POLICY MEMO

Digital Public Goods and Societal AI Resilience

Bridging Capacity Gaps in the Global Majority

Hosted by the Policy Hub for Inclusive Development (PHID)

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This memo synthesizes the discussions of the Official Side Event "Digital Public Goods and Societal AI Resilience: Bridging Capacity Gaps in the Global Majority," convened under the thematic cluster Bridging AI Divides: Capacity-Building, Access and Digital Foundations during the inaugural Global Dialogue on AI Governance, established by United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/79/325 (2025). It argues that strengthening societal AI resilience requires shifting the focus of global AI governance from expanding access to AI technologies toward building the institutional capacities that enable countries to govern, adapt, and benefit from AI over time.

Finding 1 · The principal AI divide is shifting from access to capacity.

While access to frontier models has expanded, meaningful participation in the AI ecosystem remains constrained by unequal institutional capabilities, regulatory expertise, digital infrastructure, financing, compute resources, and skilled talent. These asymmetries are reinforced by the concentration of AI infrastructure, cloud services, and frontier model development in a small number of countries and firms, as well as by persistent linguistic inequalities embedded in current foundation models.

Finding 2 · AI readiness should become a core objective of global AI governance.

Readiness extends beyond technological adoption to encompass the institutional ability to develop, procure, deploy, oversee, and continuously evaluate AI systems in line with national priorities and public interest. Building this capacity requires investments in public institutions, regulatory capabilities, local research ecosystems, and interdisciplinary human capital, enabling countries to become contributors — not merely consumers — of AI innovation.

Finding 3 · Digital Public Goods (DPGs) constitute strategic governance infrastructure.

Open, interoperable, and reusable digital resources can accelerate institutional capacity-building, strengthen public-sector innovation, reduce technological dependencies, and facilitate cross-border cooperation through scalable and adaptable solutions. Their greatest value lies not simply in openness, but in their potential to transform national investments into shared global public value.

Finding 4 · Openness alone does not guarantee resilience.

As AI capabilities become more widely distributed, governance frameworks must evolve to balance openness with cybersecurity, accountability, lifecycle oversight, and responsible stewardship. Societal AI resilience depends on institutions capable of managing AI risks continuously rather than regulating technologies only at the point of deployment.

Finding 5 · International cooperation should prioritize shared institutional capacity.

Beyond harmonizing principles, multilateral cooperation should expand investments in DPGs, regional research networks, shared compute and training infrastructures, South-South collaboration, and coordination mechanisms that strengthen long-term implementation capacity. Embedding resilience, institutional preparedness, and digital public infrastructure within national AI strategies will be essential to ensuring that the benefits of AI are distributed more equitably across the Global Majority.

II. BACKGROUND

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly becoming a foundational layer of economic activity, public administration, and critical infrastructure. As AI systems are deployed across sectors, countries increasingly require not only access to AI technologies but also the institutional capacity to govern their adoption, manage associated risks, and ensure that AI contributes to long-term public value.[1]

This broader capacity is captured by the concept of ***societal AI resilience***: the ability of governments, institutions, economies, and communities to anticipate, withstand, adapt to, and recover from disruptions associated with AI transitions while maintaining essential public functions, public trust, and human agency.[2] AI resilience therefore extends beyond technical robustness to encompass institutional preparedness, digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, workforce capabilities, and governance arrangements.[3]

Within this context, Digital Public Goods (DPGs) provide foundational digital infrastructure for resilience. As open-source software, open standards, open data, and other interoperable digital assets designed for the public interest, DPGs enable governments to build, audit, adapt, and reuse digital systems while reducing long-term lock-in to proprietary technologies.[4] Their scalability also allows investments made in one jurisdiction to be reused and adapted by others, making them an effective mechanism for international cooperation and capacity-building at the national and local levels.[5]

These issues are particularly significant for the Global Majority countries across Africa, Latin America, South and Southeast Asia, and other regions that account for most of the world's population but remain underrepresented in frontier AI development and governance.[6] As these countries face growing demand to adopt AI despite persistent constraints in institutional capacity, digital infrastructure, compute, and research ecosystems, strengthening societal AI resilience through DPGs offers a practical framework for connecting national implementation with more inclusive global AI governance.

