and economic inclusion.

At the same time, they highlight the importance of aligning innovation with governance principles, ensuring that technological solutions remain accountable, transparent, and responsive to user feedback.


5.3 Standards, Risk, and Operationalising Governance

From a standards and industry perspective, the discussion emphasised the need to translate high-level principles into **operational practices** that can be embedded within organisations.

As Derick Adil explained, frameworks such as ISO standards and risk-based governance models provide structured approaches for integrating responsible AI into business processes. Central to this is the concept of **“shift-left” governance**, where considerations of fairness, accountability, and risk are incorporated early in the design and development stages, rather than addressed retrospectively.



This approach enables organisations to align regulatory compliance with internal risk management, reducing exposure to legal, reputational, and operational risks. It also supports more nuanced governance, where oversight is calibrated according to the level of risk associated with different AI applications.



Importantly, this perspective challenges the notion that governance is inherently restrictive. Instead, it positions standards and frameworks as enablers of responsible innovation, providing the structure needed to scale AI systems in a sustainable and trustworthy manner.

■ 5.4 Trust, Incentives, and Market Realities

A critical insight emerging from the private sector dialogue is that **data justice and responsible AI are increasingly aligned with economic incentives**. In a digital environment where user trust is both fragile and essential, governance practices are becoming a key determinant of long-term success.

As emphasised during the discussion, trust is emerging as a form of currency in the digital economy. Organisations that are able to demonstrate fairness, accountability, and transparency in their use of AI are better positioned to build and maintain relationships with users, regulators, and partners.

This alignment between ethical responsibility and commercial viability represents an important shift. Rather than viewing governance as a compliance burden, organisations are beginning to recognise it as a **strategic asset**, one that supports resilience, competitiveness, and sustainable growth.

“Trust is emerging as a form of currency in the digital economy.”



However, this alignment is not automatic. It requires deliberate effort to embed data justice into core business processes, decision-making structures, and organisational culture. Without this integration, there is a risk that governance remains superficial, driven by external pressure rather than internal commitment.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of AI governance will depend not on the strength of frameworks alone, but on the institutions, incentives, and actors that translate them into practice





■ 6. Emerging Tensions and Unresolved Questions.

While progress is being made, several critical tensions remain unresolved. This section highlights the emerging risks and open questions that will shape the future of AI governance.

■ 6.1 The Enforcement Problem

Across the GFRAI 2026 dialogue, one of the most persistent concerns was the **gap between governance frameworks and their enforcement in practice**. While significant progress has been made in articulating principles, standards, and regulatory instruments, their implementation remains uneven across jurisdictions.

As highlighted by Marietje Schaake, enforcement is often treated as an after-thought in the policy process, with insufficient attention to the institutional capacity, resources, and coordination required to translate rules into action.

This challenge is particularly pronounced in contexts where regulatory institutions are still developing, or where oversight mechanisms are fragmented. Even in highly resourced environments, enforcement struggles to keep pace with the speed and complexity of technological change.

At the same time, participants noted that the issue is not solely technical or administrative, it is also **political and economic**. Effective enforcement depends on incentives, priorities, and the willingness of both public and private actors to align around shared goals. Without this alignment, governance risks becoming symbolic rather than substantive.


6.2 Beyond Data: Governing the “Intelligence Era”

A notable intervention from the audience reframed the conversation in a fundamental way: **have we moved beyond the “data era” into an “intelligence era”?** If so, what does this mean for governance?

This question challenges the current focus of most frameworks, which are primarily designed to regulate data collection, processing, and privacy. While these concerns remain important, they may not fully capture the broader implications of AI systems that generate, interpret, and act on information in increasingly autonomous ways.

In response, Payal Arora pointed to the limitations of attempting to govern “intelligence” as a discrete entity, noting that what is often described as intelligence is still rooted in data drawn from past experiences. At the same time, she emphasised that intelligence is inherently plural, shaped by diverse forms of knowledge and ways of knowing that extend beyond current AI paradigms.





Complementing this perspective, Derick Adil suggested that the challenge is less about governing intelligence itself, and more about ensuring equitable access to the conditions that make intelligence usable, such as infrastructure, interoperability, and digital literacy.

Together, these perspectives point to a critical gap in existing governance models: the need to move beyond regulating inputs toward addressing the broader ecosystems of knowledge, capability, and access that shape how AI-generated outputs are created and used.

6.3 AI, Power, and the Risk of Weaponisation

Another emerging concern relates to the **potential for AI systems to be misused or weaponised**, particularly as capabilities become more advanced and widely accessible. While much of the current governance discourse focuses on civilian and commercial applications, participants noted that these frameworks may be insufficient to address more complex or high-risk scenarios.

