

Nigeria publishes a draft national AI strategy

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Explore Firm Details

In August 2024, the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy released the draft of Nigeria's first National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (NAIS).

Nigeria Technology

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Introduction

In August 2024, the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy released the draft of Nigeria's first National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (NAIS). The NAIS was co-created by the National Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics (NCAIR) and the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) with support from private bodies.

The unveiling of the NAIS is to position the country to harness AI's potential responsibly and inclusively. The NAIS vision is clear: to establish Nigeria as a global leader in AI and to foster sustainable development through ethical innovation and collaborative efforts.

In a previous article , we explored the foundational aspects of AI and its legal and regulatory implications in Nigeria. The NAIS takes this a step further by outlining strategic pillars that will drive Nigeria's AI development and ensure that these technologies are leveraged responsibly and effectively.

In this newsletter, we analyze the main aspects of the NAIS and its importance to the growth of the Nigerian technology ecosystem.

Guiding Principles of the NAIS

The NAIS is guided by principles that emphasize responsible and ethical AI development to ensure that AI technologies are designed with societal impact in mind. These principles include, amongst others, a commitment to transparency, accountability, human-centric approaches, inclusivity and shared prosperity.

Another key principle is data ethics and agency. This involves strict adherence to principles of privacy, consent, fairness, and transparency in the collection, use, and sharing of data for AI applications. From a regulatory standpoint, this means enforcing robust privacy* protections and ensuring that individuals have the knowledge and tools to make informed decisions about their data. For businesses, it will mean integrating these ethical standards into their operations to build trust and compliance.

Key Strategic Pillars of the NAIS

There are 5 key strategic pillars of the NAIS. These are addressed below.

i . Building Foundational AI Infrastructure

Nigeria's ambition to lead in AI hinges on developing a solid infrastructure foundation and enhanced computing capacity. This pillar emphasizes investing in AI-specific hardware and software, particularly through domestic solutions to reduce reliance on foreign technology.

Additionally, the NAIS highlights the establishment of clean energy-powered AI clusters and offers tax breaks and incentives to encourage private sector investment in critical AI infrastructure, such as high-performance computing centers. These efforts aim to accelerate innovation, create jobs, and position Nigeria as a competitive player in the global AI arena.

ii. Building and Sustaining a World-Class AI Ecosystem

To achieve global leadership in AI, Nigeria aims to develop a robust and dynamic ecosystem of partners, academia, and a highly skilled workforce. This pillar focuses on fostering sustainable AI partnerships, championing international collaborations, and nurturing a culture of innovation.

Initiatives include the creation of platforms such as the Sustainable Applied AI Partnership Platform (SAAPP) to bring together diverse stakeholders for AI development, and the AI Synergy Alliance to facilitate global partnerships. Similarly, the NAIS aims to establish Deep Tech AI Accelerators and AI Centers of Excellence to drive innovation and commercialize AI solutions.

iii. Accelerating AI Adoption and Sector Transformation

This pillar seeks to harness AI for real-world impact by driving widespread adoption across various sectors, transforming industries, and promoting economic growth in Nigeria. This pillar emphasizes locally-led AI innovation, data-driven decision-making, and the development of an AI-ready workforce. Key strategies here include launching sector-specific AI adoption roadmaps, implementing global data quality standards, and creating a National AI Research and Development Fund to support cutting-edge research. The pillar also focuses on ensuring AI contributes to environmental well-being through green and sustainable AI initiatives, such as establishing a Green AI Challenge and Grant Programme to foster AI solutions for climate change, resource management, and smart city development.

The 3 Million Technical Talent (3MTT) Programme by the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation & Digital Economy aligns with these efforts by focusing on building Nigeria's future digital workforce. This program, which aims to train millions of Nigerians in tech and AI skills, complements the NAIS goal of building a skilled AI workforce and accelerating AI adoption across sectors.

iv. Ensuring Responsible and Ethical AI Development

Pillar 4 focuses on the need for Nigeria to develop and adopt AI within a responsible and ethical framework while recognizing the transformative power of AI and the inherent risks it poses. A key objective under this pillar is the establishment of a robust AI ethics framework. This involves creating a diverse AI Ethics Expert Group (AIEEG) to guide the development and implementation of ethical AI principles that align with Nigerian values. The framework will focus on fairness, transparency, accountability, privacy, and human well-being, supported by a comprehensive AI ethics assessment tool that evaluates the ethical implications of AI projects throughout their lifecycle.

Another critical objective is shaping a human-centered AI transition, which aims to anticipate and mitigate the societal disruptions AI might cause, such as job displacement and increased inequality. This will involve conducting foresight studies to map out potential challenges and opportunities, as well as implementing legislative reforms to adapt legal frameworks to the evolving nature of AI. These reforms will focus on protecting human rights, privacy, and ensuring equitable access to technology through initiatives like digital literacy programs and community technology hubs.

v. Developing a Robust AI Governance Framework

Pillar 5 emphasizes the need for clear and consistent governance principles to ensure the responsible and successful development of AI in Nigeria. A primary objective is to create well-defined National AI Principles that will guide aspects of AI development, deployment, and usage. Also, it will state Nigeria's core values and for AI development, including the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through AI.

The pillar aims to establish an independent AI Governance Regulatory Body responsible for enforcing ethical standards, providing clear guidance, and mediating disputes related to AI. The pillar also includes the development of a National AI Policy Framework to outline governance guidelines and a National AI Risk Management Framework to identify, assess, and mitigate potential safety and security risks associated with AI systems.

Conclusion

This ambitious roadmap outlines a comprehensive vision for AI development across five key pillars – each addressing critical areas essential for building a robust AI ecosystem. However, while the NAIS is thorough in its scope, it currently lacks an implementation framework detailing key timelines, milestones, and monitoring mechanisms. Also, the NAIS does not yet clarify the funding sources for the various projects it proposes. As this is still a draft, it is anticipated that these gaps will be addressed in the final version of the NAIS to ensure a more complete and actionable plan for Nigeria's AI future.

Download the NAIS document here – https://ncair.nitda.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/National-AI-Strategy_01082024-copy.pdf

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