

Pragmatic pluralism: regional AI governance beyond great power competition

Exploring underrepresented international AI policy
in APEC, ASEAN, the African Union and G20

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About the AI & Geopolitics Project (AIxGEO)

The [AI & Geopolitics Project \(AIxGEO\)](#) is an initiative dedicated to a more cooperative future for AI and geopolitics, using research, convenings and wider communications to explore the geopolitics of artificial intelligence and challenge the prevailing narrative of an 'AI arms race'. We are providing alternative visions and policy recommendations to foster global collaboration, address the multifaceted impacts of AI, and shift the policy debate toward a more cooperative future for AI development so the technology can deliver the broad benefits it promises. By putting sharing principles, economic outcomes, and multi-stakeholder involvement at the heart of AI policy, we highlight opportunities to deploy AI as a technological tool for societal benefit.

Our previous study, "[Moving beyond competition: domain-specific approach for international AI framework](#)," explored the policy debate within Western institutions (UN, OECD, WTO, and NATO).

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Executive summary

The hidden architecture of global AI governance

The mainstream narrative of international artificial intelligence (AI) governance represents a zero-sum race for leadership between the United States (US) and China, or a struggle for regulatory dominance by the European Union (EU). This framing misrepresents the reality of international AI policy: our analysis of 327 official policy documents from the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the African Union (AU), and the Group of 20 (G20) (2015–2024) reveals that the global majority, representing 62% of the world's GDP and billions of citizens, are rejecting the binary choice, forging a third path – **pragmatic pluralism**. They are constructing governance systems designed to address concrete economic and political challenges, from agricultural resilience to the integration of informal labour.

The mechanism: function over form

Our central finding is that effective governance does not require laws or regulation to be identical everywhere. The binary framing of AI governance risks fragmenting the global digital economy and excluding billions from AI's benefits. We identify a phenomenon of **functional equivalence**, where different institutional approaches can achieve similar outcomes. While the African Union proclaims data sovereignty to prevent 'digital colonialism' and APEC promotes cross-border flows to fuel trade, both are rational responses to their specific economic realities. Similarly, while the EU relies on legal compliance to mitigate bias, ASEAN employs agile mechanisms like voluntary standards and user notifications. The evidence shows that **governance functions (what the rules do) matter more than form (what the rules look like)**. This offers a vital path out of apparent global gridlock: interoperability is possible without requiring the world to adopt a single regulatory model.

Strategic positioning: power through convening

In a fracturing world, these international forums demonstrate that governance power lies in **convening the conversation** rather than monopolising the technology. ASEAN employs multi-alignment, engaging American, Chinese, and Indian initiatives simultaneously to ensure no single power dominates. The African Union builds independent institutions to move from being a consumer of global rules to a co-designer. The G20 serves as a 'diplomatic hub,' forcing geopolitical competitors to agree on minimum normative baselines, preventing the international system from breaking. By hosting critical debates in which diverse models interact, these forums maintain agency within a multipolar order.

Solving problems, not principles

Governance in these regions works because it is **problem-oriented**, going beyond abstract principles. Our analysis tracks a rapid evolution of cooperation on shared operational challenges. We identify **climate adaptation** and **education** as universal domains of convergence, offering immediate opportunities for cooperation, with additional domains in cybersecurity (ASEAN lead), agriculture AI (the AU focus), and healthcare data (APEC priority). Crucially, these forums address realities that the debate in the West often ignores. For example, ASEAN's innovations for its 117 million **informal economy workers** show that rules designed for formal corporations fail the majority of the world's workforce. Here, **capacity-building is the enforcement mechanism itself**, ensuring compliance through peer support rather than punitive sanctions.



Introduction

Key messages

- US-China-EU debates dominate AI governance discourse, but our analysis of 327 policy documents from APEC, ASEAN, the African Union, and the G20 (2015-2024) shows that regional multilateral forums are building practical, problem-oriented governance that operates beneath and beyond superpower rivalry.
- These bodies are globally significant in different ways. They represent: 62% of global GDP (APEC), US dollars (USD) one trillion potential economic uplift by 2030 (ASEAN), 55 member states and 1.3 billion people (African Union), and major economies across the global North and South (G20) – more economic power and population than any bilateral or mini-lateral frameworks.
- While institutional models differ, all four forums prioritise the same 10 core themes from digital transformation to gender equality and climate policy. We identify this as **functional equivalence**: different regions use distinct tools (such as regulatory sandboxes vs sectoral audits) to achieve the same outcomes, and that governance functions matter more than forms.
- Policies emerge from problem-solving – these forums pursue functional cooperation over abstract normative debate, building governance systems that solve concrete problems their members face through challenge-oriented AI cooperation. This is a paradigm shift from ‘whose AI rules will win?’ to ‘how can our governance systems jointly work to solve shared challenges?’

The mainstream framing of international AI governance revolves around a three-way competition. The US-China AI rivalry casts technological advances in AI as a forum of conflict, positioning them as a vector of strategic competition. European policymakers have framed the EU’s AI Act as a means of asserting regulatory sovereignty amid this bifurcation. Mainstream [Western] media headlines reinforce this narrative – ‘the AI race’, ‘the tech cold war’, ‘battling for AI supremacy’. While this framing captures real geopolitical tensions, it obscures what is happening across the majority of the world’s economies and populations.

The missing ‘middle’

Between 2015 and 2024, APEC member economies, ASEAN member states, the African Union, and the G20 collectively produced 327 policy documents and press releases on AI governance from ministerial declarations and leader statements to strategic frameworks and technical guidelines. They build operational architectures addressing concrete challenges: cross-border data flows and algorithmic bias in credit scoring (APEC), regional stability amid great power competition (ASEAN), infrastructure deficits and technological sovereignty (African Union), and coordination among major economies with divergent interests (G20).

We selected these bodies as major international fora with mainly non-Western representation to capture the ‘Global Majority,’ often overlooked in analyses of Western-centric bodies. APEC economies account for 62% of global GDP and 48% of world trade. ASEAN’s digital economy is projected to reach USD one trillion by 2030, with artificial intelligence projected to potentially result in “a 10 to 18% GDP uplift, valued at approximately USD 1 trillion by the year 2030” (2024). The African Union comprises 55 member states representing 1.3 billion people and adopted its Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy in 2024, explicitly designed to position “Africa at the forefront of harnessing artificial intelligence for socioeconomic development ethically and inclusively” (2023). The G20 brings together major economies from both the global North and South, collectively representing 85% of global GDP. These forums are central to AI governance.

Our previous analyses of the United Nations (UN), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), World Trade Organization (WTO), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) provided a Western-centric baseline. To capture the full global picture, we examined the ‘underrepresented’ majority. We specifically included the G20 because its leadership rotates – from 2016 to 2024, the G20 presidency was held by non-Western or Global South nations for seven out of nine years (China, Argentina, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, India, Brazil), offering a rare window into how these powers shape global standards when they lead the discussion.



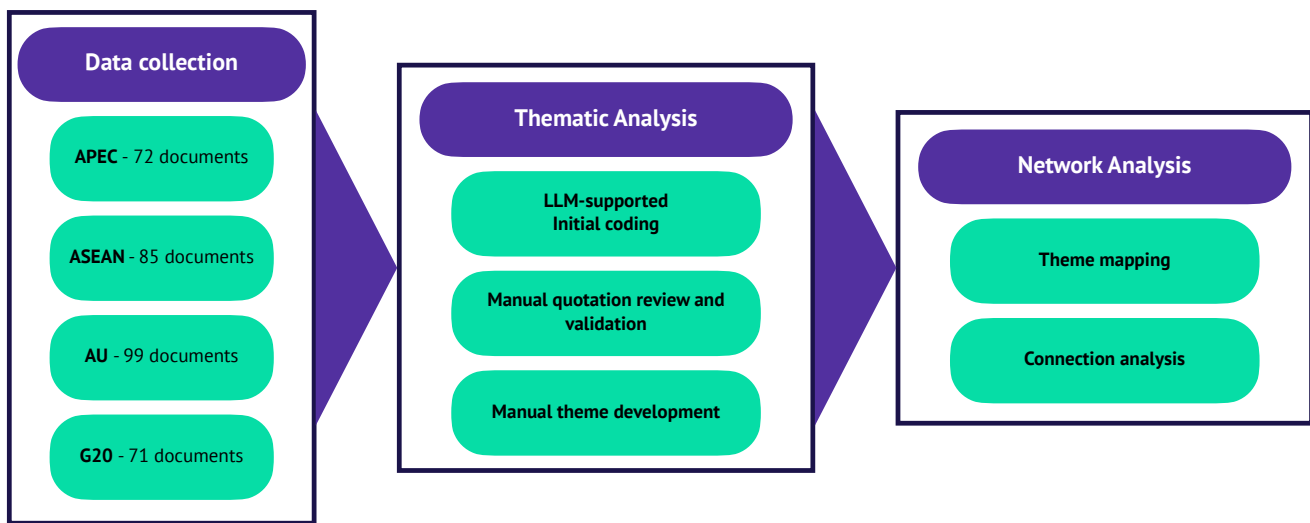


Figure 1: methodological framework for analysing international AI policy documents and identifying narrative patterns across four international forums.

Our analysis relies on a three-stage research design involving 327 official documents: Large Language Model (LLM)-supported thematic coding, manual quotation validation and manual theme development, and network analysis to map AI policy narratives and their interconnection (see Figure 1). The list of policy documents with direct quotations used in this analysis is presented in the [Appendix](#)¹.

Convergence amid diversity

Despite operating through different institutional forms and with membership comprising a wide range of levels of economic development and political structures, APEC's non-binding economic cooperation framework, ASEAN's consensus-based regional architecture, the African Union's continental strategy, and the G20's leaders-level coordination mechanism, all prioritise the same ten core themes: digital transformation; digital economy; transformative AI; gender equality; policy development; AI and education & skills; international cooperation; AI and work & labour; climate and environmental policy; and AI strategy and policy.

While addressing AI governance from radically different starting points – economic integration (APEC), geopolitical balancing (ASEAN), developmental catch-up (African Union), and major economic coordination (G20) – all four arrive at functionally equivalent priorities. This is the

core mechanism: they agree on what problems to solve, even while differing on how to solve them. They differ on specific approaches to how to achieve transparency, mitigate bias, or build capacity, but they agree on what governance must address.

Consider gender equality. All four forums identify it as a governance priority, yet operationalise it through different mechanisms. APEC frames inclusion as a test of effective policy, arguing that “if women are not at the center of our thinking in APEC – whether we are considering matters of trade policy, skills, artificial intelligence... governance itself is fundamentally flawed” (2024). ASEAN emphasises economic necessity, committing to “EMPOWER youth, women, rural populations, and vulnerable communities to boost their readiness to utilize AI” (2024). The African Union pursues systemic bias reduction, pledging to “work towards reducing biases and closing the gender, socio economic, cultural and rural-urban gaps and ensure equity, justice and equal opportunities to all African citizens in the development and adoption of AI Systems” (2024). The G20 focuses on pipeline development, encouraging “greater enrolment of all women and girls... in fields that use digital and emerging technologies, like Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning” (2023). Different mechanisms (legitimacy, empowerment, bias reduction, pipeline) but a shared commitment to structural inclusion.

¹ The full collected dataset 'International Forums (APEC, ASEAN, the African Union and G20) Policy Documents Dataset on Artificial Intelligence (2015-2024)' is published at the Apollo - University of Cambridge Repository.



This pattern repeats across governance functions. For algorithmic bias mitigation, APEC employs regulatory sandboxes and policy prototyping, ASEAN mandates fairness safeguards in deployment, the African Union commits to representative datasets reflecting African cultural identity, and the G20 requires varied datasets across languages and cultures. The institutional forms diverge. The accountability outcomes converge.

The argument

This paper argues that while Washington and Beijing contend in different ways for AI dominance and Brussels asserts European regulatory sovereignty (with certain difficulties), APEC economies, ASEAN member states, the African Union, and G20 nations are **constructing governance architectures designed for their specific contexts, demonstrating that effective AI governance emerges through pragmatic pluralism**. These forums do not compete to export a single model globally. They do not seek to replace US innovation capacity, Chinese state coordination, or European regulatory rigour. Instead, they build governance systems designed to solve the problems their members actually face: for example, facilitating digital trade without fracturing into incompatible regulatory blocs (APEC), maintaining regional autonomy while engaging with all major powers (ASEAN), building domestic AI capacity while asserting data sovereignty (African Union), and coordinating among major economies with acknowledged geopolitical divisions (G20).

