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# ADVANCING RIGHTS-BASED AI STRATEGY IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

## POLICY BRIEF

# Advancing Rights-Based AI Strategy in Côte d'Ivoire

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# Executive Summary

Côte d'Ivoire has taken a significant step towards embracing the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) with the development of its National AI and Data Governance Strategy. This policy brief emerges from the critical discussions and expert insights shared during Paradigm Initiative's Côte d'Ivoire inaugural Digital Policy Engagement Series (DiPES), convened in Abidjan.

While acknowledging the government's forward-thinking approach and stated ambition to leverage AI for national development across key sectors, this analysis reveals critical gaps that could undermine the strategy's effectiveness and impact, particularly the safeguarding of fundamental human rights, the meaningful inclusion of marginalised populations, and the establishment of clear, measurable pathways for implementation.

To ensure that Côte d'Ivoire's AI journey is both innovative and equitable, this brief presents the need for a fundamental shift towards a rights-based framework for AI governance. It emphasises the urgent need to integrate relevant continental strategies, notably the African Union's AI Strategy, and to develop concrete, actionable tools, such as a comprehensive human rights addendum and a robust milestone tracking system, to translate policy aspirations into tangible outcomes for all segments of Ivorian society.

# Table of contents


Executive Summary 4

Background 6

Overview of Côte d'Ivoire's AI Strategy 7

Key Issues and Gaps Identified 8

Case in point : Learning from Kenya's proactive approach 9

Case in point : Brazil's Holistic Approach to AI Regulation 12

Conclusion 13

# Background

**Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) is a West African nation known as the world's top cocoa producer,** with a rapidly growing economy and a significant role as a regional economic hub. Historically a French colony and a model of stability, the country experienced political turmoil and civil conflict in the early 2000s but has since achieved notable economic growth and returned to a path of development, although challenges remain. Its capital is Yamoussoukro, while Abidjan serves as its economic capital and largest city. With an average real GDP growth of 8.2% between 2012 and 2019,[1] Côte d'Ivoire managed to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and maintain a positive growth rate of 2% in 2020. In 2021, the country returned to its strong growth trajectory and continues to play a central role as a regional economic hub and a destination for many nationals from member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Côte d'Ivoire has embarked on an ambitious economic transformation program, aiming to go beyond its status as a raw material exporter to become a key player in global value chains.

**In 2023, Côte d'Ivoire ranked 138th out of 193 countries in the Oxford Insights Government AI Readiness[2] Index,** which examines 40 indicators across three pillars: Government, Technology Sector, and Data and infrastructure. The index highlights progress, identifies gaps, and provides actionable insights for policymakers working to integrate AI into public service delivery. In response, the Ministry of Digital Transition and Digitalisation initiated the development of a National AI and Data Governance Strategy, positioning it as a transformative pillar for the country's digital future.

Recognising the critical juncture at which Côte d'Ivoire stands in shaping its digital future, **Paradigm Initiative**, a pan-African digital rights and inclusion organisation, convened its Digital Policy Engagement Series **(DiPES)** in Abidjan on April 16, 2025. This important platform brought together over 30 key stakeholders, representing a diverse coalition of voices crucial to an inclusive and rights-respecting digital ecosystem. Participants included human rights defenders working on the frontlines of digital freedoms, technologists with expertise in the practical implications of AI deployment, organisations advocating for the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities, women's rights groups championing gender equality in the digital sphere, and policymakers tasked with shaping the legislative and regulatory landscape.

The central focus of the **DiPES** session was a comprehensive assessment of Côte d'Ivoire's evolving **national digital policy environment.** Deliberations centered on two pivotal documents: the recently launched National AI and Data Governance Strategy[3] and the 2023 Cybercrimes Law. Through in-depth discussions and critical analysis, the participants aimed to identify potential gaps within these frameworks collectively, articulate potential risks associated with their implementation, and, most importantly, formulate actionable and practical recommendations for improvement. This policy brief serves as a distillation of the rich insights, shared concerns, and constructive proposals that emerged from this crucial engagement, offering a civil society perspective on how Côte d'Ivoire can strengthen its digital policies to be more robust, inclusive, and aligned with fundamental human rights principles. This brief come about from a desktop research that focuses on AI and employs some comparative insights from Kenya, Brazil, and other international instruments.

