Speaking for the Global South? China's AI Governance Narrative and African Policy Agency in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Egypt, and South Africa

Mekonnen Zewdu Alemnew

Renmin University of China

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.101100151

Received: 04 November 2026; Accepted: 09 November 2026; Published: 23 November 2026

ABSTRACT

Inclusive artificial intelligence governance concerns not only access to technology but also the authority to define priorities, govern data, and shape institutions. This article compares China's international AI governance narrative with official policy discourses from Ethiopia, Nigeria, Egypt, and South Africa. It develops a three-dimensional framework distinguishing representational inclusion, capability inclusion, and decision-making inclusion. Drawing on scholarship on representation, participation, capability, African agency, and digital sovereignty, the framework separates discursive positioning, substantive opportunities, and governing authority.

The article presents an interpretive comparison of selected passages from Xi Jinping's 2026 World Artificial Intelligence Conference address and four African national documents. Supplementary Ethiopian executive and institutional communications contextualize that case. The analysis identifies convergence around development and capability building but uneven specification of authority. The Chinese address announces support and presents China as responsive to Global South demands; the African documents locate cooperation within national research, innovation, regulatory, and regional projects.

Recognition, representation, responsiveness, and legitimate authorization are assessed separately. African agency is likewise distinguished into policy articulation, institutional capacity, bargaining power, technological autonomy, and demonstrated influence.

The evidence establishes articulated positions more directly than implementation or influence. It does not demonstrate reception of the later Chinese speech or causal policy transfer. The contribution is an integrated analytical framework that makes participation claims more precise without treating the Global South as a unified actor or national ambition as achieved authority.

Keywords*:* global AI governance; China–Africa relations; African policy agency; Global South; digital sovereignty; strategic narratives

1. INTRODUCTION

Who speaks for the Global South in artificial intelligence governance, and what follows from being included in that conversation? These questions concern more than access to technological tools. A government may be recognized as a partner without determining research priorities. It may receive training without the institutional conditions needed to apply it. It may join an international organization without influencing its agenda.

Common governance language does not settle these relationships. Jobin, Ienca, and Vayena (2019) identify convergence around several ethical principles while documenting substantial differences in interpretation and implementation. Agreement on responsible or inclusive AI therefore provides a starting point for investigation rather than evidence of a common institutional settlement.

China's international discourse makes this distinction consequential. In his July 17, 2026 address to the World Artificial Intelligence Conference and High-Level Meeting on Global AI Governance, Xi Jinping connects equitable governance with cooperation, safety, cultural diversity, and assistance for developing countries. The address announces training opportunities, application cooperation centers, and access to the AI-enabled meteorological warning system MAZU (Xi, 2026).

The speech also presents China as responsive to a collective constituency. It characterizes WAICO's establishment as answering "the call of the Global South" (Xi, 2026, WAICO announcement). This links Chinese action to collective interests, but does not itself establish that those countries authorized China to represent them.

African national documents provide a necessary counterpoint. Ethiopia connects research, infrastructure, skills, data governance, and cooperation (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia [FDRE], 2024). Nigeria links leadership to local talent, inclusive innovation, and collaboration (Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy [FMCIDE], 2025). Egypt connects technological assets to national development and African–Arab regional roles (National Council for Artificial Intelligence [NCAI], 2025). South Africa combines competitiveness with rights, stakeholder involvement, and responsible deployment (Department of Communications and Digital Technologies [DCDT], 2024).

These texts articulate priorities beyond receiving external technology. Yet a strategy is not proof that those priorities have been implemented. Brown's (2012) account of African agency supports attention to differentiated actors and historical conditions rather than either passive-recipient assumptions or automatic claims of autonomy.

This article treats inclusion as a differentiated relationship involving recognition, substantive opportunities, and authority. Speaking for is posed as a question, not assumed as an established mandate. The analysis distinguishes references to needs, claims to advance interests, demonstrated responsiveness, and legitimate authorization.

The comparison includes four purposively selected African countries, not a representative sample of Africa. Their priorities overlap: rights, development, innovation, sovereignty, and leadership can appear within the same document. The Global South is also treated as a contested political category rather than a unified set of interests.

Chronology limits the inquiry. The principal African documents predate Xi's 2026 address. They cannot establish responses to it. Shared language may reflect compatibility, broader policy circulation, or earlier learning, but causal influence requires additional evidence. This follows strategic narrative scholarship's separation of projection and reception (Miskimmon et al., 2013).

The article asks:

RQ1: How does China's 2026 World Artificial Intelligence Conference address represent African institutions and the Global South, and what claims does it make about collective needs and representation?

RQ2: What AI governance priorities, institutional roles, and forms of policy agency do Ethiopia, Nigeria, Egypt, and South Africa articulate in their selected official documents?

RQ3: How do the examined discourses compare across representational inclusion, capability inclusion, and decision-making inclusion?

RQ4: Where do the discourses converge, diverge, or reveal tensions, and what evidence, if any, indicates policy learning or selective appropriation?

RQ5: Which dimensions of participation are specified most clearly in the examined texts?

RQ3 concerns the content and relationships of the dimensions; RQ5 concerns documentary specificity rather than a ranking of actual power. The contribution is to connect established theoretical distinctions in an AI-governance framework while making explicit what official texts can and cannot establish.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Shared principles and institutional differences

Jobin et al. (2019) identify convergence around transparency, justice and fairness, non-maleficence, responsibility, and privacy. Differences in justification, responsibility, and implementation nevertheless remain. An endorsement of fairness does not specify who evaluates systems, whose harms count, or which remedies exist.