The shift required is from domain-specific AI governance (rules for health AI, finance AI, agriculture AI) to challenge-oriented AI cooperation (using AI to address pandemic preparedness, financial inclusion, climate resilience).

What follows

This paper proceeds as follows. **Section I demonstrates that governance functions matter more than forms**. We show that different regions use different tools to achieve the same outcomes (functional equivalence) for bias mitigation, transparency, data governance, and capacity-building. We demonstrate that for these forums, inclusion is a measure of success: if a policy ignores women or the informal economy, the governance is considered to have failed.

Section II examines strategic positioning in a multipolar order, revealing how geopolitical power increasingly lies in convening the debate where diverse policies/governance models interact, rather than in monopolising AI technology itself. We analyse each group in turn: ASEAN engages all powers but aligns with none; the African Union builds independent institutions to avoid dependency; APEC uses trade rules to keep US-China lines open, and the G20 manages competition with cooperation, creating a space for agreement on minimum standards. We also identify hidden axes of divergence, particularly data governance as a proxy for competing visions of AI's purpose.

Section III argues that effective cooperation requires starting with shared problems rather than seeking agreement on abstract principles. We trace the evolution over time from sectoral exploration (2015-2019) through COVID-19-driven acceleration (2020-2022) to governance institutionalisation (2023-2024), showing how policies emerged from problem-solving. We identify climate and education as universal convergence domains, offering immediate opportunities for cooperation.

Section IV demonstrates that capability building is a core governance mechanism. Unlike Western models that assume relatively uniform implementation capabilities, regional frameworks explicitly integrate capacity development into design: through bilateral transfer models (APEC), mass literacy campaigns (ASEAN), institutional architecture building (African Union), and enabling Small and medium enterprises (G20).

Taken together, there are significant implications for Western diplomacy and AI policy. The path to effective international AI cooperation does not run through exporting the EU's regulatory model, the US market-led approach, or even synthesising the two. It involves **recognising functional equivalence, building capability through governance, and creating inclusive spaces where diverse approaches can interact**. The question is no longer whose AI rules will dominate, but how our AI governance systems can work together to address challenges that affect us all.



1. Regional governance outperforms universal frameworks

Key messages

- Despite operating through different institutional forms, all four forums share 10 core governance priorities, demonstrating that functional equivalence exists – different mechanisms can achieve similar accountability outcomes.
- Governance functions (what the rules do) matter more than form (what the rules look like). Whether a region uses a sandbox (APEC) or a safety audit (ASEAN), if the outcome is a safer system, the mechanisms are functionally equivalent. The key is ensuring that functions are fulfilled, rather than forcing uniform regulatory structures.
- All forums recognise that traditional laws are too slow for AI. They are converging on experimental governance (sandboxes and pilots) because, as ASEAN notes, an AI system can “adapt on its own, learning through use, so the decisions it makes today may be different from those it makes tomorrow” (2024).
- **Implication for cooperation: *diplomatic engagement should prioritise functional equivalence.*** ASEAN’s sectoral audits and the EU’s GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) both achieve algorithmic accountability despite fundamentally different institutional mechanisms.

The convergence paradox

APEC, ASEAN, the African Union, and the G20 operate with radically different rulebooks. APEC is a voluntary economic forum; ASEAN relies on consensus; the AU is a continental political union; and the G20 is a coordination mechanism for global leaders. Yet, they all arrive at the same ten priorities: digital transformation, digital economy, transformative AI, gender equality, policy development, AI & education and skills, international cooperation, AI & work and labour, climate and environmental policy, and AI strategy and policy. Three forums share five additional priorities: Regional Cooperation, Data Governance, Economic Development, Cybersecurity and Security, and AI Ethics.

APEC, ASEAN, the African Union, and the G20 operate through different institutional logics, serve different regional contexts, and face different governance challenges. APEC facilitates economic integration among

21 diverse economies through non-binding cooperation. ASEAN maintains a consensus-based regional architecture among 10 member states, navigating great power competition. The African Union pursues continental coordination across 55 nations with diverse development needs. The G20 facilitates cooperation among major economies with acknowledged geopolitical divisions, even noting in official declarations that members “reiterated our national positions as expressed in other fora, including the UN Security Council” (2023).

Yet despite these fundamental differences in structure, membership, and purpose, all four forums converge on functionally equivalent priorities. The explanation lies in shared problem structures. AI governance requires addressing bias and discrimination (hence universal emphasis on fairness mechanisms). It affects labour markets (hence all forums prioritise workforce adaptation). It depends on educated populations (hence convergence on education and skills). It intersects with climate challenges (hence, environmental policy priority). And it demands international cooperation precisely because AI systems and data cross borders. The forums differ profoundly in how they address these challenges, but the challenges themselves are structurally identical.

The critical insight is that these forums agree on what governance must achieve, even if they differ on how to achieve it. This is **functional equivalence: the recognition that different governance models and regulatory tools can achieve similar outcomes.**

Mapping functional equivalence across governance domains

1. Bias mitigation

APEC employs regulatory experimentation: “Mechanisms such as regulatory sandboxes, pilots, and policy prototyping can offer a balanced solution that protects rights while providing the necessary flexibility to avoid stifling innovation” (2023). The mechanism is **iterative learning** – test interventions in controlled environments before scaling.

ASEAN mandates algorithmic safeguards at deployment: “Deployers should have safeguards in place to ensure that algorithmic decisions do not further exacerbate or



'Non-Western' international forums policy themes: priorities

Colour intensity indicates priority



Source: 327 policy documents and press releases from the official websites of APEC, ASEAN, the African Union, and G20.

Figure 2: theme policy priorities across APEC, ASEAN, the African Union and G20
Note: 15 most emphasised themes per organisation; reveals distinct policy priorities.

amplify existing discriminatory or unjust impacts” (2024).
 The mechanism is **preventive design** – build fairness requirements into systems before release.

The African Union pursues systemic gap closure: “Work towards reducing biases and closing the gender, socio economic, cultural and rural-urban gaps and ensure equity, justice and equal opportunities to all African citizens in the development and adoption of AI Systems” (2024). The mechanism is a structural transformation, addressing underlying inequalities that AI might amplify.

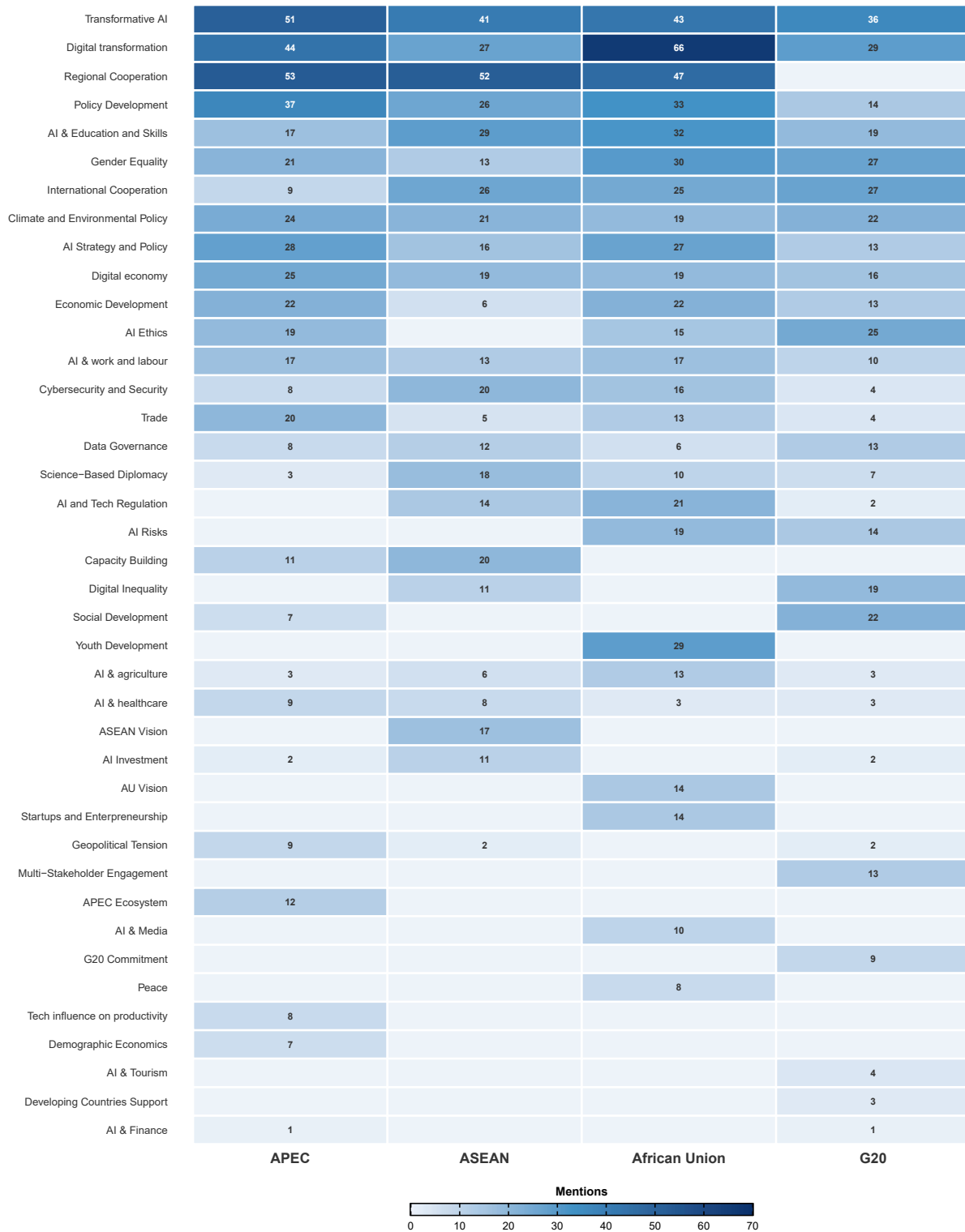
The G20 requires representative training data: “AI systems... [should be] based on varied and representative datasets, including from a wide range of languages and cultures, that avoid reinforcing or perpetuating discriminatory or biased applications” (2024). The mechanism is **input diversity** – ensure training data reflects populations affected by AI decisions.

Four different paths address the same challenge: preventing AI from amplifying inequality. The tools differ (testing, design, gap closure, diversity), but the safety outcome is the same.



AI policy priorities across 'non-Western' international forums

Frequency of theme mentions in policy documents | Darker shades indicate stronger emphasis



Source: 327 policy documents and press releases from the official websites of APEC, ASEAN, the African Union, and G20.

Figure 3: overall representation of AI policy priorities across APEC, ASEAN, the African Union and G20
Note: frequency of theme mentions in policy documents; darker colors indicate stronger emphasis (higher frequency).



2. Transparency and explainability

APEC emphasises policymaker deliberation: “It is therefore imperative that policymakers ensure that AI use remains human-centric. Policymakers need to carefully deliberate the appropriateness of various approaches of AI-augmented decision making” (2022). Transparency operates through **institutional oversight**, where human decision-makers retain ultimate authority.

ASEAN mandates disclosure requirements: “Transparency refers to providing disclosure on when an AI system is being used and the involvement of an AI system in decision-making” (2024). Transparency operates through **user notification**; people must be aware when AI affects them.

The African Union demands cultural alignment: “For AI to support Africa’s developmental agendas, it must be ethical, trustworthy, safe and inclusive, aligned with the culture and aspirations of the African people” (2024). Transparency operates through **values congruence** – AI systems must be explicable within local cultural frameworks.

The G20 adopts principles-based frameworks: “We commit to a human-centered approach to AI, and welcome the non-binding G20 AI Principles, drawn from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Recommendation on AI” (2019). Transparency operates through **normative consistency** – adherence to agreed principles enables mutual understanding.

Transparency is achieved differently: through human oversight (APEC), user alerts (ASEAN), cultural fit (AU), or agreed principles (G20) – divergent mechanisms serve the same governance function of ensuring AI systems remain comprehensible and accountable.

3. Data governance

Here, functional equivalence operates across competing paradigms. APEC and the G20 emphasise productive circulation: “Cross-border flow of data, information, ideas and knowledge generates higher productivity, greater innovation, and improved sustainable development” (2019). For APEC, this manifests as the need to “work with the private sector to establish a harmonised set of standards that require robustness tests of the artificial intelligence

system before it is implemented, to ensure artificial intelligence algorithms are fair” (2021). Data flows enable innovation but require standards, ensuring quality and fairness.