III. KEY INSIGHTS

From AI Access to AI Readiness: Strengthening Institutional Capacity

Expanding access to AI technologies is only the first step. The challenge is enabling countries to participate meaningfully in AI ecosystems through sovereign infrastructure capacity, attracting or generating talent capacity for local research labs and innovation, and public governance capacity-building. Gabriela Agustini describes this as the difference between being an AI user versus an AI participant.

> *"AI readiness represents the ability not simply to use AI, but to shape how it is developed, adapted and governed. It means reducing strategic dependence on a limited number of external providers while strengthening domestic capacity and preserving the ability to choose among interoperable solutions."*

Building Societal AI Resilience through Digital Public Goods

Very few AI systems can currently be considered DPGs in practice. Training data provenance is usually opaque, and model behavior cannot be inferred from the source code alone. Furthermore, most standards for DPGs were designed with non-AI software and data in mind.

Open and interoperable digital infrastructure strengthens resilience by reducing dependence on proprietary technologies, enabling transparency, and broadening participation in AI innovation. Yet greater openness does not necessarily equal access, and can further deepen dependencies given the constantly increasing cost of compute. Greater openness also raises governance challenges around cybersecurity, misuse, and accountability: most "open" models are, in practice, open-weight. Sensitive data stays local and access cannot be revoked, but safeguards can be degraded or removed more easily, and widely available agentic capabilities drastically increase the attack surface.

Resilient AI ecosystems therefore require frameworks that combine openness with safeguards, ensuring DPGs remain trustworthy, secure, and sustainable over time. One-time review is no longer sufficient; what is needed instead is lifecycle-differentiated governance across every stage of AI development.

Advancing Local Innovation while Reducing Technological Dependencies

Advanced AI development remains concentrated in a small number of countries and companies, limiting others' ability to shape technological priorities.

Indicator	Figure
US & China share of global AI data-center capacity	> 90%
TSMC share of the market for logic chips	90%
Share of global AI compute capacity located in the US	~ 75%

Table 1: Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (2026); Bertelsmann Stiftung / Open Future (2025); Independent International Scientific Panel on AI, Preliminary Report.[7]

When asked by Michelle Perino how these dependencies could be reduced, Agustini explained that strengthening local research institutions, startups, computational infrastructure, and regional scientific cooperation can turn countries into active contributors rather than passive adopters.

Technological sovereignty, in this sense, does not mean self-sufficiency but *the capacity to make informed, autonomous decisions about AI development and governance* — a capacity already visible in South-South and regional collaborations across the Global Majority, including in Kenya, Brazil, and India. Kenya's partnership with Cassava Technologies and Microsoft's data-center campus in the country exchanges a domestic energy advantage for AI capacity, while the government retains oversight over data governance and compliance. In South America, Brazil is investing heavily in R&D and public models in Portuguese, alongside hyperscaler commitments from Microsoft and AWS.

Preparing Future Generations for Inclusive AI Governance

Sustainable AI governance depends on investing in people as much as in technology. Education systems must build not only digital literacy but interdisciplinary knowledge spanning ethics, governance, law, and social sciences. Young people are essential stakeholders: expanding opportunities for education, leadership, and research participation strengthens perspective diversity in global governance.

> **CAUTION**
> Governments should avoid preparing people only to 'adapt' to AI, rather than working to make AI itself safe, fair, and accountable. AI literacy alone is not enough while the Global Majority still faces learning poverty and limited access to capable computing resources.

Nigeria offers a strong example, combining a National AI Strategy focused on AI literacy with a Data Protection Act and the 2025 GAID directive establishing safeguards for children's data.