The increasing autonomy of AI systems, coupled with their integration into critical infrastructures, raises questions about **security, control, and unintended consequences**. At the same time, the concentration of technological power in a small number of actors, both state and corporate, introduces additional risks related to misuse, imbalance, and lack of accountability.

These concerns highlight the limitations of existing governance approaches, which are often designed around discrete use cases rather than systemic risks. Addressing them will require broader coordination across domains, including security, ethics, and international cooperation.



6.4 Jobs, Transition, and Economic Disruption

Beyond governance and security, the forum also touched on the **economic implications of AI**, particularly in relation to labour markets and employment. While AI has the potential to drive productivity and innovation, it also raises concerns about job displacement, skills mismatches, and widening inequality.

Rather than framing this as a binary choice between adoption and resistance, participants emphasised the need to approach AI as a **transition challenge**. This involves developing policies and systems that support workers in adapting to changing economic conditions, including through reskilling, social protection, and inclusive growth strategies.

In this context, AI governance intersects with broader questions of economic policy and development. Ensuring that the benefits of AI are widely distributed, and that its disruptions are managed effectively requires coordination across sectors and sustained investment in human capital.

The tensions outlined in this section reflect the **unfinished nature of AI governance**. While significant progress has been made in defining principles and frameworks, critical questions remain unresolved, particularly in relation to enforcement, emerging technologies, power dynamics, and economic impact.



■ 7. Toward a New Design Agenda for Responsible AI.

Drawing on the insights from the forum, this section outlines key directions for advancing more inclusive and effective AI governance. It identifies practical priorities for policymakers, industry, and other stakeholders.


■ 7.1 Core Design Principles Emerging from the Dialogue

The discussions at GFRAI 2026 point toward a set of emerging principles that can inform the next generation of responsible AI governance. While not presented as a formal framework, these principles reflect a convergence of perspectives across policy, academia, industry, and civil society.

First, **contextuality must be central to AI governance**. Systems cannot be designed or regulated in abstraction from the environments in which they operate. This requires recognising variations in infrastructure, institutional capacity, cultural norms, and socio-economic realities.

Second, **participation must replace passive inclusion**. Rather than treating communities as end users of pre-designed systems, governance processes must actively involve them in shaping how AI is developed and deployed. As Somto Mbelu emphasised, co-creation is essential to ensuring that AI systems reflect the needs and values of those they affect.

Third, **data justice must be embedded across the AI lifecycle**. This includes not only addressing bias and fairness at the output level, but also rethinking how data



is sourced, structured, and governed. Questions of representation, ownership, and power must be treated as core design considerations rather than secondary concerns.


Fourth, **governance must be adaptive and iterative.** Given the pace of technological change, static frameworks are unlikely to remain effective over time. Instead, governance systems must incorporate feedback loops, continuous evaluation, and the flexibility to evolve alongside emerging risks and opportunities.

Finally, **trust must be treated as both an ethical and strategic imperative.** As highlighted during the forum, trust underpins the legitimacy of AI systems and their adoption at scale. Building trust requires not only compliance with regulations, but also demonstrable accountability, transparency, and responsiveness to user concerns.

7.2 What the Majority World Teaches Global AI Governance

A defining insight from GFRAI 2026 is the need to rethink the directionality of knowledge in AI governance. Rather than viewing innovation and standards as flowing primarily from established centres of technological power, the forum highlighted the contributions of what is often referred to as the “Global South” or, more accurately, the **majority world.**

In her keynote, Payal Arora challenged the framing of the Global South as a peripheral actor, noting that the majority of the world’s population and a significant proportion of its young people reside outside the West. This demographic reality carries important implications for how AI systems should be designed, governed, and evaluated.



Experiences from these contexts offer valuable lessons in **resource-constrained innovation, informal system dynamics, and community-driven problem solving**. They also highlight alternative approaches to governance that prioritise flexibility, inclusivity, and development outcomes.

The African Union's AI strategy, for example, reflects an effort to align governance with long-term development goals, infrastructure realities, and questions of sovereignty. Similarly, grassroots innovation models demonstrate how AI can be adapted to local needs in ways that expand access and opportunity.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that the future of AI governance will be shaped not by a single dominant model, but by **diverse contributions from multiple regions**, each bringing unique insights and priorities to the global conversation.

7.3 Strategic Recommendations

Building on the insights from the forum, this report identifies a set of strategic directions for key stakeholder groups involved in shaping AI governance.



For Policymakers

- Move beyond universal frameworks toward context-sensitive regulatory approaches that account for local realities.
- Invest in institutional capacity, including enforcement mechanisms, technical expertise, and cross-sector coordination.
- Promote multi-level governance models that enable alignment across global, regional, and national levels while preserving flexibility.
- Ensure that governance processes are inclusive and participatory, incorporating diverse voices in policy design.