ASEAN and the African Union emphasise protective sovereignty. The African Union’s Data Policy Framework asserts that “data sovereignty... refers to the view that data that is generated in or passing through national internet infrastructure should be protected and controlled by that state” (2022). ASEAN operationalises this through localisation: “Cooperation on the development and utilisation of Large Language Models (LLMs) can greatly expedite AI innovation that resonates with local languages and cultures” (2024). Rather than harmonising cross-border flows, ASEAN prioritises culturally grounded AI development using locally controlled data.

These approaches cannot be merged into one single policy framework. However, they are functionally equivalent because they both solve the specific problem their members face. APEC and G20 members with established innovation ecosystems prioritise circulation; ASEAN and AU members by building domestic capacity to prioritise protection. Both are rational governance choices to different structural positions in the global AI landscape.

4. Capacity-building

APEC implements bilateral peer-to-peer transfer: “With support from Korea and other global AI leaders, Peru has been able to develop its AI strategies and build capacity in both the public and private sectors” (2024). South-South cooperation leverages shared development experiences.

ASEAN pursues mass literacy campaigns: “AI Ready ASEAN initiative... aims to uplift AI literacy for more than 5 million youth, educators, and parents across the region” (2024). Building demand-side capacity enables citizens to understand, use, and hold AI systems accountable.

The African Union establishes institutional architecture: “Called for the creation of an African Expert Working Group to develop a common African approach on AI” (2019) alongside “capacity building framework that supports the adoption of AI by Africans to achieve SDGs” (2019). Expert networks foster enduring institutional capacity that extends beyond individual skill development.



The G20 focuses on enterprise enablement: “The uptake of AI by firms, in general, is still low and significant gaps remain between large firms and MSMEs [micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises] in the development and use of AI technologies, in particular in developing countries” (2021), calling for “MSME-friendly AI policies, guidelines, standards and regulations and by relying on agile regulatory approaches” (2021). Reducing barriers enables the adoption of AI in small businesses.

Four mechanisms – all building capacity as a precondition for effective governance.

Experimental governance convergence

Despite differing starting points and institutional forms, forums converge on experimental governance mechanisms, including regulatory sandboxes, policy pilots, and agile regulatory approaches. This convergence reflects a shared recognition that AI’s adaptive nature creates fundamental challenges for traditional regulation.

ASEAN articulated the core governance challenge: “AI [systems] adapt on its own, learning through use, so the decisions it makes today may be different from those it makes tomorrow” (2024). This captures the distinct risk of AI: speed of change. A system tested and approved today may behave differently tomorrow. Traditional regulations, which test a product once before release, fail for adaptive systems.

The governance implication follows: “AI systems are different from legacy technologies and may pose unfamiliar risks. AI systems’ processing speeds and decision-making capabilities are quickly outpacing monitoring and validation tools” (2024). If systems evolve faster than oversight mechanisms can track, governance requires continuous monitoring, not one-time authorisation.

This justifies the experimental governance mechanisms emerging across forums. APEC advocates that “mechanisms such as regulatory sandboxes, pilots, and policy prototyping can offer a balanced solution that protects rights while providing the necessary flexibility to avoid stifling innovation” (2023). ASEAN’s bilateral engagement includes commitment to “COLLABORATE on the research and development of AI, including through the exploration of AI regulatory sandboxes” (2024). The G20 endorses “agile regulatory approaches” (2021) and explicitly offers governance pluralism: “We encourage all countries to consider appropriate AI policy approaches and governance systems, which may include regulatory, co-regulatory and self-regulatory measures with a human-centric, ethical, and social perspective” (2024).

Sandboxes enable controlled observation of adaptive behavior in real-world conditions. Agile regulation enables iterative adjustment as AI systems evolve. Co-regulatory and self-regulatory measures enable flexibility, matching technological pace. This convergence on experimental governance (sandboxes and pilots) is itself a form of functional equivalence: the forums **agree on the process** (experimentation and flexibility) **rather than the specific rule**.



Implications for international cooperation

First, digital and data governance should seek **functional equivalence, not identical rules**. When negotiating data flows, do not demand that a partner adopts your exact laws (like the GDPR). Instead, the focus should be on mapping whether their tools achieve the same protections and governance function (data protection, individual rights, oversight, remedy).

Second, diplomatic missions should **map governance functions that matter** (bias mitigation, transparency, capacity-building), then accept divergent mechanisms for fulfilling those functions. This requires bilateral and multilateral engagements to shift from 'adopt our standards' to 'demonstrate how your mechanisms achieve similar accountability outcomes'. The burden is mutual: both parties should demonstrate how their approaches fulfill the agreed-upon functions.

Third, development cooperation and capacity-building initiatives should recognise that **inclusion is a metric of success, not an ethical add-on**. Forums that embed gender equality and youth empowerment are doing it because their economies depend on it. When ASEAN states that: "AI development is currently concentrated in a few countries, and thus risks imposing significant social, economic, and ethical impacts on the majority of the world's population without their participation or consent" (2024), this signals that governance excluding affected populations will struggle.

Fourth, regulatory dialogues can leverage **experimental governance** (such as sandboxes, agile approaches, and co-regulation) as **common ground across diverse regulatory philosophies**. All forums acknowledge that AI systems evolving through autonomous learning require continuous oversight, not one-time approval. This procedural convergence enables cooperation even where substantive rules diverge. A regulatory sandbox in Singapore, a pilot program in Peru, and a policy prototype in South Africa all serve the same governance function: learning through controlled experimentation before scaling interventions.

Different governance models can achieve similar outcomes through very different institutional forms. The path to effective international AI cooperation lies not in forcing the world to adopt one rulebook, but in building bridges between these different systems. Yet, having good rules is not enough. To understand the real power dynamics, we should look at how these forums position themselves in a multipolar order - the subject of Section III.



2. Strategic positioning in a multipolar order

Key messages

- Governance power lies in convening, not monopolising. As technology fragmentation deepens, power shifts to those who can bring rivals to the same table. ASEAN (multi-alignment), the AU (aspirational autonomy), and APEC (neutral convening) derive influence by hosting the critical debates where US, Chinese, and European models collide, without monopolising AI .
- The current (Western-led) AI governance architecture is exclusionary by design – “most meetings are held in cities in developed countries, where the cost of travel is high” (AU, 2024), and “only seven out of 193 UN Member States are part of major AI governance initiatives, with 118, primarily in the Global South, missing” (ASEAN, 2024) – meaningful inclusion requires changing where and how governance happens, not just issuing invitations.
- Forums are split on the issue of data sovereignty (AU/ASEAN: prevent extraction, build domestic capacity through LLM localisation and national control) versus productive data circulation (APEC/G20: enable innovation through cross-border flows) – this axis matters more for international AI governance than abstract debates about ‘open’ versus ‘closed’ AI ecosystems.
- The African Union’s sovereignty emphasis presented as a rational economic response. They recognise that without data control, ‘winner-takes-all’ AI markets will permanently lock them out of the value chain.

The standard geopolitical narrative positions states along a single axis: alignment with the United States, alignment with China, or assertion of regulatory sovereignty (the European Union’s claimed position). This framing assumes that meaningful geopolitical agency requires choosing a technological bloc or possessing the resources to impose regulatory models extraterritorially. Regional multilateral forums demonstrate a different form of power – one that **operates through strategic positioning at the intersection of competing systems** rather than through dominance within a single system.

Beyond binary alignment

1. ASEAN’s multi-alignment

ASEAN engages all major powers without granting exclusivity to any. With the United States, ASEAN commits to “COLLABORATE on the development of interoperable AI governance approaches and frameworks” (2024), emphasising technical cooperation and standards interoperability. With China, ASEAN “noted the Global Artificial Intelligence (AI) Governance Initiative and AI Capacity-Building Action Plan for Good and for All proposed by China” (2024) – acknowledgment without endorsement, engagement without adoption. With India, ASEAN supports “collaboration [on] the development of necessary knowledge, skills, infrastructure, risk management frameworks and policies to effectively and responsibly leverage AI technologies” (2024), prioritising practical capability-building.

By employing such a deliberate strategy, ASEAN creates a space where competing visions can coexist. US firms operating in ASEAN cannot ignore Chinese AI infrastructure investments. Chinese platforms cannot disregard US-aligned governance expectations. European regulatory approaches must adapt to regional contexts or lose relevance. By maintaining relationships with all major powers, ASEAN forces them to engage on **ASEAN’s terms, which prioritise regional autonomy, developmental needs, and contextual adaptation over wholesale adoption of external models.**

The leverage derives from indispensability (not a scale). ASEAN member states collectively represent a market too significant to ignore, a geographic position too strategic to abandon, and a diplomatic bridge too valuable to fracture. The alternative to ASEAN’s multi-alignment would be forcing member states to choose between the US and Chinese technological ecosystems – fragmenting the region, undermining ASEAN centrality, and eliminating the neutral ground where great powers currently interact.



AI policy themes network

Themes gravitate towards the international forums that mention them.
 Colour indicates connectivity: darker nodes are shared by more forums.

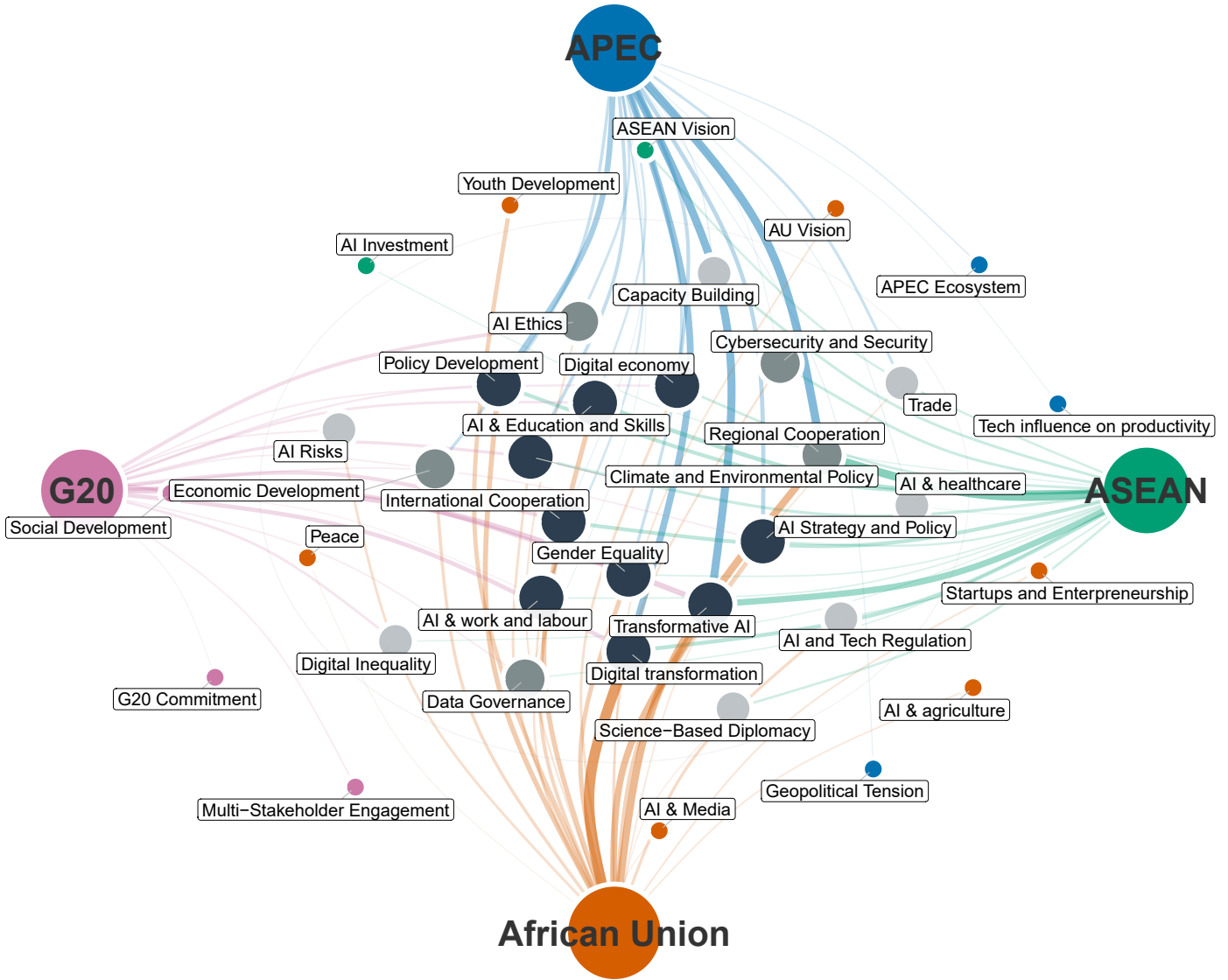


Figure 4: policy themes network

Note: Bipartite network with two distinct sets of nodes: (type 1) four primary 'anchor' nodes – international forum; (type 2) theme nodes – specific themes from analysis. Tie (connection) represents the mention of a policy theme by the International Forum. A tie is created only when a theme is mentioned eight or more times – this filters out weak or infrequent mentions to focus on significant policy priorities.