The same applies to capacity building. Training, computing, research funding, and regulatory development are different interventions. Grouping them under one term can conceal their different implications for durable participation. This study therefore moves from identifying vocabulary to examining the relationships and obligations attached to it.

2.2 Representation and participation

Pitkin (1967) distinguishes authorization and accountability from substantive and symbolic accounts of representation. Saward (2006) emphasizes the construction and contestability of representative claims. Together, these approaches separate claiming to advance interests from possessing an accepted representative relationship.

Participation scholarship supplies a related distinction. Arnstein (1969) separates opportunities to be informed or consulted from arrangements that redistribute power. Fung (2006) examines who participates, how participants communicate and decide, and how their activities connect to public action. Presence, voice, and authority are therefore not interchangeable.

These contributions justify examining both narrative positioning and institutional procedures. Their application here does not assume that international cooperation is equivalent to a domestic democratic process; it identifies the evidentiary questions needed to assess different relationships.

2.3 Capability and technological inequality

Sen (1999) distinguishes resources from substantive freedoms. Possessing an input does not ensure an effective opportunity to use it, because social, institutional, and environmental conditions affect conversion. This provides a reason to distinguish announced assistance from sustainable technological capability.

Birhane (2020) examines algorithmic colonization through corporate power, imported systems, and marginalization of local needs. Her analysis centers Western corporate agendas and should not be transferred automatically to every state partnership. Mohamed et al. (2020) likewise situate AI within historical hierarchies and emphasize the experiences of affected and vulnerable people.

These works question access-centered accounts without predetermining the consequences of every partnership. Cooperation may strengthen research while preserving infrastructure dependence. Local development may improve relevance without ensuring public accountability. Those relationships require evidence.

2.4 African agency and institutional capacity

Brown (2012) supports an actor-specific and historically situated approach to African agency. Dependence can constrain action without eliminating it, while public ambition does not prove successful negotiation.

Wu, Ramesh, and Howlett (2015) distinguish analytical, operational, and political policy capacities across individual, organizational, and systemic levels. Their framework helps separate an institution's formal existence from its ability to analyze problems, implement decisions, and sustain support.

The present article therefore distinguishes policy articulation, capacity, leverage, autonomy, and observed effects. This prevents a strategy, institute, or partnership from serving as an undifferentiated indicator of agency.

2.5 Sovereignty and strategic narratives

Pohle and Thiel (2020) treat digital sovereignty as a contested discourse rather than a single settled condition. Control may concern data location, infrastructure, jurisdiction, procurement, or individual self-determination. The relevant question is autonomy for whom, over what, and in relation to which constraint.

Miskimmon et al. (2013) examine how narratives connect problems, identities, responsibilities, and futures. Their distinction between projection and reception limits what a speech-based comparison can infer. The present article analyzes one international address rather than claiming to characterize China's entire AI diplomacy.

2.6 Contribution and scope

The contribution is not the discovery that resources, recognition, and power differ. Existing scholarship establishes those distinctions. The article integrates them for a bounded comparison of official AI discourse and develops corresponding evidence rules.

It does not claim a systematically verified absence of previous comparative research. Broader conclusions about Chinese diplomacy or African technological trajectories would require a wider literature and empirical corpus.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Global South: A contested political category

The Global South is used here as a contested political and relational category, not a fixed geographical region or a coherent decision-making actor. The term circulates in descriptions of development, inequality, collective voice, and international status; there is no single universally settled membership or meaning (House of Commons Library, 2026).

The category can identify shared concerns without demonstrating common preferences. Economic structures, political systems, technological positions, and strategic relationships differ among states commonly grouped under it. Inequalities also exist within those states. National governments are not assumed to express every societal interest.

This article uses the term in two distinct ways. As a category used by political actors, it is an object of analysis: who invokes it, whose needs it identifies, and what action it legitimizes. As an analytical term, it sensitizes the comparison to unequal positions without substituting for case-specific evidence.

China's invocation of the Global South is not treated as confirmation of its own representative status. Neither are four African documents treated as a continental or Global South consensus. Collective interests and coalitions must be established for particular issues rather than assumed from the label.

3.2 Why distinguish three inclusion dimensions?

Recognition, effective opportunity, and governing authority describe different relationships. Participation research shows that access and consultation need not confer power (Arnstein, 1969; Fung, 2006). Capability scholarship distinguishes inputs from substantive opportunities (Sen, 1999). Representation theory separates claims from accepted relationships (Pitkin, 1967; Saward, 2006).

Fraser's (2008) account of participatory parity offers a further basis for distinguishing distribution, recognition, and political representation. The present framework does not reproduce her categories directly. Its representational dimension concerns discursive positioning; political membership and voice in Fraser's sense also inform decision-making inclusion.

The dimensions are therefore an analytical synthesis, not a complete theory of justice or a developmental ladder. They identify what must be assessed separately before connections are inferred.

3.3 Representational inclusion

Representational inclusion concerns how actors and their interests are portrayed: as beneficiaries, partners, markets, knowledge producers, leaders, or rule-makers. Saward's (2006) claim-based approach makes it possible to examine who constructs a constituency, which interests are attributed to it, and whether that account can be accepted or contested.

The dimension is broader than frequency of mention. Naming a country establishes visibility, while identifying it as a knowledge producer assigns a different role. Neither automatically establishes a mandate or material influence. Recognition is politically relevant, but its effects require investigation.

3.4 Recognition, representation, responsiveness, and authorization

The article distinguishes four relationships rather than treating inclusive language as evidence of all of them. For coding purposes, "representative claim" is used where an actor offers itself or another subject as standing for a constituency. An accepted relationship is a separate empirical question (Saward, 2006).