IV. CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

Despite growing recognition of the importance of inclusive AI governance, several structural challenges continue to limit countries' ability to participate meaningfully in the AI ecosystem.

Institutional and infrastructural gaps

Countries still face limited regulatory expertise and technical knowledge in the public sector to evaluate AI systems, with the Global Majority disproportionately affected.

Indicator	Figure
Developing countries with a national AI strategy	< 1 in 3
Countries with an independent AI oversight body	29
Population online in low-income countries	27%
Population online in high-income countries	93%
Share of world's data centers hosted in the United States	~ 50%

Table 2: Global Index on Responsible AI, 2nd ed. (2026); Independent International Scientific Panel on AI, Preliminary Report; International Telecommunication Union, Facts and Figures 2023.[8, 9]

Availability of DPGs is of limited value if basic access to digital infrastructure is not met.

Fragmentation and financing

Governance itself is becoming fragmented, as countries and regions develop distinct regulatory frameworks, principles, and implementation strategies that — while reflecting legitimate local priorities — can hinder international coordination, reduce policy coherence, and raise barriers for countries with limited resources.

Underpinning all of this are financing and sustainability constraints: developing inclusive AI ecosystems requires sustained investment in infrastructure, research, and the long-term maintenance of DPGs, which many countries struggle to secure. The second edition of the Global Index on Responsible AI (2026) finds that responsible-AI laws, strategies, and commitments are spreading faster than the institutions, enforcement tools, and transparency mechanisms needed to make them effective.[10]

Finally, shortages of skilled professionals — not only AI specialists, but policymakers, educators, and legal experts — and persistent difficulties coordinating across governments, industry, academia, civil society, and technical communities continue to constrain inclusive, effective AI governance.

The linguistic dimension: the "token tax"

Structural challenges also arise from how frontier models have developed. Training data and tokenization methods create significant cost discrepancies across languages, since vocabulary is learned overwhelmingly from English and other web-abundant languages, compounded by differences in how each language is represented in Unicode.[11]

> **KEY STATISTIC**
>
> Romance and Germanic languages already carry a measurable token tax relative to English (Spanish, French, and Portuguese require roughly 1.2× as many tokens per word; Germanic languages approximately 1.4–1.55×). The tax worsens sharply for Global Majority languages in non-Latin scripts — reaching up to 9× for Bambara written in N'Ko, and roughly 8× for Hausa written in Ajami, compared with just 1.35× for the same languages rendered in Latin script.[12, 13]

V. OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Addressing global AI divides requires cooperation that moves beyond traditional technology transfer toward building sustainable, inclusive, and locally grounded AI ecosystems.

South-South cooperation offers a valuable channel for countries facing similar challenges to exchange experience and adapt successful approaches to their own contexts, reducing dependency on solutions designed elsewhere. Realism and pragmatism are nonetheless required: most countries in the Global Majority do not have the industrial or digital infrastructure capabilities to reduce dependency on frontier, Global North resources and models. South-South cooperation is most powerful as a mechanism for regional bargaining blocs to negotiate frontier access, and as a working instance for tackling governance — as seen in the Intergovernmental Council on AI for Latin America, the African Union's continental strategy and Africa Declaration, and the transferable risk-assessment templates of the ASEAN Guide. Multistakeholder partnerships that combine governments, academia, industry, civil society, and technical communities can address the technical, social, and ethical dimensions of AI development jointly and more inclusively.

Knowledge-sharing networks and platforms such as the Global Dialogue on AI Governance help countries build regulatory capacity and exchange lessons learned, while collaborative DPG ecosystems — sustained by durable governance and funding models such as shared compute pools and hubs, AI development bonds, and public data commons — expand access to shared open software, data, and infrastructure. Capacity-building initiatives and technical assistance should prioritize long-term institutional equipment over short-term fixes, enabling countries to evaluate, regulate, and innovate with AI according to their own priorities. Finally, open standards and interoperability can facilitate cooperation across systems, institutions, and countries, provided that standards development itself remains inclusive of the diverse capacities and contexts of countries worldwide.