2. The African Union's aspirational autonomy

The African Union asserts sovereignty to avoid a new form of digital colonialism, building capacity through partnerships. The Continental AI Strategy explicitly aims at “propelling Africa’s role in shaping global digital governance” (2024). The goal is to move from being a consumer of global rules to a co-designer.

While the AU acknowledges it currently lacks the capacity to enforce this fully, it uses this ambition to negotiate better partnerships: it asks the EU to “share its experiences with... frameworks on AI, as well as the Expert Group on Business-to-Government Data Sharing” (2018) and to “establish a capacity development programme to support African policymakers, regulators and other public sector representatives... including on AI and its human rights and ethical implications” (2018); partners with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on “creating a comprehensive capacity-building programme for African media, focused on Artificial Intelligence” (2024), as a prerequisite for accessing the African market.

This dual strategy – sovereignty with partnership pragmatism – enables the AU to avoid the trap of dependency while accessing necessary resources. Pursuing “Africa-centric, development focused, Responsible and Ethical AI that Empowers People and Contributes to the Continent Inclusive Growth, Resilience and Socio-economic Progress” (2024), AU crafting a political infrastructure for the development of African approaches. Yet, partnerships provide the technical assistance, knowledge transfer, and resource access that enable the translation of strategic vision into operational capacity.

The positioning is aspirational in the best sense – **the AU sets governance ambitions that exceed current implementation capacity, then uses those ambitions to mobilise support and justify partnerships** on African terms. Rather than accepting a subordinate role in global AI governance designed by others, the AU advocates for co-design rights and uses strategic partnerships to build the capacity to effectively implement these rights.

3. APEC's neutral ground

APEC comprises both the United States and China, along with economies spanning the developmental spectrum from Papua New Guinea to Japan. This structural composition forces the forum to maintain focus on economic cooperation despite geopolitical divisions. APEC notes the US-China bilateral dialogue on AI's impact: “[US President on] his conversation with China’s President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the retreat about the impact of artificial intelligence and how economies have to work on it” (2023). That such dialogue occurs within the APEC framework, and is publicly acknowledged, demonstrates the forum's value as neutral ground.

Yet, APEC maintains this neutrality through focus on practical economic cooperation. When addressing AI governance, APEC emphasises trade facilitation, digital economic integration, and workforce development – areas where US and Chinese interests can align around shared gains, even as strategic competition continues. APEC documents consistently frame AI through economic pragmatism: “The responsible use of AI could release a tremendous amount of productivity within the global economy” (2023).

APEC also contains sub-regional clusters pursuing coordinated strategies. The forum notes that “Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay have adopted AI domestic strategies or are in the process of doing so” (2022) – seven Latin American economies within APEC are developing aligned approaches. This demonstrates that APEC's neutrality enables regional coordination.

The positioning **offers major powers a venue for engagement without forcing other members into binary choices**. Smaller APEC economies can maintain economic ties with both the US and China, access technology and investment from both, and develop governance approaches drawing on both models, precisely because APEC provides institutional space for such pragmatic complexity.



4. G20's managed competition

The G20 acknowledges geopolitical divisions explicitly while seeking functional cooperation despite them, recognising that G20 members hold fundamentally opposed positions on key geopolitical questions. The Forum does not resolve these divisions – it manages them. The G20 achieved a significant normative baseline in 2019 when leaders committed to “a human-centered approach to AI, and welcome the non-binding G20 AI Principles, drawn from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Recommendation on AI” (2019). The principles are explicitly non-binding and their adoption signals that major economies, including those in strategic competition, can agree on a common baseline.

This positioning – managed competition through normative minimum – enables the G20 to serve a coordination function that more ambitious efforts would fail to achieve. The forum does not eliminate geopolitical rivalry. It prevents AI governance from fracturing entirely by maintaining a thin but meaningful layer of shared commitments. Subsequent G20 declarations reaffirm these principles across changing presidencies, demonstrating that the normative floor remains in place even as geopolitical tensions fluctuate.

The G20 also offers governance pluralism explicitly: “We encourage all countries to consider appropriate AI policy approaches and governance systems, which may include regulatory, co-regulatory and self-regulatory measures with a human-centric, ethical, and social perspective” (2024). This acknowledges that the EU's regulatory approach, the US market-led model, and China's state-coordinated framework can all operate within the human-centric principle agreed at Osaka – **different governance modes fulfilling a shared normative baseline**.

Even recent tensions, including the US's boycott of the G20 2025 Summit, paradoxically demonstrate the Forum's value: despite fundamental disagreements that even prevent full participation, members continue to engage on technical governance issues, potentially maintaining a minimum level of coordination.

Data governance as a geopolitical axis

A hidden fault line runs through AI governance debates, more consequential than many explicit disagreements: competing paradigms of data's purpose. This divide does not map neatly onto US-China-EU competition but rather cuts across it, separating forums that view data as fuel for innovation (APEC/G20) and those who view it as a national resource to be protected (AU/ASEAN).

The AU articulates the protective view: “Data sovereignty draws on the concept of the sovereign nation state. It refers to the view that data that is generated in or passing through national internet infrastructure should be protected and controlled by that state” (2022). This frames data as a sovereign resource requiring protection from extraction, like oil or minerals. The concern is that data generated in Africa – about African populations, African contexts, African needs – will be extracted, processed elsewhere, and used to develop AI systems that serve external interests and then sold back to Africa.

ASEAN employs similar framing with sharper critique: “AI is mainly created and controlled by companies and countries in the Global North, leaving those in the Global South in a state of ‘data poverty’” (2024). The term “data poverty” is deliberate; it positions data concentration as a form of structural inequality comparable to resource extraction during colonialism. The remedy is not simply better data-sharing arrangements, but fundamental shifts in who controls data and who benefits from its use. ASEAN operationalises protective sovereignty through localisation strategies: “Cooperation on the development and utilisation of Large Language Models (LLMs) can greatly expedite AI innovation that resonates with local languages and cultures” (2024). Rather than relying on LLMs trained predominantly on English language data from Western sources, ASEAN prioritises developing models trained on regional languages and cultural contexts, which requires regional data control. Similarly, the African Union strategy emphasises the need to “ensure the availability of high-quality and diverse datasets to reflect Africa cultural identity and diversity, underpin AI development and ensure the availability of AI infrastructure” (2024). This is not



about restricting data flows as a form of protectionism, but about ensuring that African data serves African AI development first.

Conversely, APEC and the G20 view data as fuel. The G20 states that “cross-border flow of data, information, ideas and knowledge generates higher productivity, greater innovation, and improved sustainable development” (2019). This frames data as productive input requiring circulation for innovation – its value derives from aggregation across contexts, enabling pattern recognition and insight generation that isolated datasets cannot achieve. APEC operationalises this through harmonisation efforts: “Governments could also work with the private sector to establish a harmonised set of standards that require robustness tests of the artificial intelligence system before it is implemented, to ensure artificial intelligence algorithms are fair” (2021). The emphasis is on enabling cross-border flows while ensuring adequate safeguards – data should move, but with standards in place to ensure quality, security, and fairness. This assumes that economic integration benefits from data circulation, and governance should facilitate rather than restrict it. **For established economies with strong tech sectors, restricting data flow chokes innovation. For developing economies, however, free flow often feels like free extraction.**

These paradigms represent distinct structural positions within the global AI landscape. APEC and G20 members include economies with established AI innovation ecosystems where firms benefit from accessing diverse global datasets. For them, data circulation generates competitive advantage – Google, Microsoft, and Meta improve their models through global data access, and APEC/G20 economies capture returns through corporate presence and tax revenue. African Union and ASEAN members, by contrast, see their populations’ data extracted to train foreign AI systems, with returns captured elsewhere. For them, data sovereignty protects against extraction and enables domestic capacity building.

The paradigms are not reconcilable into a single framework. However, they can achieve functional coexistence by acknowledging and respecting different legitimate interests. The AU and ASEAN are pursuing rational development strategies given their structural position. APEC and G20 members are operating within

innovation models that require data aggregation. Both paradigms can enable responsible AI development through different means.

Cooperation requires accepting this plurality rather than forcing unified data governance. For specific use cases, such as climate research requiring global meteorological data and pandemic response requiring health surveillance data, ‘data bridges’ can enable targeted sharing without requiring comprehensive frameworks. **Regional forums can maintain sovereignty over most data while enabling selective circulation for agreed-upon purposes, thereby avoiding the false choice between total openness and total closure.**

Security as a strategic enabler

Security and cybersecurity serve different strategic functions across ASEAN, the African Union, and APEC recognising that AI-enabled security capabilities are prerequisites for pursuing their distinct governance strategies. In other words, security is about leverage.

ASEAN’s security emphasis enables multi-alignment, links “artificial intelligence (AI), synthetic biology, and quantum technologies” as integrated dual-use challenges with “profound” security impact (2024), and warning that “given their potential for intelligence gathering and cyber operations, ASEAN must work closely with international partners to establish norms and principles for their responsible use” (2024). Multi-alignment becomes vulnerable without sovereignty, if member states depend entirely on US or Chinese AI systems for critical infrastructure, providers gain leverage. ASEAN pursues sufficient capacity to secure critical systems and prevent AI-enabled operations from forcing alignment choices.

The AU frames security as a precondition for development, including “peace and security” alongside agriculture, education, and health, mandating assessment of “AI on Africa Peace and Security landscape” (2024). The emphasis is defensive: “A.I. Powered Cybersecurity: Intelligent and self-learning technologies helping organizations in their fight against cyber-attacks, by detecting potential attacks at an early stage with real-time adaptive security intelligence” (2017). Protecting nascent digital infrastructure from external threats enables developmental AI deployment.



APEC positions security as trade facilitation. With cross-border data flows and digital trade as priorities, cybersecurity becomes a foundational trust infrastructure that enables commerce. Secure systems create confidence necessary for the digital economic integration APEC facilitates, “the most pressing areas of standard-setting affecting services are cybersecurity and privacy” (2024).

Security serves positioning-specific functions – ASEAN maintains multi-alignment autonomy, the AU protects developmental infrastructure, and APEC enables trusted trade. This demonstrates functional equivalence; the same governance domain serves different strategic purposes

based on context. **Cooperation requires acknowledging differences in threat perceptions:** ASEAN’s intelligence-gathering concerns differ from those of AU infrastructure protection needs and APEC’s secure-commerce requirements. The function of security changes by region. Yet, all create opportunities for collaboration on shared challenges – norms for AI cyber operations, defensive security tools, and secure channels for necessary data flows.

Implications for international cooperation

First, middle powers and multilateral institutions should recognise that governance power lies in ‘being’ the bridge (honest broker) – **hosting conversations, not monopolising technology.** ASEAN’s influence derives from creating space where competing powers must engage. The African Union gains agency by asserting co-design rights in global governance. APEC maintains relevance by providing a neutral ground for US-China interaction. Western diplomatic strategies should similarly prioritise convening inclusive dialogues, not just exporting rules. Creating spaces where diverse approaches interact generates more influence than attempting to impose standards.

Second, data governance negotiations should accept **competing data governance paradigms rather than seeking unified frameworks.** The protective sovereignty paradigm (AU/ASEAN) and the productive circulation paradigm (APEC/G20) reflect different structural positions, both of which are legitimate. Rather than bilateral agreements that demand developing countries accept data circulation or that advanced economies accept comprehensive localisation, diplomatic engagement should **build domain-specific bridges for areas requiring data sharing** (such as climate, pandemics) while respecting sovereignty for most data. This requires international bodies and summits to abandon the ambition of universal data governance frameworks in favor of functional cooperation on specific problems.