Table 1:- summary of Recognition, representation, responsiveness, and authorization

Concept	Minimum analytical criterion	Stronger evidence	Inference to avoid
Recognition	A constituency is identified and acknowledged as relevant	Its needs, perspectives, or standing receive explicit attention	Mention establishes voice or mandate
Representative claim	An actor presents itself or another subject as standing for or advancing a constituency's interests	Identifiable audience endorsement, rejection, or contestation	A claim is an accepted representative relationship
Responsiveness	An identifiable preference or concern is linked to an adjustment in conduct	Consultation records, revisions, implementation feedback	A beneficial announcement proves a response to expressed demands
Legitimate authorization	A defensible mandate or accepted representative procedure has an identifiable source and scope	Constituency standing, accountable delegation, meaningful contestability, renewal or withdrawal	Self-assertion, general support, or silence establishes authorization

A speech can claim responsiveness without demonstrating it. The analysis records that difference. Evidence of fit between an initiative and a need is weaker than evidence that affected actors expressed the need and influenced the response.

Formal authorization and legitimate authorization are also distinct. A delegation rule may establish legal competence, but a legitimacy assessment must ask who could grant it, whose interests fall within its scope, and whether affected actors can contest its exercise. Acceptance matters, but is not sufficient if the relevant constituency is excluded or the scope is misrepresented.

These criteria are not universal necessary-and-sufficient tests of all legitimate representation. Non-electoral relationships can be legitimate (Saward, 2006; Urbinati & Warren, 2008). They are evidence rules for avoiding unsupported mandate claims in this study. Recognition is not a necessary first stage of authorization, and the four concepts are not a hierarchy through which relationships automatically progress.

3.5 Capability inclusion

Capability inclusion concerns substantive opportunities to develop, assess, adapt, and use AI, not resources alone. Sen's (1999) resource–freedom distinction directs attention to conversion conditions: organizational continuity, language accessibility, maintenance, expertise retention, legal permissions, and sustained finance.

The analysis distinguishes inputs, conversion conditions, and opportunities. Training places are inputs; institutions able to employ and retain expertise are conversion conditions; sustained research or independent assessment is an opportunity that those conditions may enable.

This is a domain-specific adaptation, not a claim that states are equivalent to individuals. The capability approach remains concerned with people's freedoms. National capacity is therefore not assumed to benefit every group or expand democratic participation.

3.6 Decision-making inclusion

Decision-making inclusion concerns procedures and authority through which actors can shape priorities, rules, resources, or outcomes. Following Fung (2006), the connection between participation and public action is examined separately from access to discussion.

The article distinguishes three scales: domestic state authority, domestic societal participation, and international institutional influence. A national regulator's mandate does not establish international leverage; membership abroad does not establish community influence at home.

Formal authority is also separated from its exercise. A power may exist without being used effectively, while informal actors may influence outcomes without a vote. Operational records are needed for stronger influence claims.

3.7 African policy agency: Five analytical components

African policy agency is defined as the situated ability of identifiable African actors to formulate priorities, pursue them through institutions and relationships, and shape decisions affecting technological development and governance. "African" identifies context, not a unified continental interest. Ministries, regulators, researchers, firms, communities, and regional institutions may seek different outcomes (Brown, 2012).

Table 2: summery of five analytical components

Component	Definition	Indicative evidence	Insufficient evidence alone
Policy articulation	Formulating priorities, problems, instruments, and cooperation conditions	Objectives, assigned responsibilities, locally specified needs	A leadership aspiration
Institutional capacity	Competencies and organizational conditions for policy functions	Staff, executed finance, coordination, analytical and operational records	An institute's creation or formal mandate
Bargaining power	Relational ability to affect negotiated terms through incentives, costs, or alternatives	Concessions, negotiated conditions, credible alternatives, coalition leverage	Partnership status or meeting attendance
Technological autonomy	Practical room to choose, evaluate, adapt, maintain, govern, or replace technology	Portability, adaptation rights, expertise, maintenance and replacement options	National branding or domestic location
Demonstrated influence	An observable contribution to a changed decision or outcome	Traceable effects on agreements, standards, procurement, regulation, or allocation	Similarity between preferences and outcomes

These components are not five levels. Articulation expresses a position; capacity, leverage, and autonomy describe enabling or constraining relationships; demonstrated influence concerns observed consequences. Institutional capacity can be strong without leverage in a particular negotiation. Autonomy concerns room to act, while bargaining concerns affecting another actor's terms.

Wu et al. (2015) ground the distinction between organizational existence and policy capacity. Farrell and Newman's (2019) account of asymmetric networks illustrates how structural positions can produce leverage, but does not establish that every dependent actor is powerless or every partnership coercive.

Demonstrated influence requires cautious attribution. An outcome matching a preference is not sufficient evidence of causation. Where negotiation records or decision sequences are unavailable, influence is reported as unestablished rather than absent.

