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# Why Central Africa Cannot Afford to Import AI Governance Models

*Central Africa is not behind on AI. It's behind on AI governance. Here's why that distinction matters.*

Central Africa is often described as lagging in artificial intelligence adoption. According to the Microsoft AI Diffusion Report 2025, countries in the subregion rank among the lowest on the continent, with adoption rates between 6.80% and 7.80%. Cameroon, for example, ranks 32nd out of 46 African countries.

At first glance, this looks like a gap to close. But looking more carefully, the reality is more nuanced and more urgent.

The real challenge is not just the adoption of AI. It is about how these technologies are introduced and, above all, governed.

## The Real Diagnosis: Governance, Not Adoption

The African AI Governance Index provides precise data on the regulatory situation of each African country. Cameroon scores 63/100; the best in Central Africa thanks to a data protection law promulgated in December 2024. But the country scores 0/10 on Implementation Evidence. The law exists. Real governance does not yet.

Gabon, with a score of 49/100, completed a UNESCO RAM assessment and a CEA AI Workshop in December 2024. Result: 13.40% generative AI adoption compared to 7.80% for Cameroon. Methodology before regulation.

*As Kwame Opoku, founder of the African AI Governance Index, puts it: "The gap between African nations is not about resources. It is about coordination, measurement, and building the institutions that make success legible and replicable."*

## What Kenya Teaches Us

The contrast with Kenya is striking. In two years, Kenya became a founding member of the International Network of AI Safety Institutes, alongside the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. It appointed a special envoy for technology; the first African country to create such a position. It launched a national AI strategy in March 2025.

Central Africa does not have less potential than Kenya. It has less institutional coordination.

## What We Observe on the Ground

A survey conducted with IIBA Cameroon Chapter reveals that 64% of organizations recognize the importance of data but only 22% actually use it to make decisions. In several organizations,

AI tools are already in use. Imported. Trained on data that does not reflect local realities. Deployed without defined governance frameworks.

I have personally trained over 50 professionals in the responsible use of generative AI tools. At every session, the same reality: powerful tools, used without safeguards.

**This creates three structural risks.**

**First, technological dependency.** Adopting external solutions without local control means depending on infrastructures and standards that cannot be managed internally.

**Second, contextual mismatch.** Systems trained on data that poorly represents African realities produce inadequate or biased results.

**Third, technological lock-in.** Once integrated into decision-making processes, AI systems are difficult to replace. Choices made today without adapted frameworks will have lasting consequences.

## A Strategic Window Not to Miss

In this context, Central Africa's delay can be interpreted differently. It represents an opportunity to build governance frameworks adapted to local realities before mass adoption.

This is not about slowing adoption. It is about structuring it better.

**Four priorities emerge.**

**Strengthen data foundations.** Without reliable data, AI systems cannot produce quality results.

**Adapt existing frameworks.** The EU AI Act, UNESCO recommendations, and the Kigali Declaration must be contextualized for the subregion's institutional realities.

**Foster collaboration.** AI governance cannot be designed at the institutional level alone. It must integrate field-level practices.

**Bridge the gap between awareness and action.** 64% awareness versus 18% actual use that is the real problem to solve.

## Conclusion

The question is no longer "Is Central Africa ready for AI?"

*It is: "Who will design the governance frameworks capable of ensuring responsible, contextualized AI aligned with the region's development priorities?"*

**Without governance, adoption creates dependency.**

**With adapted frameworks, this delay can become a genuine strategic advantage.**

*Sources: Microsoft AI Diffusion Report 2025, African AI Governance Index, IIBA Cameroon Chapter, World Bank Group Data Academy*