Third, international partnerships should recognise that **sovereignty and ‘protectionism’ reflect structural regional context.** When the African Union emphasises data sovereignty or when ASEAN pursues LLM localisation, they are trying to avoid being permanently locked out of the AI economy. Effective cooperation requires technology leaders to address this economic reality, perhaps by offering technology transfer or local infrastructure investment in exchange for data access, rather than simply demanding open markets.

The overarching insight is that geopolitical agency in **AI governance derives less from technological leadership than from strategic positioning** that creates space for diverse approaches to interact. As fragmentation deepens, forums that provide neutral ground, enable multi-alignment, or assert co-design rights gain disproportionate influence in relation to their technological capabilities.



3. Problem-oriented AI governance architectures

Key messages

- Problem urgency compresses governance timelines. COVID-19 accelerated AI governance maturation from exploratory language (2015-2019) through crisis deployment (2020-2022) to institutional codification (2023-2024), demonstrating that challenge-oriented governance emerges from problem-solving, not from principle application.
- Practicality vs. Principles: APEC, ASEAN, and the AU build rules from the bottom up to solve specific operational headaches (like trade friction or disease tracking). The G20 works from the top down, using high-level principles to create a space for agreement among geopolitical rivals. Both approaches work, serving different diplomatic functions through distinct pathways.
- Climate and education are universal convergence domains. Despite diverging on many priorities, all forums strongly emphasise climate and environmental policy, as well as AI in education, offering immediate cooperation opportunities with clear benefits and minimal geopolitical friction.
- No single forum is an expert in everything. The domain-specific approach enables lead-partner models. Rather than forcing universal standards, **cooperation should leverage comparative advantages** – AU/ASEAN leads in agriculture AI, APEC leads in healthcare diagnostics, and ASEAN leads in cybersecurity governance – with knowledge transfer following natural sectoral strengths.
- Adaptive AI requires adaptive governance. ASEAN's recognition that AI systems “adapt on their own, learning through use, so the decisions they make today may be different from those they make tomorrow” challenges traditional regulation, assuming static technology, justifying experimental governance (sandboxes, agile approaches, continuous monitoring).

Temporal evolution: COVID-19 as governance accelerator

AI governance matured through crisis-driven acceleration rather than linear policy development. The typical policy sequence: principles » pilots » scaled implementation »

governance codification, was compressed by COVID-19 from a decade-long process to two to three years of intensive iteration.

2015–2017: exploratory phase

Early documents employ prospecting language emphasising potential and possibility. APEC warns that “when it comes to driverless cars, to the internet of things, to artificial intelligence... if we don't work with society... the full benefits of science and innovation will not be achieved” (2015). The framing is a conditional future, identifying AI as an emerging challenge requiring societal engagement. The African Union lists AI among “the next 7 technologies” for research (2017). China's President Xi at the 2016 G20 Summit notes that “new technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality are developing by leaps and bounds” (2016). This phase is characterised by technology identification, early warnings about workforce transformation, and calls for education, but little operational deployment or governance.

2020–2023: crisis

The pandemic triggered immediate AI deployment addressing urgent operational needs. ASEAN documents shift to action language: “Coordinating cross-border health responses; scaling-up the use of digital technology and artificial intelligence for efficient information exchanges” (2020). APEC reports on deployment outcomes: “AI tools can identify COVID-19 hazards, such as identifying patients who will experience lung damage or severe respiratory issues, helping hospitals make the most of their limited resources by giving priority and care to patients who need to care right away” (2023). The G20 acknowledged that “in light of the benefits and challenges of new technologies, including Artificial Intelligence... we will provide tailored support to businesses and workers in the transition” (2021). The crisis created ‘permission/opportunity’ for rapid experimentation. AI systems that might have undergone years of pilot testing were deployed at scale within months because operational urgency outweighed procedural caution. This generated intensive learning about what works in real-world conditions – which governance mechanisms enable beneficial deployment while mitigating risks.



2023–2024: rule setting

The lessons learned during the pandemic were hardened into permanent policy. The AU explicitly seeks to position “Africa at the forefront of harnessing artificial intelligence for socioeconomic development ethically and inclusively” (2023). ASEAN establishes institutional architecture: “The Meeting also welcomes the recommendation to set up a new Working Group under ADGSOM on AI Governance, including initial work on generative AI” (2023), and launches operational initiatives: “ASEAN COSTI Tracks on AI (ACT on AI) 2024-2025, five AI-related activities initiated by COSTI and supported by Dialogue Partners that would further position ASEAN as a competitive player in the global AI landscape” (2024). The language shifts from exploration (‘potential’) through urgency (‘scaling-up’) to formalisation (‘strategy,’ ‘working group’). What distinguishes this sequence from typical policy development is its compression and reversal – **governance institutions emerged after operational deployment, codifying lessons learned rather than establishing rules before implementation.** COVID-19 functioned as a natural experiment at a global scale, revealing which AI applications deliver value, which governance mechanisms enable responsible deployment, and which capacity gaps constrain effectiveness.

Problem-up versus principle-down architectures

Forums diverge fundamentally in how governance emerges – some build from concrete problems upward, others apply normative principles downward. The difference matters for the cooperation strategy.

Problem-up: AU, ASEAN, APEC

These forums start with diagnosed challenges and work backward to governance mechanisms. The African Union responds to structural economic threats (winner-takes-all dynamics, infrastructure deficits, comparative advantage erosion), producing “Africa-centric, development focused” governance (2024) designed to address those specific challenges. The strategy explicitly mandates that: “Africa needs to conduct its own research to establish its own localised position and support innovation to advance solutions that address challenges identified in Agenda 2063” (2024). Governance design follows directly from problem diagnosis.

ASEAN addresses coordination across “670 million people spanning different cultures, ethnicities, languages, and socio-economic backgrounds” (2024) plus 117 million informal economy workers exceeding formal employment (2020). The governance response – flexible, non-binding recommendations adaptable to national contexts – directly responds to the diversity challenge. Standards uniform across member states would either restrict advanced economies or under-regulate developing ones.

APEC addresses economic integration, friction and capacity gaps by leveraging knowledge-sharing mechanisms and bilateral capacity transfer. The Peru-Korea model – “with support from Korea... Peru has been able to develop its AI strategies and build capacity” (2024) – exemplifies facilitative governance emerging from diagnosed integration barriers.

Principle-down: G20

The G20 works differently because it has to. As a group containing geopolitical rivals (the US, China, Russia, the EU), it cannot easily agree on detailed operational rules. Instead, it adopts high-level principles to establish a ‘safe’ baseline. Leaders committed to “a human-centered approach to AI, and welcome the non-binding G20 AI Principles” (2019) before operationalising across labour markets (2021), digital economy (2021), sustainable development (2022), and culture (2023). Principles establish the minimum common ground, then guide sectoral implementation, enabling coordination despite fundamental disagreements.



Implication for cooperation

Problem-up governance generates high stakeholder buy-in (addresses recognised challenges), produces context-adapted solutions (problems differ by region), and yields implementation-ready mechanisms (governance emerges from operational experience). But it also risks fragmentation – each forum optimising locally may produce incompatible approaches. Principle-down governance ensures normative coherence (consistent principles across sectors), enables coordination among diverse actors (shared baseline despite differences), and maintains flexibility through non-binding frameworks. However, it risks abstraction – principles disconnected from operational realities may fail in practical implementation.

International organisations and bilateral partnerships should therefore **begin with identifying shared problems rather than seeking agreement on abstract principles**. Climate adaptation, pandemic response, and financial inclusion are concrete challenges where multilateral forums can cooperate productively without needing to agree on comprehensive AI principles. Diplomatic initiatives should recognise that **functional cooperation around specific problems** generates more progress than negotiating universal normative frameworks that must reconcile fundamentally different governance logics. This explains why climate and education emerge as opportunities for cooperation – they are problems that all forums face, not principles that all must adopt. Initial diplomatic engagement should focus on shared challenges (climate AI for disaster prediction, education AI for literacy) to build trust and demonstrate the value of cooperation, enabling subsequent extension to more complex domains where principle-based negotiation would stall.

Sectoral (domain-specific) convergence as an operational template

Despite diverging priorities across many domains, forums converge strongly on two sectors: **climate and environmental policy**, and **AI and education**. These universal convergence points offer immediate cooperation opportunities with clear benefits and minimal geopolitical friction.

APEC emphasises AI for disaster preparedness and agricultural resilience: “AI and advanced regional models are expected to offer valuable tools for proactive decision-making and regional resilience” in ENSO prediction (2024). Peru deploys “AI-powered smart insect traps to monitor pests... allowing SENAMHI to link pest patterns with climate data” (APEC, 2024). ASEAN advises the: “Use of Artificial Intelligence, machine learning and big data, satellite and space-based data for disaster management” (2022). The African Union includes “climate change and natural resource management” as core sectors for AI integration (2024). The G20 links technological development to sustainability: “[scientific effort to] refine and develop the full spectrum of economy-wide scenarios for energy and climate models” (2019). **Climate offers everything needed for effective cooperation: universal impact (all regions affected), clear shared problem (adaptation and mitigation), immediate applications (prediction, monitoring, resource optimisation),**

and measurable outcomes (lives saved, emissions reduced, resources conserved). Geopolitical friction is minimal – climate AI cooperation is not zero-sum competition but mutual benefit, until some countries decide it’s a ‘hoax’.

On education and skills, APEC emphasises workforce readiness: “Closing the gaps in digital skills through incentives, literacy training and certification programs are crucial for ensuring the readiness of the region’s workforce” (2023). ASEAN pursues mass literacy: “AI Ready ASEAN initiative... aims to uplift AI literacy for more than 5 million youth, educators, and parents across the region” (2024). The African Union develops assistive technology: “AI powered screening tools that can help in the early detection of dyslexia” (2022) and recognises that with AI, “new jobs will be created, requiring new skills set such as critical thinking, creative problem-solving, resilience, teamwork, social, emotional skills” (2021). The G20 targets pipeline development: “Encourage and support greater enrolment of all women and girls... in fields that use digital and emerging technologies, like Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning” (2023). Thus, **education offers multiple cooperation entry points: literacy programmes, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) pipeline development, teacher training, assistive technology for disabilities, and curriculum design, enabling forums to collaborate on shared challenges while pursuing context-appropriate approaches.**



Other sectors reveal distinct regional strengths. This suggests a ‘lead-partner’ model for cooperation: instead of every forum trying to write new rules for every sector, they should adopt the standards of the region with the most experience.

Agriculture: the AU emphasises “AI-driven drones and sensors can monitor large tracts of farmland, providing real-time data on crop health, soil moisture, and pest activity” (2024). ASEAN demonstrates operational deployment: “... currently uses artificial intelligence in its hog farms in Nakhon Pathom Province” (2021). Lead-partner model: AU/ASEAN drive agricultural AI development, APEC provides digital trade infrastructure for agritech, G20 provides development finance.

Healthcare: APEC documents “...using AI Box in the hospital setting...96% accuracy in detecting diabetic retinopathy of

all types” (2021). Lead-partner model: APEC leads diagnostic AI development, ASEAN scales to regional deployment, AU adapts for resource-constrained settings.

Cybersecurity: ASEAN addresses dual-use governance and intelligence-gathering concerns. Lead-partner model: ASEAN leads security governance frameworks, AU implements for continental infrastructure, APEC provides economic sector protection standards.

Rather than imposing universal standards across all sectors, cooperation should follow natural sectoral strengths – forums with a comparative advantage lead development, while others adapt to their specific contexts. This respects sovereignty while enabling knowledge transfer and avoiding the lowest-common-denominator outcomes that universal standard-setting often produces.

Implications for international cooperation

First, multilateral initiatives should **cooperate on shared problems, not principles**. Climate and Education offer immediate opportunities where all forums see value, geopolitical friction is minimal, and cooperation generates clear mutual benefits; agriculture, healthcare, and cybersecurity provide additional leverage for cooperation. International bodies attempting to negotiate a global “AI Ethics Treaty” will likely fail due to value differences. However, project-based cooperation on “AI for Flood Prediction” or “AI for Literacy” is immediately viable. These build trust and habits of cooperation that enable diplomatic missions to later expand to more complex issues.

Second, sectoral working groups should adopt **lead-partner models for cooperation**. Rather than negotiating universal standards for agriculture, healthcare, or cybersecurity, international partnerships should leverage comparative advantage. Forums with sectoral strength lead development, while others adapt to their specific contexts. This respects sovereignty, enables knowledge transfer, and produces better-quality governance than universal standards.