Digital sovereignty across the dimensions

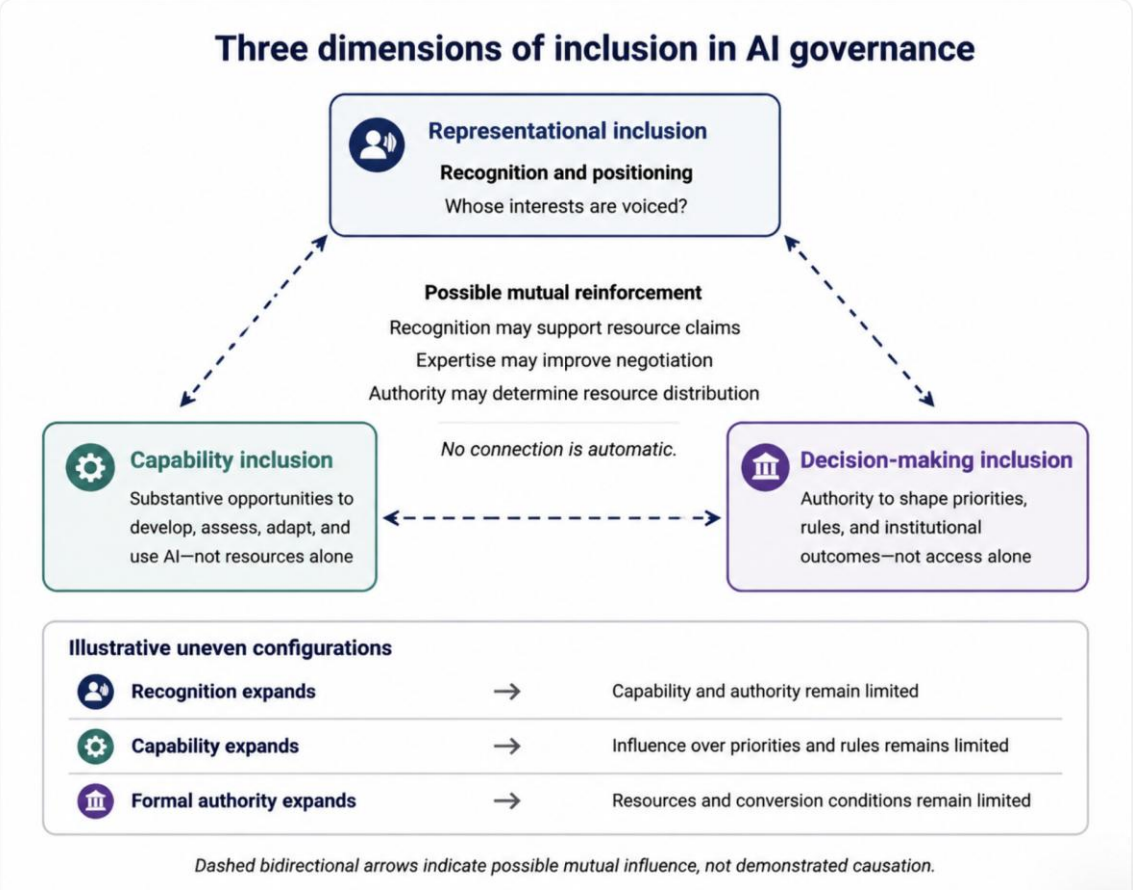
Digital sovereignty is treated as cross-cutting, not a fourth inclusion dimension. It concerns who claims control, over which object, and in relation to whom (Pohle & Thiel, 2020).

Representationally, it concerns claims to define collective technological interests. In capability terms, it concerns meaningful options. In decision-making terms, it concerns authority over deployment, data, procurement, and regulation. National control does not itself establish societal accountability or freedom from supply-chain dependence.

Relationships and uneven configurations

The three dimensions can reinforce one another, but no connection is automatic. Recognition may support resource claims; expertise may improve negotiation; authority may determine resource distribution. Progress in one can coexist with constraints in another.

Figure 1: Three dimensions of inclusion in AI governance. (Generate http://scispace.com)



Dashed, bidirectional arrows indicate possible mutual influence, not demonstrated causal effects. Illustrative configurations show recognition without effective capability or authority, capability without governing influence, and formal authority without conditions for its exercise. Source: Conceptual synthesis drawing on Arnstein (1969), Fung (2006), Sen (1999), and Saward (2006).

The framework generates three questions rather than predictions: when does recognition enable opportunity; when do opportunities support authority; and when does authority change outcomes? Its contribution is to make these links inspectable without treating a country as occupying one fixed inclusion level.

4. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem is the uncertain relationship between inclusive discourse and the allocation of governing authority. The Chinese address recognizes unequal development and proposes cooperation, while African documents locate technological participation within national institutional and regional projects (Xi, 2026; FDRE, 2024; FMCIDE, 2025; NCAI, 2025; DCDT, 2024).

Shared language does not settle whether priorities were negotiated, expertise will be sustained, or affected actors can change decisions. The study therefore examines articulated relationships and distinguishes what is specified from what requires additional evidence. The questions introduced in Section 1 guide that comparison.

5. OBJECTIVES

5.1 General objective

To examine how the selected Chinese and African official texts construct participation, technological opportunity, and governing authority in AI governance.

5.2 Specific objectives

1. Identify roles assigned to African institutions and Global South countries in the Chinese address.

2. Examine national priorities and distinguish articulation from capacity, leverage, autonomy, and influence.

3. Compare the three inclusion dimensions without treating them as interchangeable.

4. Distinguish recognition, representative claims, responsiveness, and legitimate authorization.

5. Identify convergence, difference, and documented learning while specifying evidentiary limits.

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1 Design and research status

The article presents a qualitative comparative document analysis informed by strategic narrative analysis. Bowen (2009) treats documents as materials requiring examination and interpretation rather than neutral records. Here, texts are read as situated interventions with identifiable genres and audiences.

The analysis is passage-based and interpretive. It does not report exhaustive coding of every provision, corpus frequencies, independently measured agreement, or implementation evaluation. Claims are bounded by the passages and sources presented. The interpretive framework supplies coding rules, not evidence that an independent full coding exercise has occurred.

6.2 Case and source selection

The four African cases are purposively selected for regional variation and relevant documentation. This is a diverse-case comparison rather than a controlled causal design.