For Industry and Technology Developers

- Integrate data justice principles into core design and development processes, rather than treating them as compliance requirements.
- Adopt risk-based governance models that align ethical considerations with business strategy and long-term sustainability.
- Prioritise transparency and accountability, particularly in high-impact applications.
- Recognise trust as a competitive advantage, and invest in practices that strengthen user confidence and engagement.



For Standards Bodies and Multilateral Institutions

- Develop standards that support interoperability without enforcing uniformity, allowing for contextual adaptation.
- Facilitate knowledge exchange across regions, particularly between established and emerging AI ecosystems.
- Support the development of inclusive data infrastructures that reflect diverse perspectives and realities.
- Encourage collaborative governance models that bring together public, private, and civil society actors.



For Civil Society and Research Communities

- Continue to play a critical role in holding institutions accountable, particularly in relation to issues of bias, inclusion, and impact.
- Advocate for community-driven approaches to data and AI system design.
- Expand research on the social, economic, and cultural implications of AI, particularly in underrepresented contexts.
- Contribute to building public awareness and literacy, enabling more informed engagement with AI technologies.



The design agenda emerging from GFRAI 2026 reflects a shift from reactive governance toward proactive, inclusive, and context-aware approaches. It recognises that responsible AI cannot be achieved through isolated interventions, but requires coordinated action across multiple domains and stakeholders.

At its core, this agenda calls for a rebalancing of power, a rethinking of assumptions, and a renewed commitment to ensuring that AI systems serve the broader public good.





8. Conclusion: From Forum to Movement


The inaugural Global Forum on Responsible AI (GFRAI) 2026 marked more than a convening of stakeholders, it signalled the emergence of a **shared recognition that the current trajectory of AI governance is insufficient for the realities it seeks to address.**

Across discussions, a consistent message emerged: while global frameworks have advanced important principles, they remain limited in their ability to respond to the diversity of contexts in which AI systems operate. The assumption that governance models can be designed in one setting and applied universally is increasingly untenable in a world characterised by uneven infrastructure, varied institutional capacity, and diverse social realities.

As Somto Mbelu emphasised, the future of artificial intelligence must be shaped through **co-creation**, not passive adoption. This principle resonates throughout the insights captured in this report from the call for participatory design and community-driven data systems, to the recognition that governance must be grounded in lived experience rather than abstract ideals.

The forum also highlighted a broader shift in perspective: from viewing responsible AI as a matter of compliance to understanding it as a **continuous, context-sensitive process**. This shift is reflected in the emphasis on data justice, multi-level governance, and the need to align technological development with societal priorities.

At the same time, GFRAI 2026 underscored the importance of **rebalancing global narratives and power structures**. The contributions from what is often termed the “Global South” demonstrated that innovation, insight, and leadership are not con-



fined to traditional centres of influence. Rather, they are distributed across regions, offering diverse approaches that can enrich and reshape the global governance landscape.

Looking ahead, the challenge is not simply to refine existing frameworks, but to **build new models of collaboration** that can accommodate this diversity while maintaining shared commitments to fairness, accountability, and human rights. This will require sustained engagement across sectors, as well as the willingness to question established assumptions and experiment with new approaches.

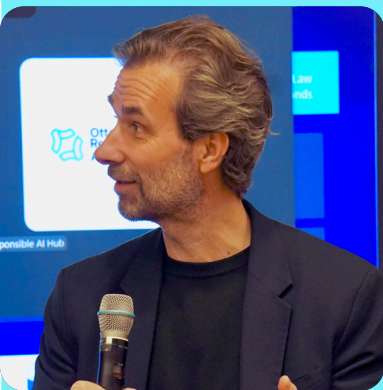
The forum also reinforced the importance of sustained international collaboration across public institutions, academia, industry, and civil society in shaping the future of responsible AI.

In this context, GFRAI positions itself not merely as an event, but as the foundation of an **ongoing global dialogue** platform for connecting perspectives, surfacing tensions, and advancing actionable ideas. Its travelling nature reflects a recognition that meaningful governance must be informed by multiple contexts, and that solutions must be shaped through continued exchange rather than static consensus.

Ultimately, the future of responsible AI will depend on whether governance systems can evolve to reflect the complexity of the world they seek to regulate. This includes acknowledging that **technology is not neutral**, that **data reflects power**, and that **inclusion must be actively designed**.

GFRAI 2026 offers an important step in this direction. By centring data justice, amplifying diverse voices, and reframing the terms of the debate, it contributes to a growing movement toward more equitable, inclusive, and context-aware AI governance.

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