Third, diplomatic strategies should recognise that **shared challenges provide natural entry points for diplomatic engagement and joint international governance**. The COVID-19 lesson is that challenge-oriented governance emerges from operational experience. Creating opportunities for controlled experimentation (sandboxes, pilots) enables learning without requiring a crisis. Diplomacy should support experimental governance mechanisms that generate operational lessons informing governance design.

Fourth, regulatory cooperation should **match governance to the speed of the technology**. Since AI evolves faster than laws can be passed, static regulations are obsolete before they are signed. Cooperation should focus on sharing the results of continuous monitoring and live testing. This procedural requirement provides an opportunity for cooperation – all forums need such mechanisms, creating space for the shared development of approaches.

The overarching insight is that **effective cooperation emerges more readily from solving shared concrete problems than from negotiating comprehensive normative frameworks**. Start with education-AI partnerships or deploying AI in agriculture, generate success and trust, and then extend cooperation to more sensitive/challenging domains. This problem-first approach enables progress even amid geopolitical competition.



4. Making pragmatic pluralism work

Key messages

- Governance must reach where people work. ASEAN's targeting of 117 million informal economy workers (exceeding formal employment) demonstrates that frameworks designed only for the formal sectors miss the majority of the workforce, requiring governance innovation for micro-enterprises and informal contexts.
- Reskilling is not technical training alone. AU's recognition that AI will replace some aspects of academic knowledge work shifts education strategy from knowledge transfer to cultivating irreplaceable human traits (such as imagination, creativity, empathy, and resilience) – capabilities that AI cannot replicate.
- Scepticism can argue that regional diversity leads to fragmentation or a 'race to the bottom'. The evidence suggests the opposite: forums are competing to raise standards to attract high-quality investment and are using capacity-building as an effective enforcement tool that operates as peer accountability.
- Concrete actions are available now. The UK can leverage Commonwealth networks to bridge regional frameworks; the US can shift from model-export to equivalence-mapping; the EU can recognise sectoral audits as adequate alternatives; all can fund regional sandboxes, support peer-to-peer transfer, and enable multi-alignment without forcing binary choices.

Capability innovations beyond the mainstream

Previous sections established that forums embed capacity building as a governance mechanism – APEC's bilateral transfer, ASEAN's five million literacy target, the AU's Expert Working Group, and the G20's MSME focus all integrate capability development into governance design. Two insights extend this analysis beyond conventional capacity-building narratives.

ASEAN governance for informal economies

Most Western AI rules assume a 'formal' economy: companies with legal departments, workers with contracts, and clear liability chains. ASEAN confronts a different reality: "These businesses are providing employment opportunities for about 117 million people across ASEAN.

This figure is much higher than the number of jobs created by formal enterprise" (2020). Micro-enterprises operating in informal economies constitute the majority of the employment sector, not a marginal phenomenon – governance that targets only registered firms misses the majority of the population.

This fundamentally challenges governance design. AI deployment strategies targeting only formal sector firms, offering tax incentives for technology adoption, requiring compliance reporting, or establishing algorithmic accountability through employment law, miss millions of workers. Governance must reach street vendors using mobile payment platforms with embedded AI credit scoring, smallholder farmers accessing AI-enabled agricultural advice through feature phones, and informal service providers whose livelihoods depend on platform algorithms they cannot see or contest. **If you cannot regulate via the employer (who doesn't exist), you must regulate via the tool.**

ASEAN's approach treats AI diffusion to micro-enterprises as a core governance priority. The policy guideline on digitalisation explicitly addresses "harnessing digital transformation to promote the formalisation of micro enterprises", recognising that AI tools can enable productivity gains that make eventual formalisation viable, rather than demanding it as a prerequisite for accessing AI benefits. This reverses the typical sequence: instead of 'formalise first, then provide tools', ASEAN pursues 'provide tools that enable formalisation'.

African Union cultivating irreplaceable human capacities

Standard reskilling discourse focuses on training workers for AI-adjacent roles: prompt engineering, data labeling, algorithm auditing, system maintenance. The African Union articulates a more fundamental challenge: "We are not far from an age where Artificial Intelligence will replace humans in the tasks that used to require academic knowledge" (2021). Rather than automation of manual labour or the displacement of routine cognitive work, this is the replacement of educated workers' core functions, the jobs for which people invest in degrees to obtain.

The response cannot be more technical training. If AI replaces academic knowledge work, training for knowledge



Shared AI policy themes in 'non-Western' narratives

Panel A: Core themes shared by all four forums. Panel B: Consensus themes shared by three forums.

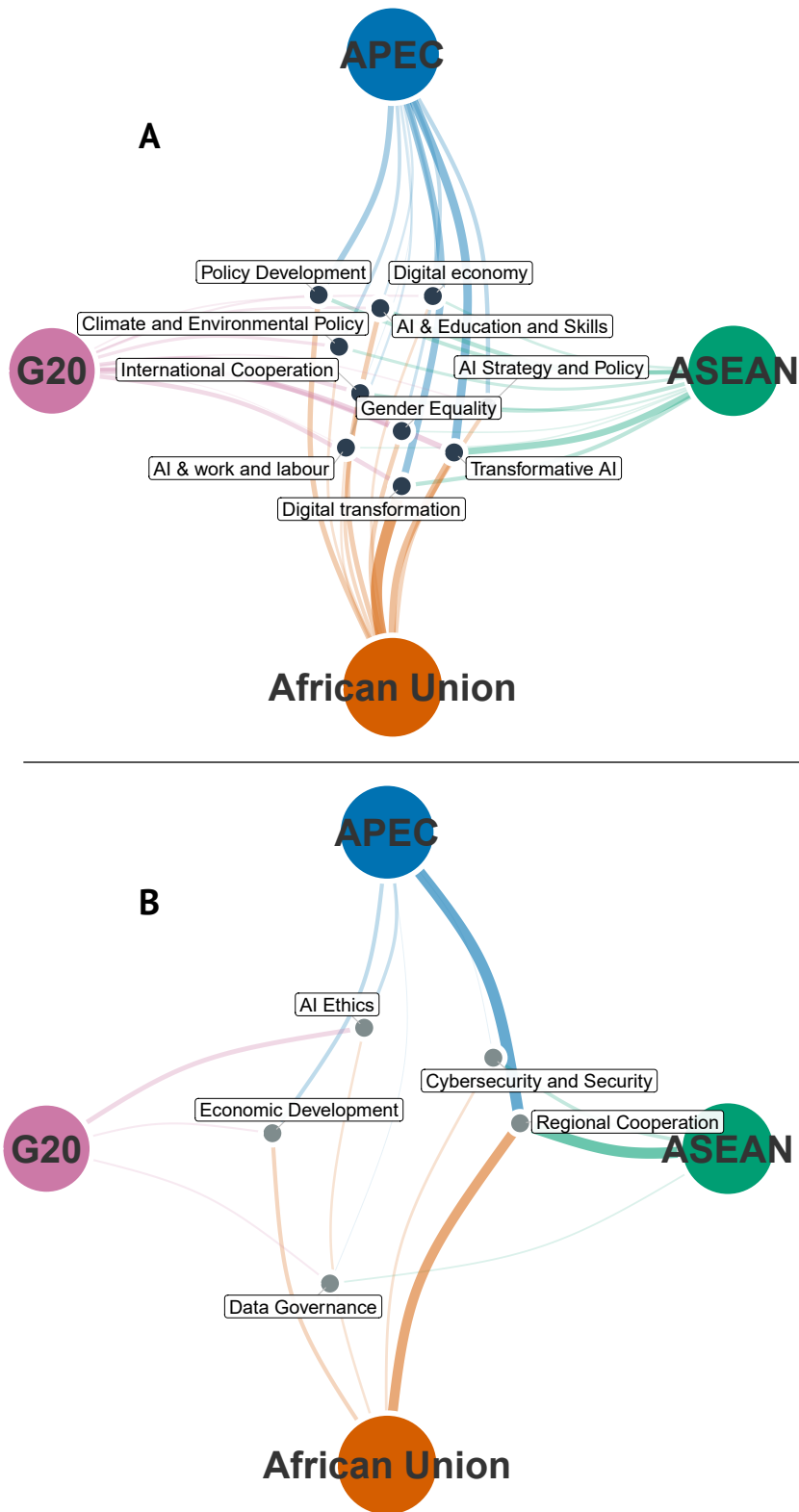


Figure 5: shared AI policy themes across APEC, ASEAN, the African Union and G20.

Note: bipartite network with two distinct sets of nodes: (type 1) four primary 'anchor' nodes – international forum; (type 2) theme nodes – specific themes from analysis. Tie (connection) represents the mention of a policy theme by the International Forum. A tie is created only when a theme is mentioned eight or more times – this filters out weak or infrequent mentions to focus on significant policy priorities.



work jobs is futile. The AU's strategy shifts focus: "In the future, therefore, human traits like imagination, creativity, entrepreneurship, empathy will become key skills" (2021). The jobs AI creates will "require new skills set such as critical thinking, creative problem-solving, resilience, teamwork, social, emotional skills" (2021). This is a pedagogical transformation: education systems must shift from knowledge transfer (teaching facts, procedures, domain expertise) to trait cultivation (developing imagination, empathy, resilience). These are capacities AI cannot replicate because they are inherently human.

The governance implication is that capability-building for the AI era requires fundamentally rethinking education, not adding AI literacy modules to existing curricula. ASEAN's emphasis on "...guiding teachers and education leaders towards a human-centred approach to AI, ensuring that the educational process emphasises human agency and critical thinking" (2024) points in a similar direction, ensuring the next generation can govern AI effectively by possessing capacities AI lacks.

Public-private complementarity

Forums also differ in how they position the public and private sectors. Advanced economies (APEC/G20 members) assume the private sector leads innovation while the government regulates. APEC argues that "Generative AI holds the potential for radical transformation... need to mitigate its risks through enabling approaches" (2023) – business driving development, government enabling. Emerging economies (ASEAN) pursue public-private partnerships, exemplified by AI in hog farms. Developing economies (AU) recognise that the government must build an enabling environment first: "create an enabling environment for AI start-up ecosystem focused on solving Africa development problems" (2024). These reflect institutional realities, rather than ideological choices – **cooperation must respect context-appropriate public-private configurations.**

Addressing objections

1. "This is just fragmentation dressed up as pluralism."

Fragmentation means systems cannot talk to each other. Pluralism means they speak different languages but can translate. Fragmentation implies incompatibility

– regulatory regimes so divergent that cross-border operations become impossible, forcing firms to choose between markets or abandon global operations. Pragmatic pluralism, by contrast, pursues functional equivalence, recognising that different mechanisms can achieve similar accountability outcomes. As we showed in Section II, diverse tools can achieve functionally equivalent outcomes. We do not need a single global law; we need interoperability between different policy frameworks.

2. "These are aspirational frameworks without enforcement – how is that governance?"

Such positioning assumes enforcement operates only through punitive compliance mechanisms – regulatory penalties, legal sanctions, market exclusion. But regional multilateral frameworks are enforced through peer accountability and capability interdependence. Rather than sequencing (establish rules » build capacity to implement), regional forums invert this: capacity building IS the governance mechanism. Bilateral partnerships create peer accountability, mass literacy campaigns enable demand-side enforcement, expert networks build enduring institutional capacity. This enforcement logic suits sovereignty-respecting governance better than punitive compliance mechanisms. You cannot force a country to implement complex safety checks if they lack the staff to do it. By bundling governance rules with the training to implement them, regional forums can achieve higher actual compliance than strict regimes that exist only on paper.

3. "Won't this lead to regulatory arbitrage and a race to the bottom?"

Evidence shows the opposite – forums compete to build capacity, not to deregulate. The AU explicitly rejects race-to-bottom logic, pursuing "Africa-centric, development focused, Responsible and Ethical AI" (2024) rather than positioning as a low-regulation jurisdiction. ASEAN establishes governance frameworks, adopting the ASEAN Guide, creating working groups, rather than maintaining regulatory vacuums to attract investment. APEC emphasises "responsible use of AI could release a tremendous amount of productivity within the global economy" (2023), linking productivity to responsibility, not deregulation. The competitive dynamic is one of capacity-building, where forums vie to position themselves as AI



innovation hubs by developing skilled workforces, building infrastructure, and creating governance frameworks that attract quality investment. Regulatory arbitrage assumes firms optimise purely on compliance cost; actual investment decisions weigh governance quality, workforce capability, and market access – factors enhanced by robust frameworks, not regulatory vacuums.