Table 3: summery of case and source selection

Case	Core source	Date and genre
China	Xi's WAIC address	July 17, 2026; international executive address
Ethiopia	National Artificial Intelligence Policy	June 2024; national policy
Nigeria	National Artificial Intelligence Strategy	September 2025; national strategy
Egypt	National AI Strategy, second edition	2025–2030 planning period; national strategy
South Africa	National Artificial Intelligence Policy Framework	October 2024; policy-development framework

Document dates are distinguished from planning periods and current legal status. The selected South African framework does not establish policy status in November 2026. Nigeria's 2025 edition is not pooled indiscriminately with the earlier version.

6.3 Genre and temporal comparability

A speech and national strategies have different purposes and lengths. Administrative specificity in a strategy is not treated as proof of a stronger commitment. The comparison asks how participation is articulated within each genre.

African documents predating the address are not responses to it. Similarity supports comparison, not causal transfer. Absence of operational detail is recorded as unspecified, not evidence of exclusion.

6.4 Supplementary Ethiopian sources

EAII's website, the Digital Government Strategy 2025–2030, MInT's WAICO report, and Abiy Ahmed's technology interview provide context (EAII, n.d.; MInT, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; Abiy Ahmed Ali [PhD], 2025). They clarify executive understandings and test a narrowly developmental reading, but do not support thematic frequency comparisons.

The interview is executive discourse, not enacted policy or independent verification of technical achievements. MInT's WAICO report establishes its account of participation, not organizational powers. Its publication date and any terminology implying United Nations status remain unconfirmed.

6.5 Unit, operationalization, and procedure

The unit is a coherent passage: an objective, paragraph, subsection, or interview exchange. The three dimensions organize the comparison alongside development, rights, security, sovereignty, innovation, cooperation, and leadership.

Recognition requires acknowledgment of a constituency; representative claims require standing-for or acting-for positioning. Claimed responsiveness is separated from documented adjustment to identifiable preferences. Authorization requires evidence of a scoped mandate and legitimate constituency relationship, not the claimant's assertion.

Resources are distinguished from conversion conditions and substantive opportunities. Access is distinguished from formal authority and exercised influence. Policy articulation is treated as directly observable in documents; capacity, bargaining, autonomy, and effects require their own evidence.

For each passage the analysis asks: who acts; what is proposed; who benefits; which resources or powers are specified; and what would establish the claim? A passage may receive more than one classification.

Interpretations are presented with locators and countervailing provisions where available. No high–moderate–low country rankings are assigned. Learning requires an explicit reference or traceable connection; appropriation requires evidence of adaptation from an identifiable source.

6.6 Language and verification

The Ethiopian policy is bilingual. Amharic section and printed-page locators identify relevant passages, while English paraphrases are not presented as official English quotations.

The interview transcript includes recognition errors. Its passages are paraphrased with approximate timestamps and require audio-based checking before use as translated quotations. Interviewer claims are separated from Abiy's responses; upload and recording dates are not equated.

Direct quotations from the other documents use the retrieved English wording. Page locators refer to printed pagination where identifiable. Outstanding source and translation issues are retained in the verification note rather than resolved by inference.

6.7 Trustworthiness, reflexivity, and ethics

The safeguards are source traceability, chronology, explicit inference rules, and attention to counter-evidence. Leadership in South Africa, rights in Ethiopia, and plural international references in Egypt and Nigeria challenge simplified national categories.

No intercoder reliability statistic is reported. An audit trail can make interpretation inspectable but is not equivalent to an agreement measure. The researcher must apply the same skepticism to all sources: ambition is not achievement and silence is not exclusion.

The materials are public. Institutional requirements for ethics review or exemption should be determined through university procedures. Later interviews would require appropriate consent and data protection.

7. FINDINGS

7.1 Recognition and claims to represent collective interests

China: Responsiveness claimed, authorization unestablished

Xi states that WAICO's establishment is:

"a major move by China to answer the call of the Global South and unite the international community together"

(Xi, 2026, WAICO announcement).

The wording recognizes a constituency and links Chinese initiative to its demands. It claims responsiveness rather than merely asserting national benefit. However, the address does not identify how those demands were aggregated or who delegated representative authority. The finding is therefore a claim to responsiveness, not demonstrated responsiveness or a legitimate mandate.

The African Union appears as a proposed cooperation partner, but the four national cases are not separately described. The speech's rejection of a unilateral solo and its preference for a symphony of international cooperation preserve partnership language alongside China's organizer role (Xi, 2026). Neither element cancels the other.

Ethiopia: Articulating a continental contribution

Ethiopia's policy proposes making the country an African destination for AI research and development, including a center of excellence and joint work on African social and economic issues (FDRE, 2024, Amharic Section 4.4.2, p. 12).

This positions Ethiopia as a prospective knowledge producer, not only a recipient. Yet the policy also acknowledges constraints in skills, finance, data, infrastructure, and regulation (FDRE, 2024, Amharic Section 2, pp. 2–3). Leadership aspiration and dependence coexist.

EAII's website and Abiy's interview reinforce a continental research identity (EAII, n.d.; Abiy Ahmed Ali [PhD], 2025, approximately 45:22–46:17). These establish institutional and executive self-positioning, not independent rankings or continental authorization.

Nigeria: Leadership through local talent and collaboration

Nigeria's vision is:

"To be a global leader in AI, leveraging ethical and inclusive innovation, local talent, and strategic collaboration to drive sustainable development."

(FMCIDE, 2025, p. 4).

The strategy does not oppose collaboration to national leadership. It presents collaboration as one resource through which leadership might be built. Local talent and ethical innovation establish the intended basis of that role.

Elsewhere, the strategy describes Nigeria as a prospective champion of AI adoption in Africa (FMCIDE, 2025, p. 11). This extends the imagined audience beyond national beneficiaries, but it does not establish recognition of Nigerian leadership by other states.