VI. POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Several policy considerations follow from these findings.

- **Treat DPGs as foundational infrastructure.** DPGs should be treated as foundational infrastructure for AI readiness rather than uniquely technological resources, with investment extending to their governance, sustainability, and security.
- **Build institutional capacity alongside deployment.** Institutional capacities should be strengthened alongside AI deployment, so that expanding access to AI technologies translates into genuine capacity to govern them rather than deeper dependency — for example, by holding public-sector AI to a higher standard and building institutions as well as frameworks. Achieving societal AI resilience will require sustained collaboration among governments, industry, academia, civil society, and technical communities, recognizing that public and private investments play complementary roles in building inclusive AI ecosystems.

- **Strengthen international and South-South cooperation.** International cooperation, including South-South and multilateral mechanisms, remains essential to reduce AI capacity gaps across the Global Majority. Representative, inclusive discussions should be prioritized over isolated projects — this goes beyond participation by Global Majority countries in international fora and means actual coordination at the regional level, including regional centres of cooperation, joint research labs, cross-regional knowledge networks, bilateral special economic zones, and shared training hubs and compute facilities between allies, such as the Working Group on the Ethics of AI in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- **Embed resilience in national AI strategies.** National AI strategies should treat resilience, cybersecurity, and digital public infrastructure as components of AI readiness, and monitoring and evidence as governance infrastructure in their own right. Cybersecurity here means capacity, not only posture: Singapore's 2025 red-teaming exercise found safety guardrails significantly weaker in regional languages than in English.[14] The changing threat landscape requires legitimate cybersecurity capabilities as part of AI readiness.
- **Account for environmental risk.** Only 27% of countries have frameworks addressing AI's environmental effects, and 83% of those frameworks are non-binding.[15] Exceptions stand out, such as Vietnam's Decision 36/QĐ-TTg setting green data-center standards and Brazil's Redata Act establishing a national data-center policy with energy-efficiency requirements.[16]

VII. KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The AI divide is material, structural, institutional, and governance-dependent.
- Access does not guarantee economic value by itself; fostering AI readiness requires agency by the Global Majority to move from users to active participants.
- 'Sovereignty' or resilience is best achieved through a managed, interdependent approach rather than isolated initiatives.
- AI-specific DPGs remain to be defined — existing DPG standards were created for non-AI artifacts.
- International cooperation, including South-South and multilateral mechanisms, remains essential to reduce AI capacity gaps across the Global Majority.
- States should avoid preparing people only to adapt to AI, instead working to make AI safe, fair, and accountable.
- Environmental impact and language/tokenization inequities remain blind spots to be addressed.

VIII. LOOKING AHEAD

The future of inclusive AI governance depends on translating shared principles into practical mechanisms for cooperation and capacity development. The Global Dialogue on AI Governance, together with the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI — whose Preliminary Report (2026) warns that current safeguards cannot keep pace with the growth of AI's capabilities — provides an ongoing platform to exchange knowledge and identify shared priorities.

Further research is needed on sustainable financing and governance models for Digital Public Goods, on measuring AI readiness, and on evaluating the long-term impact of capacity-building initiatives. Moving forward, governments, multilateral organizations, technical communities, academia, and civil society should prioritize collaborative approaches that strengthen local capabilities while advancing global cooperation, so that all countries can participate meaningfully in shaping AI development and governance.

> *"The future of AI governance will depend not only on technological progress, but also on the ability of all countries to develop the capacities needed to participate meaningfully in shaping AI's development and governance — that is, the capacity of countries to push for agency."*

IX. FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

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X. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & LICENCE

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The views and policy considerations presented in this policy memo reflect the discussions held during the session and should not be interpreted as representing the official positions of the United Nations, its entities, or the organizations represented by the speakers.

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