4. “The EU model has teeth – why should we embrace weaker alternatives?”

The EU’s regulatory approach achieves results within its jurisdiction but faces structural limits to extraterritorial effectiveness. The ‘Brussels Effect’ has limits. The GDPR framework has produced just 16 adequacy decisions covering 25 countries after seven years, as few non-EU jurisdictions are likely to adopt EU-equivalent, comprehensive legal frameworks. The AI Act (2024)

faces similar challenges, asserting extraterritorial reach but lacking enforcement mechanisms beyond market exclusion, which harms EU users as much as non-EU firms. Regional frameworks, by contrast, achieve stakeholder buy-in. ASEAN’s 10 member states, the AU’s 55 member states, and APEC’s 21 economies adopt governance frameworks because they have shaped them, ensuring relevance to local contexts and generating implementation commitment that frameworks often lack. The measure of governance effectiveness is not regulatory stringency but actual impact, and frameworks with high implementation rates across diverse contexts achieve more than stringent rules that most jurisdictions reject or superficially adopt while maintaining non-compliance in practice. Accepting functional equivalence, recognising that a partner’s sectoral audit protects data as well as the EU’s legal obligation, expands Europe’s influence instead of shrinking it.

Political priority actions

First, digital governance should **invest in regional AI sandboxes**. Allocate development finance and technical assistance to establish regulatory sandboxes in ASEAN, the AU, and APEC economies, enabling controlled experimentation with governance approaches while generating operational learning. This buys influence and insight into how AI works in emerging markets.

Second, international cooperation should **support peer-to-peer capacity transfer**. The APEC and ASEAN models demonstrate the effectiveness of regional peer-to-peer cooperation. Scale this through a dedicated funding mechanism, matched by recipient economies to ensure commitment, enabling bilateral capacity-building partnerships between economies at similar development stages.

Third, diplomatic missions should **map functional equivalences systematically** (institutionalise the comparison). Move beyond ‘adequacy’ (which asks: is your law identical to ours?) to ‘equivalence’ (which asks: does your law achieve the same outcome?). We need a formal diplomatic mechanism to map these equivalences, reducing friction for cross-border AI trade.

Fourth, diplomatic engagement and international cooperation should **enable multi-alignment without forcing binary choices**. Western diplomacy should explicitly accept that partners can maintain relationships with all major powers simultaneously. This requires resisting urges to demand exclusivity, avoiding ‘with us or against us’ framing, and creating space for middle powers and regional blocs to pursue strategic autonomy. The benefit is maintained access and influence. The alternative is forcing alignment choices that may lead Western actors to lose.

These actions conceptualise pragmatic pluralism, translating recognition of functional equivalence and respect for diverse governance approaches into concrete cooperation mechanisms.



Conclusion

Key messages

- APEC, ASEAN, the AU and G20 policies reveal that the majority of the world is constructing pragmatic pluralism – a governance architecture based on solving shared problems (like climate and pandemics) rather than adopting external frameworks or ideologies.
- Cooperation requires recognising that different policy tools and interventions can achieve similar outcomes, rather than demanding legal harmonisation. Outcomes, long-term goals, and achievement of results matter more than form.
- Capacity building is the enforcement mechanism. Knowledge transfer and sharing on how to deploy AI is a more effective governance tool than punishing for non-compliance.
- The choice for current Western-led diplomacy is to adapt and participate in those emerging architectures as a respectful partner.

The hidden pattern

A clear pattern emerges from these 327 documents and nearly a decade of policy making across APEC, ASEAN, the African Union, and the G20, obscured by the noise of the mainstream AI race. Effective AI governance is coalescing around shared operational challenges, rather than competing normative principles. When APEC deploys AI-powered pest monitoring, ASEAN coordinates cross-border pandemic response using algorithmic risk assessment, the African Union integrates AI into climate adaptation strategies, and the G20 links productivity gains to sustainability goals, they are not choosing between American innovation models, Chinese state coordination, or European regulatory frameworks. They are solving problems.

This recognition is that the most pressing AI governance questions are operational, not normative: how do we utilise AI for early disease detection in resource-constrained settings? How can we ensure that algorithmic credit scoring does not exclude workers from the informal economy? How do we deploy AI for climate resilience without exacerbating data extraction? These are domain-specific challenges that require context-adapted solutions.

What COVID-19 demonstrated is that challenge-oriented cooperation works faster than negotiating comprehensive treaties. Climate adaptation, pandemic preparedness, and financial inclusion are not 'easier' cooperation domains - they involve sovereignty concerns, resource competition, and distributional conflicts. However, **they offer what principle-based negotiations lack: clear, shared stakes, measurable outcomes, and immediate benefits from cooperation.** When ASEAN and APEC both deploy AI for disaster management, when the AU and G20 both pursue AI for agricultural productivity, they **build governance habits through operational collaboration that create a foundation for addressing harder challenges.** This challenge-oriented approach provides the political infrastructure – forums are broad enough to coordinate across member states and sectors, yet concrete enough to operationalise around specific challenges where interests align despite ideological differences. **The shift from competition to cooperation, from principles to shared problems, from sector-specific rules to challenge-oriented governance, creates political infrastructure for cooperative AI development.**

Three lessons for mainstream 'Western' diplomacy

1. Strategic non-alignment is a sign of governance power

ASEAN's simultaneous engagement with US, Chinese, and Indian AI initiatives, without granting exclusivity to any, generates influence disproportionate to ASEAN's technological capabilities. By creating space where competing powers must interact, ASEAN forces them to engage on ASEAN's terms: respecting regional autonomy, addressing developmental needs, adapting to local contexts. The African Union's aspirational autonomy, asserting co-design rights in global governance while pragmatically building capacity through partnerships, similarly generates agency that passive alignment or isolated autonomy cannot achieve. Western diplomacy has treated non-alignment as a form of fence-sitting, requiring correction through incentives or pressure. The evidence suggests non-alignment is a rational strategy deserving respect and engagement. Enabling multi-alignment rather than forcing binary choices creates diplomatic channels that exclusive alignment closes.



2. Capability-building IS a governance mechanism

Western frameworks typically sequence: establish governance rules, then build capacity to implement them. Regional multilateral forums invert this: build capacity as a governance mechanism itself. This is a different enforcement logic suited to sovereignty-respecting, consensus-based governance. Western development cooperation should adopt this lens: rather than offering capacity-building to enable the adoption of Western governance models, build capacity that enables partners to develop governance approaches appropriate to their contexts.

3. Functional equivalence enables cooperation

The EU's adequacy framework, US bilateral adequacy negotiations, and similar mechanisms implicitly demand regulatory convergence – jurisdictions must adopt frameworks sufficiently similar to EU/US models to qualify as 'adequate'. This generates resistance and limits cooperation to jurisdictions willing to subordinate regulatory sovereignty. Functional equivalence offers an alternative, recognising that ASEAN's sectoral audits, the AU's data sovereignty frameworks, and APEC's regional standards can achieve similar accountability outcomes (bias mitigation, transparency, individual rights protection) through different institutional mechanisms. This enables cooperation across differences – **jurisdictions maintain distinct approaches while demonstrating functional equivalence in outcomes. Western governments should shift adequacy frameworks from legal similarity tests to functional outcome assessments. This drastically expands cooperation opportunities while respecting sovereignty.**

The path forward

The international AI governance landscape reveals a truth obscured by competition narratives: effective governance emerges through pragmatic pluralism. While Washington and Beijing debate AI dominance and Brussels asserts regulatory sovereignty, regional multilateral forums collectively representing the majority of the world's economies and populations are constructing governance architectures optimised for their contexts, demonstrating that different models can achieve similar outcomes through functional equivalence.

The path forward lies in **recognising functional equivalence, building capability as a governance mechanism, addressing material barriers to participation, starting cooperation with shared challenges rather than abstract principles, leveraging sectoral complementarity through lead-partner models, and enabling multi-alignment without forcing binary choices.**

The question is whether Western governments will recognise the value of this pragmatic pluralism quickly enough to shape it. If they insist on regulatory hegemony, demanding that the world adopts their specific rules, they will find themselves excluded from the governance architectures that the majority of the world is building. The forums examined here are building governance for AI's future. The choice for Western diplomacy is whether to participate in that construction as partners respecting sovereignty and functional equivalence, or to watch from outside as others define the terms of global AI cooperation.



Appendix

Year	Document	Quotation
ASEAN		
2020	ASEAN Health Ministers enhance cooperation in fighting COVID-19 pandemic	"Coordinating cross-border health responses; scaling-up the use of digital technology and artificial intelligence for efficient information exchanges"
2021	ASEAN GUIDELINES ON PROMOTING THE UTILIZATION OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES FOR ASEAN FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL SECTOR	"...currently uses artificial intelligence in its hog farms in Nakhon Pathom Province"
2022	JOINT STATEMENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN) FOR THE ASIA-PACIFIC MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (APMCDRR)	"Use of Artificial Intelligence, machine learning and big data, satellite and space-based data for disaster management"
2023	The 4th ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting and Related Meetings. Singapore	"The Meeting also welcomes the recommendation to set up a new Working Group under ADGSOM on AI Governance, including initial work on generative AI"
2024	ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Science, Technology and Innovation (AMMSTI) Statement on Artificial Intelligence (AI)	"projected to significantly impact the ASEAN economy, potentially resulting in a 10 to 18% GDP uplift, valued at approximately USD 1 trillion by the year 2030"
		"Cooperation on the development and utilisation of Large Language Models (LLMs) can greatly expedite AI innovation that resonates with local languages and cultures"
2024	ASEAN-U.S. LEADERS' STATEMENT ON PROMOTING SAFE, SECURE, AND TRUSTWORTHY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE	"EMPOWER youth, women, rural populations, and vulnerable communities to boost their readiness to utilize AI"
		"COLLABORATE on the research and development of AI, including through the exploration of AI regulatory sandboxes"
		"COLLABORATE on the development of interoperable AI governance approaches and frameworks"
2024	ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics	"adapt on its own, learning through use, so the decisions it makes today may be different from those it makes tomorrow"
		"Deployers should have safeguards in place to ensure that algorithmic decisions do not further exacerbate or amplify existing discriminatory or unjust impacts"
		"Transparency refers to providing disclosure on when an AI system is being used and the involvement of an AI system in decision-making"
		"AI [systems] adapt on its own, learning through use, so the decisions it makes today may be different from those it makes tomorrow"
		"AI systems are different from legacy technologies and may pose unfamiliar risks. AI systems' processing speeds and decision-making capabilities are quickly outpacing monitoring and validation tools"
2024	Remarks by H.E. Dr Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN AI Opportunity Southeast Asia Forum	"AI Ready ASEAN initiative... aims to uplift AI literacy for more than 5 million youth, educators, and parents across the region"
		"AI development is currently concentrated in a few countries, and thus risks imposing significant social, economic, and ethical impacts on the majority of the world's population without their participation or consent"
		"only seven out of 193 UN Member States are part of major AI governance initiatives, with 118, primarily in the Global South, missing"
		"artificial intelligence (AI), synthetic biology, and quantum technologies rapidly emerge, their impact on security and cyber diplomacy is profound"
		"Given their potential for intelligence gathering and cyber operations, ASEAN must work closely with international partners to establish norms and principles for their responsible use."
2024	CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT OF THE 27TH ASEAN-CHINA SUMMIT VIENTIANE, LAO PDR	"noted the Global Artificial Intelligence (AI) Governance Initiative and AI Capacity-Building Action Plan for Good and for All proposed by China"