Egypt: A technological basis for overlapping regional roles

Egypt proposes a:

"National foundational model as a basis to drive industry development and regional cooperation"

and links it to leadership in Africa and the Arab region (NCAI, 2025, p. 23).

Here representation is tied to a proposed technological asset. The model is imagined not only as a domestic application but as a basis for industry and regional relationships.

The presidential statement also emphasizes citizen empowerment, rights, and public benefit. Regional ambition therefore coexists with domestic obligations rather than replacing them (NCAI, 2025, opening presidential statement).

South Africa: Public interest and leadership together

South Africa aims to be:

"a leader in AI within the African continent and a significant player on the global stage."

The framework connects this to influencing ethics and governance (DCDT, 2024, Section 5.2, p. 6).

This passage challenges an exclusively rights-centered characterization of the case. The framework combines productive competitiveness, social equity, and international influence. None is sufficient to establish achieved leadership.

Across the cases, cooperation, leadership, and public benefit are overlapping claims. The evidence does not justify assigning each country one defining governance identity.

7.2 Capability: Inputs, conversion conditions, and opportunities

China: Specified inputs, unresolved conversion

Xi announces 5,000 training and seminar opportunities over five years, application cooperation centers, and MAZU access for 30 countries (Xi, 2026, concluding commitments).

These figures specify the scale of announced global support. They are not African allocations. The speech identifies types of resources but not participant selection, curricula, intellectual property, or long-term maintenance.

Its fourth observation connects capability building to bridging divides and preventing historical injustice. Assistance is thus framed as part of a distributive international obligation rather than charity alone. Whether it supports priorities defined by participants depends on arrangements outside the speech.

Ethiopia: Institutional interdependence

The policy links human resources, infrastructure, data governance, and research (FDRE, 2024, Amharic Sections 4.1–4.4, pp. 6–12). Infrastructure provisions include data centers, computing resources, standards, and shared use; research provisions connect national development needs with technology adaptation.

The analytical significance lies in this interdependence. Acquiring a tool is not presented as sufficient without personnel, data, and institutions that can apply it.

Abiy's interview makes the relationship explicit through hardware, human capability, information capability, and organizational capacity (Abiy Ahmed Ali [PhD], 2025, approximately 10:14–11:52). Institutional continuity matters because achievements should not disappear when individuals leave.

The Digital Government Strategy extends this concern to cloud transition, data management, skills, and regulatory development (MInT, n.d.-a). It supplies context, not independent verification that the proposed system functions effectively.

Nigeria: Ecosystem development under constraints

Nigeria calls for:

"homegrown innovations through intentional local capacity building and ecosystem enablement."

(FMCIDE, 2025, p. 14).

The strategy's five pillars connect infrastructure, ecosystem development, adoption, ethical deployment, and governance. Capability is consequently broader than a shortage of trained individuals.

The document also identifies limited broadband, constrained infrastructure, and educational challenges (FMCIDE, 2025, p. 10). These are not incidental qualifications. They show that the strategy's leadership future depends on conditions it acknowledges are incomplete.

Its account therefore combines developmental possibility with an institutional problem: who will coordinate investment and sustain the resulting capability?

Egypt: Models within an industrial system

Egypt organizes its strategy around governance, technology, data, infrastructure, ecosystem, and talent. The mission connects these components to the sustainability and competitiveness of an AI industry (NCAI, 2025, pp. 7–8, 23).

The foundational model should be read within this system rather than as a self-sufficient symbol of autonomy. The strategy's SWOT assessment identifies data-quality problems, inadequate research infrastructure, expertise shortages, and weak connections between research and societal needs (NCAI, 2025, p. 21).

The text therefore provides both an asset-centered future and a diagnosis of constraints. National designation does not establish control over every component of model production.

South Africa: Producing and assessing systems

South Africa proposes:

"Develop robust supercomputing infrastructure to support AI research and development."

(DCDT, 2024, Section 6.2, p. 9).

Research centers, training, partnerships, and financial support sit alongside ethical and safety provisions. The framework also identifies historical inequality and institutional inertia as barriers (DCDT, 2024, Sections 5.3 and 6).

Its capability agenda is therefore productive and evaluative: developing systems and establishing conditions for responsible use. The presence of safeguards does not distinguish it from development; it describes how development is intended to proceed.

7.3 Authority at domestic and international scales

Domestic state authority

Ethiopia's policy assigns coordination, monitoring, evaluation, and oversight responsibilities to institutions. It also anticipates legal frameworks governing development, imported products, licensing, and use (FDRE, 2024, Amharic Sections 7.1–7.2, pp. 23–26).

These provisions articulate national governing responsibilities. They should not be read as evidence that every proposed power has been enacted or effectively exercised.

Nigeria's strategy proposes a governance regulatory body, national principles, and risk-management arrangements (FMCIDE, 2025, p. 5). Egypt proposes a regulatory system, activation of an ethical framework, and the foundation of a regulatory body (NCAI, 2025, p. 23).

South Africa describes its framework as a first step toward policy and a basis for later regulation (DCDT, 2024, pp. 1–3). This is a different institutional stage, not evidence of weaker commitment.

Domestic societal participation

Nigeria's strategy states:

"Local communities must be allowed to provide their perspective and cultural context into AI"

and connects this to decisions about safe use and usefulness (FMCIDE, 2025, p. 13).

This goes beyond naming communities as beneficiaries. It recognizes their perspectives as relevant to defining acceptable use. However, the passage does not specify how conflicting preferences are resolved or which decisions communities can change.

Ethiopia anticipates public participation in planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation and includes rights concerning personal data (FDRE, 2024, Amharic Section 7.1, p. 26; Section 4.7.2, p. 17).

South Africa calls for diverse stakeholder involvement in policymaking and human oversight of critical AI decisions (DCDT, 2024, Sections 6.10–6.12, p. 11). Consultation and operational oversight remain distinct mechanisms; neither guarantees an effective right to challenge outcomes.

International institutional influence

Xi calls for coordination of strategies, rules, and standards and recognizes a United Nations role. The address does not specify voting or allocation procedures for the announced cooperation arrangements (Xi, 2026, fourth observation).

MInT reports Ethiopian participation in WAICO's establishment agreement, but does not establish its influence over organizational priorities (MInT, n.d.-b).

Egypt's strategy reports regional working-group roles and international engagement (NCAI, 2025, p. 19). These statements provide evidence of the strategy's account of participation, not proof of decisive influence or current office-holding.

International influence is therefore less directly established by the examined evidence than national institutional responsibilities. That finding concerns source specificity, not actual geopolitical power.

7.4 Sovereignty and the unresolved question of accountability

Abiy's connectivity discussion connects technological openness to sovereign databases, sovereign cloud infrastructure, and data location (Abiy Ahmed Ali [PhD], 2025, approximately 30:37–32:30). The problem is not openness versus closure, but the conditions under which external infrastructure is used.

A separate hypothetical exchange imagines an AI adviser supporting a shared national narrative and countering divisive agendas (approximately 05:14–07:35). This does not document an operational system. It does identify a tension: who determines which narratives are legitimate and how disagreement is distinguished from harmful manipulation?

This tension prevents a purely celebratory reading of state capability. It should also be set alongside the Ethiopian policy's rights and public-participation provisions rather than treated as their automatic cancellation.

The broader analytical point applies across cases. National control and public accountability are different questions. Sovereignty claims require identification of both the object controlled and the actor exercising control.

7.5 Learning, appropriation, and demonstrated influence

Egypt explicitly benchmarks several countries, including China. It describes Chinese infrastructure integration, research investment, local ecosystems, and talent development (NCAI, 2025, Section 3.2, pp. 13–16).

This establishes consideration of Chinese experience, not the causal origin of particular Egyptian measures. Other benchmark countries remain part of the account.

Nigeria explicitly references international recommendations, including Google's "AI Sprinters," while connecting them to national priorities (FMCIDE, 2025, p. 13). Ethiopia proposes identifying, importing, and adapting foreign technologies (FDRE, 2024, Amharic Section 4.4.3, p. 12).

Plural policy learning is therefore better supported than appropriation of a uniquely Chinese narrative. Silence on data ownership, curricula, or voting procedures remains an evidentiary gap rather than proof of exclusion.

8. DISCUSSION

8.1 Representation without presumed authorization

The Chinese address recognizes needs and presents China as responsive. It supplies a representative claim in the broad sense of advancing collective interests, but no demonstrated Global South mandate.

This is not a finding that the initiative lacks all legitimacy. It is a narrower finding that legitimate authorization cannot be established from the claimant's speech alone. Nor would endorsement by one institution necessarily authorize representation of all states and communities grouped under the category.

8.2 Differentiated African agency

The sources establish policy articulation most directly. They also describe intended capacity and autonomy arrangements, but do not generally demonstrate bargaining leverage or changed outcomes.

This preserves agency without romanticizing it. African actors need not be independent of external resources to pursue priorities; however, a stated priority cannot substitute for evidence that it altered a relationship. Brown's (2012) differentiated account is more suitable than a passive-versus-autonomous binary.

8.3 Uneven inclusion is the central relationship

The comparison illustrates why recognition, opportunity, and authority require separate assessment. Training specifies an input; a strategy identifies an intended system; membership identifies a relationship. None automatically demonstrates influence over rules.

The diagram's configurations are analytical possibilities, not classifications of the five cases. Establishing a mismatch empirically requires evidence for both the gain and the continuing limitation. Genre also remains an alternative explanation for differences in detail.

8.4 The Global South is invoked and negotiated

The category enables claims about unequal participation but does not supply a common preference. African documents include national, continental, Arab, international, and community-oriented projects. These overlapping scales challenge any assumption that the comparison reveals a single Southern agenda.

Compatibility can facilitate cooperation, but collective positions must be demonstrated issue by issue. The study therefore examines use of the category rather than treating it as an independent actor that speaks or authorizes.

8.5 National control is not sufficient accountability

Birhane (2020) and Mohamed et al. (2020) direct attention to knowledge and interests marginalized by technological projects. The findings extend this question to state-centered inclusion.

Greater autonomy from external providers may expand governmental options without expanding public voice. Participatory commitments may also exist amid technological dependence. The framework asks who gains options and authority rather than assuming that national ownership resolves inequality.

8.6 Implications for assessing cooperation

The analysis suggests practical evidence questions: who sets research and training priorities; who governs data reuse; what expertise remains after support ends; which contracts permit adaptation or replacement; who can change agendas; and how affected actors can challenge outcomes.

These questions evaluate assistance, partnership, and sovereignty without assuming that each necessarily produces either dependency or autonomy. They also distinguish formal institutions from demonstrated influence.

9. SIGNIFICANCE

The contribution is an integrated analytical framework, not a country ranking. It connects representation, participation, capability, and sovereignty while preserving their different meanings.

For communication research, it makes representative and responsiveness claims contestable. For China–Africa research, it compares an international narrative with African priorities without making the former their presumed cause. For policy analysis, it identifies what evidence would distinguish ambition, institutional conditions, leverage, autonomy, and effects.

Its usefulness depends on maintaining these boundaries rather than treating the framework as a substitute for implementation research.

10. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has three principal limitations. First, it examines selected official passages rather than implementation or a completed exhaustive coding dataset. Future research should combine fuller document coding with funding agreements, procurement records, institutional procedures, and project evaluations. Second, the four cases are purposively selected and the sources differ in genre and status. The findings are comparative insights, not generalizations about Africa. Further work should include more countries and equivalent document types. Third, the chronology prevents conclusions about reception of Xi's address. Post-address documents and interviews with policymakers, researchers, regulators, and civil society could establish how external narratives are interpreted, negotiated, or contested.

11. CONCLUSION

The examined texts connect participation to recognition, resources, and authority without demonstrating that these dimensions advance together. The Chinese address claims responsiveness to collective needs; African documents articulate national and regional projects extending beyond technology consumption.

Neither a common Southern mandate nor a simple opposition between Chinese leadership and African passivity is established. The clearer finding is that differently situated actors claim roles within a governance order whose practical distribution of authority requires additional evidence.

The title's question therefore cannot be answered by naming one voice of the Global South. It requires identifying who is acknowledged, who claims to represent interests, what substantive options exist, and who can shape decisions. Separating these relationships makes inclusion empirically examinable without equating official ambition with achieved power.

Ethical Considerations

The author declares that there are no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Abiy Ahmed Ali (PhD). (2025, May 9). ኢትዮጵያውያን ችሎታ ያላቸው ብዙ ሰዎች አሉን፤ ልምምዶች አሉን፤ ተወዳድረን በሀገራችንም፣ በአህጉራችንም ውጤታማመሆን እንችላለን የሚል እምነት አለኝ። [We Ethiopians have many capable people and experience; I believe we can compete and succeed in our country and on our continent] [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0RimofA7bmQ
2. Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 35(4), 216–224. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225
3. Birhane, A. (2020). Algorithmic colonization of Africa. SCRIPTed, 17(2), 389–409. https://doi.org/10.2966/scrip.170220.389
4. Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. Qualitative Research Journal, 9(2), 27–40. https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027
5. Brown, W. (2012). A question of agency: Africa in international politics. Third World Quarterly, 33(10), 1889–1908. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2012.728322
6. Department of Communications and Digital Technologies. (2024, October). South Africa national artificial intelligence policy framework. https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/ethics/SA_National_AI_Policy_Framework_(2024).pdf
7. Ethiopian Artificial Intelligence Institute. (n.d.). Ethiopian Artificial Intelligence Institute. https://aii.et/
8. Farrell, H., & Newman, A. L. (2019). Weaponized interdependence: How global economic networks shape state coercion. International Security, 44(1), 42–79. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00351
9. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (2024, June). National artificial intelligence policy. https://api.oecdai.org/storage//policy-initiatives/Apr2026/117ojpi25umobo9d90-Ethiopian%20ai%20policy.pdf

10. Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy. (2025, September). National artificial intelligence strategy. https://ncair.nitda.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/National-Artificial-Intelligence-Strategy-19092025.pdf
11. Fraser, N. (2008). Scales of justice: Reimagining political space in a globalizing world. Polity.
12. Fung, A. (2006). Varieties of participation in complex governance. Public Administration Review, 66(Suppl. 1), 66–75. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00667.x
13. House of Commons Library. (2026, October 15). What is the Global South? https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-12129/
14. Jobin, A., Ienca, M., & Vayena, E. (2019). The global landscape of AI ethics guidelines. Nature Machine Intelligence, 1(9), 389–399. https://doi.org/10.1038/s42256-019-0088-2
15. Ministry of Innovation and Technology. (n.d.-a). Digital government strategy 2025–2030: Advancing a connected, user-centred, data-driven, environmentally-responsible and secure digital-first government. http://www.mint.gov.et/documents/d/guest/1-digital-government-strategy-2025-2030-vf
16. Ministry of Innovation and Technology. (n.d.-b). World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization—WAICO) where Ethiopia is a founding member. It has been established. http://www.mint.gov.et/w/world-artificial-intelligence-cooperation-organization-waico-where-ethiopia-is-a-founding-member.-it-has-been-established
17. Miskimmon, A., O'Loughlin, B., & Roselle, L. (2013). Strategic narratives: Communication power and the new world order. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315871264
18. Mohamed, S., Png, M.-T., & Isaac, W. (2020). Decolonial AI: Decolonial theory as sociotechnical foresight in artificial intelligence. Philosophy & Technology, 33(4), 659–684. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-020-00405-8
19. National Council for Artificial Intelligence. (2025). Egypt national artificial intelligence strategy: Second edition (2025–2030). Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. https://ai.gov.eg/SynchedFiles/en/Resources/AIstrategy%20English%2016-1-2025-1.pdf
20. Pitkin, H. F. (1967). The concept of representation. University of California Press.
21. Pohle, J., & Thiel, T. (2020). Digital sovereignty. Internet Policy Review, 9(4). https://doi.org/10.14763/2020.4.1532
22. Saward, M. (2006). The representative claim. Contemporary Political Theory, 5(3), 297–318. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300234
23. Sen, A. (1999). Development as freedom. Oxford University Press.
24. Urbinati, N., & Warren, M. E. (2008). The concept of representation in contemporary democratic theory. Annual Review of Political Science, 11, 387–412. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.053006.190533
25. Wu, X., Ramesh, M., & Howlett, M. (2015). Policy capacity: A conceptual framework for understanding policy competences and capabilities. Policy and Society, 34(3–4), 165–171. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polsoc.2015.09.001
26. Xi, J. (2026, July 17). Joining hands to build a just and equitable system for global AI governance [Keynote address]. World AI Conference and High-Level Meeting on Global AI Governance, Shanghai, China. Xinhua; reproduced by the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. http://english.scio.gov.cn/topnews/2026-07/18/content_118605932.html