Year	Document	Quotation
2024	ASEAN-INDIA JOINT STATEMENT ON ADVANCING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION	"collaboration [on] the development of necessary knowledge, skills, infrastructure, risk management frameworks and policies to effectively and responsibly leverage AI technologies"
2024	The ASEAN Innovate to Educate (issue 38)	"AI is mainly created and controlled by companies and countries in the Global North, leaving those in the Global South in a state of 'data poverty'"
		"...guiding teachers and education leaders towards a human-centred approach to AI, ensuring that the educational process emphasises human agency and critical thinking"
2024	THE 20TH ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION (AMMSTI-20)	"ASEAN COSTI Tracks on AI (ACT on AI) 2024-2025, five AI-related activities initiated by COSTI and supported by Dialogue Partners that would further position ASEAN as a competitive player in the global AI landscape"
2024	The Quest Toward Developing an AI Governance in ASEAN	"670 million people spanning different cultures, ethnicities, languages, and socio-economic backgrounds"
2024	POLICY GUIDELINE ON DIGITALISATION OF ASEAN MICRO ENTERPRISES. Harnessing Digital Transformation to Promote the Formalisation of Micro Enterprises	"These businesses are providing employment opportunities for about 117 million people across ASEAN. This figure is much higher than the number of jobs created by formal enterprise"
		"harnessing digital transformation to promote the formalisation of micro enterprises"
African Union		
2017	Accelerating Africa's Industrialization through "Digitization" & Youth "Techpreneurship"	"A.I. Powered Cybersecurity: Intelligent and self-learning technologies helping organizations in their fight against cyber-attacks, by detecting potential attacks at an early stage with real-time adaptive security intelligence"
2017	PARALLEL SESSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY	"the next 7 technologies - water purification, next generation medicines, next generation batteries, 3D Printing, synthetic biology and artificial intelligence is being considered"
2018	New Africa-Europe Digital Economy Partnership. Accelerating the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals	"share its experiences with... frameworks on AI, as well as the Expert Group on Business-to-Government Data Sharing"
		"establish a capacity development programme to support African policymakers, regulators and other public sector representatives... including on AI and its human rights and ethical implications"
2019	3RD ORDINARY SESSION OF THE AFRICAN UNION SPECIALIZED TECHNICAL COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES (CCICT). Ministerial Report	"Called for the creation of an African Expert Working Group to develop a common African approach on AI"
		"capacity building framework that supports the adoption of AI by Africans to achieve SDGs"
2021	STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025 2021-2025	"new jobs will be created, requiring new skills set such as critical thinking, creative problem-solving, resilience, teamwork, social, emotional skills"
		"We are not far from an age where Artificial Intelligence will replace humans in the tasks that used to require academic knowledge"
		"In the future, therefore, human traits like imagination, creativity, entrepreneurship, empathy will become key skills"
		"require new skills set such as critical thinking, creative problem-solving, resilience, teamwork, social, emotional skills"
2022	Digital Education Strategy and Implementation Plan	"AI powered screening tools that can help in the early detection of dyslexia"
2022	AU Data Policy Framework	"data sovereignty... refers to the view that data that is generated in or passing through national internet infrastructure should be protected and controlled by that state"
		"Data sovereignty draws on the concept of the sovereign nation state. It refers to the view that data that is generated in or passing through national internet infrastructure should be protected and controlled by that state"
2023	Powering Africa's Digital Future: AU Ministerial Meeting set to ignite Digital Transformation in Africa	"Africa at the forefront of harnessing artificial intelligence for socioeconomic development ethically and inclusively"
		"Africa at the forefront of harnessing artificial intelligence for socioeconomic development ethically and inclusively"



Year	Document	Quotation
2024	African Digital Compact	"work towards reducing biases and closing the gender, socio economic, cultural and rural-urban gaps and ensure equity, justice and equal opportunities to all African citizens in the development and adoption of AI Systems"
		"Work towards reducing biases and closing the gender, socio economic, cultural and rural-urban gaps and ensure equity, justice and equal opportunities to all African citizens in the development and adoption of AI Systems"
		"Africa-centric, development focused, Responsible and Ethical AI that Empowers People and Contributes to the Continent Inclusive Growth, Resilience and Socio-economic Progress"
		"ensure the availability of high-quality and diverse datasets to reflect Africa cultural identity and diversity, underpin AI development and ensure the availability of AI infrastructure"
		"Accelerate the integration of AI in the core sectors notably sectors with high social and economic value, including agriculture, education, health, climate change and natural resource management, and regional peace and security"
		"Ensure Africa-centric, development focused, Responsible and Ethical AI that Empowers People and Contributes to the Continent Inclusive Growth, Resilience and Socioeconomic Progress."
		"create an enabling environment for AI start-up ecosystem focused on solving Africa development problems"
2024	Concept Note Multistakeholder Consultative Sessions on the Development of a Continental Strategy on Artificial Intelligence (AI)	"For AI to support Africa's developmental agendas, it must be ethical, trustworthy, safe and inclusive, aligned with the culture and aspirations of the African people"
2024	African Ministers Adopt Landmark Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy, African Digital Compact to drive Africa's Development and Inclusive Growth	"most meetings are held in cities in developed countries, where the cost of travel is high"
		"propelling Africa's role in shaping global digital governance"
2024	African Union and UNESCO join efforts in support of a free, sustainable and fit for purpose African media	"creating a comprehensive capacity-building programme for African media, focused on Artificial Intelligence"
2024	Services Domestic Regulation: Envisioning Next Generation Technical Standards Principles	"the most pressing areas of standard-setting affecting services are cybersecurity and privacy"
2024	CONTINENTAL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE STRATEGY. Harnessing AI for Africa's Development and Prosperity	"Africa needs to conduct its own research to establish its own localised position and support innovation to advance solutions that address challenges identified in Agenda 2063"
2024	ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) FOR SUSTAINABLE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA	"AI-driven drones and sensors can monitor large tracts of farmland, providing real-time data on crop health, soil moisture, and pest activity"
APEC		
2015	Chief Advisors Chart the Future of Science Diplomacy	"when it comes to driverless cars, to the internet of things, to artificial intelligence... if we don't work with society... the full benefits of science and innovation will not be achieved"
2021	2021 APEC Economic Policy Report	"work with the private sector to establish a harmonised set of standards that require robustness tests of the artificial intelligence system before it is implemented, to ensure artificial intelligence algorithms are fair"
2021	2021 APEC Economic Policy Report	"Governments could also work with the private sector to establish a harmonised set of standards that require robustness tests of the artificial intelligence system before it is implemented, to ensure artificial intelligence algorithms are fair"
2021	Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy Recommendation on Digital Transformation for Healthcare Ecosystem - Case Study Report	"...using AI Box in the hospital setting...96% accuracy in detecting diabetic retinopathy of all types"



Year	Document	Quotation
2022	Artificial Intelligence in Economic Policymaking	"It is therefore imperative that policymakers ensure that AI use remains human-centric. Policymakers need to carefully deliberate the appropriateness of various approaches of AI-augmented decision making"
2022	Learning Workshop in Artificial Intelligence: Experiences of APEC Economies	"Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay have adopted AI domestic strategies or are in the process of doing so"
2023	Best Practices to Detect and Avoid Harmful Biases in Artificial Intelligence Systems	"Mechanisms such as regulatory sandboxes, pilots, and policy prototyping can offer a balanced solution that protects rights while providing the necessary flexibility to avoid stifling innovation"
		"mechanisms such as regulatory sandboxes, pilots, and policy prototyping can offer a balanced solution that protects rights while providing the necessary flexibility to avoid stifling innovation"
2023	Asia-Pacific Leaders United in Building Inclusive, Resilient, Sustainable Economies	"[US President on] his conversation with China's President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the retreat about the impact of artificial intelligence and how economies have to work on it"
2023	APEC Confronts Risks, Harnesses Opportunities of Artificial Intelligence	"The responsible use of AI could release a tremendous amount of productivity within the global economy"
		"Closing the gaps in digital skills through incentives, literacy training and certification programs are crucial for ensuring the readiness of the region's workforce"
2023	The current state of AI implementation within the APEC region for covid-19 mitigation	"AI tools can identify COVID-19 hazards, such as identifying patients who will experience lung damage or severe respiratory issues, helping hospitals make the most of their limited resources by giving priority and care to patients who need to care right away"
2023	Business Leaders: Embrace Collaboration to Tackle Global Challenges in Equity, Sustainability and Trade	"Generative AI holds the potential for radical transformation... need to mitigate its risks through enabling approaches"
2024	APEC's Crucial Role in Championing Gender Equity in the Asia-Pacific	"if women are not at the center of our thinking in APEC—whether we are considering matters of trade policy, skills, artificial intelligence... governance itself is fundamentally flawed"
2024	AI Governance: Why Cooperation Matters	"With support from Korea and other global AI leaders, Peru has been able to develop its AI strategies and build capacity in both the public and private sectors"
2024	Project Final Report: APEC Climate Symposium 2024 – Towards a Sustainable and Resilient Society through Enhanced ENSO Response and Preparedness	"AI and advanced regional models are expected to offer valuable tools for proactive decision-making and regional resilience"
		"AI-powered smart insect traps to monitor pests... allowing SENAMHI to link pest patterns with climate data"
G20		
2016	Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China speech at B20 Summit	"new technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality are developing by leaps and bounds"
2019	G20 Osaka Leaders' Declaration	"We commit to a human-centered approach to AI, and welcome the non-binding G20 AI Principles, drawn from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Recommendation on AI"
		"a human-centered approach to AI, and welcome the non-binding G20 AI Principles, drawn from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Recommendation on AI"
2019	G20 Ministerial Statement on Trade and Digital Economy	"Cross-border flow of data, information, ideas and knowledge generates higher productivity, greater innovation, and improved sustainable development"
		"cross-border flow of data, information, ideas and knowledge generates higher productivity, greater innovation, and improved sustainable development"
2019	G20 Karuizawa Innovation Action Plan on Energy Transitions and Global Environment for Sustainable Growth	"[scientific effort to] refine and develop the full spectrum of economy-wide scenarios for energy and climate models"



Year	Document	Quotation
2021	Declaration of G20 Digital Ministers	"The uptake of AI by firms, in general, is still low and significant gaps remain between large firms and MSMEs [micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises] in the development and use of AI technologies, in particular in developing countries"
		"MSME-friendly AI policies, guidelines, standards and regulations and by relying on agile regulatory approaches"
		"agile regulatory approaches"
2021	G20 Labour and Employment Ministerial Declaration	"in light of the benefits and challenges of new technologies, including Artificial Intelligence... we will provide tailored support to businesses and workers in the transition"
2022	G20 Compendium on Promoting Investment for Sustainable Development	"The country has developed a set of targeted sectors including: education tech, cybersecurity, e-healthcare/ epharma, renewable power generation/ water supply, smart buildings, robotics, blockchain, carbon-capture technology, transport infrastructure, 5G infrastructure, healthcare facilities therapeutics, and devices, senior housing & care organizations, consumer companies, 3D printing, IoT & Sensors, sustainable transport, sustainability in food consumption, subscription- based products/ digital content, financial tech, e-commerce platforms, Artificial Intelligence, augmented reality/ virtual reality, renewable energy, agriculture Tech."
2023	G20 Culture Ministers Meeting Outcome Document and Chairs Summary	"Recognising the benefits and opportunities of the digital technologies – that encompass web-based and frontier technologies such as 3D modelling, Artificial Intelligence, including generative AI, virtual or augmented reality, gamification, robotics, and information and data produced by earth observation systems – for the documentation, interpretation, presentation, preservation, protection and recovery, research, promotion, dissemination and transmission of culture and cultural heritage, including long term preservation of digital documents – we underline the importance of the development of common international standards on digital technology for the conservation of cultural heritage, particularly in the face of growing threats linked to conflicts, disasters or climate change – while further underlining that digital transformation is a driving force for the development of cultural and creative sectors and industries, enabling access to new audiences, promoting diversity and inclusion, fostering cross-cultural knowledge production and transfer as well as the development of global cultural markets"
2023	G20 2023 Action Plan on Accelerating Progress on the SDGs	"Encourage and support greater enrolment of all women and girls... in fields that use digital and emerging technologies, like Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning"
2023	VARANASI DEVELOPMENT MINISTERIAL MEETING "G20 2023 ACTIONPLAN ON ACCELERATING PROGRESSON THE SDGS"	"greater enrolment of all women and girls... in fields that use digital and emerging technologies, like Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning"
2023	G20 Digital Economy Ministers Meeting Outcome Document and Chair Summary	"reiterated our national positions as expressed in other fora, including the UN Security Council"
2024	Salvador da Bahia Declaration Ministers of Culture	"AI systems... [should be] based on varied and representative datasets, including from a wide range of languages and cultures, that avoid reinforcing or perpetuating discriminatory or biased applications"
		"We encourage all countries to consider appropriate AI policy approaches and governance systems, which may include regulatory, co-regulatory and self-regulatory measures with a human-centric, ethical, and social perspective"
		"We encourage all countries to consider appropriate AI policy approaches and governance systems, which may include regulatory, co-regulatory and self-regulatory measures with a human-centric, ethical, and social perspective"