[1] Côte d'Ivoire Overview: Development news, research, data | World Bank.

[2] https://oxfordinsights.com/ai-readiness/ai-readiness-index/

# Overview of Côte d'Ivoire's AI Strategy

**Côte d'Ivoire's National AI and Data Governance Strategy**[4] articulates a comprehensive vision for leveraging artificial intelligence as a catalyst for national development. The strategy is structured around five core objectives, each aimed at harnessing the transformative power of AI across various facets of Ivorian society and the economy[5].

**Firstly**, the strategy prioritizes the Digital Transformation of Key Sectors, identifying agriculture, healthcare, education, energy, and public administration as areas ripe for AI-driven innovation. The anticipated benefits range from increased efficiency and productivity in agriculture to enhanced diagnostics and personalized treatment in healthcare, improved access to quality education, optimized energy management, and more streamlined and citizen-centric public services.

**Secondly**, recognizing that a thriving AI ecosystem requires a skilled workforce, the strategy emphasizes Human Capital Development. This objective encompasses initiatives aimed at training a new generation of AI specialists, integrating AI-related curricula into educational institutions at various levels, and providing opportunities for professional retraining to equip the existing workforce with the skills needed to navigate and contribute to an AI-driven economy.

**Thirdly,** the strategy seeks the Creation of an Innovation Ecosystem that fosters dynamism and growth in the AI sector. This involves actively encouraging AI research and development, supporting the emergence and scaling of AI startups, establishing incubators and accelerators to nurture innovation, and forging strong public-private partnerships to leverage the combined expertise and resources of government, industry, and academia.

**Fourthly,** the strategy underscores the importance of Promoting Digital Sovereignty. This objective focuses on strategically leveraging local data resources, promoting the use of national languages in digital interfaces and AI applications, and investing in the development of robust domestic digital infrastructure to ensure greater national control over its digital assets and future.

**Finally,** the strategy includes the Establishment of an Ethical and Legal Framework, acknowledging the critical need to address the societal implications of AI. This pillar encompasses key considerations such as data protection to safeguard individual privacy, ensuring algorithmic fairness to prevent discriminatory outcomes, and upholding respect for fundamental human rights in the design, deployment, and use of AI technologies.

While the explicit recognition of these ethical principles within the strategy is a commendable first step, a significant concern remains regarding the level of detail provided on how these principles will be translated into concrete actions, operational guidelines, and effective mechanisms for oversight and accountability. The promise of ethical AI governance hinges on moving beyond broad statements to the development of practical tools and frameworks that ensure these principles are embedded throughout the AI lifecycle. Principles like **UNESCO**[6] and **OECD**[7] can provide a basic template for this integration.

[3] https://www.wearetech.africa/en/fils-uk/news/tech/cote-divoire-unveils-ai-and-data-governance-strategy

[4] https://telecom.gouv.ci/new/uploads/publications/1741967075 41.pdf

[5] UNESCO's Readiness Assessment Methodology (RAM) is a comprehensive tool designed to evaluate a country's preparedness for implementing AI. The RAM focuses on multiple dimensions of readiness, including areas such as technological infrastructure, legislation, and the economy, with a focus throughout on ethical considerations and effective governance.

# Key Issues and Gaps Identified

## 1. Lack of a Detailed Ethical and Human Rights Framework

Although the strategy mentions ethical considerations, it lacks a clear roadmap on how these principles will be implemented or monitored. Risks such as algorithmic bias, data misuse, and lack of transparency remain insufficiently addressed. These risks are not theoretical; they manifest as tangible threats to fundamental rights, including the potential for algorithmic bias to perpetuate and even amplify existing societal inequalities, the pervasive danger of data misuse impacting individual privacy and autonomy, and a concerning lack of transparency that can obscure decision-making processes by AI systems, making accountability virtually impossible.

The implications of this gap are profound. Without explicit mechanisms to conduct human rights impact assessments for AI applications, Côte d'Ivoire risks inadvertently developing and deploying systems that could discriminate against its own marginalised communities, infringe upon privacy rights, or limit access to essential services based on flawed data or biased algorithms. For instance, an AI system used in public services might inadvertently disadvantage certain demographic groups if the training data reflects historical biases, or an AI-powered surveillance system could disproportionately impact freedom of assembly or expression if not governed by clear rights-protective parameters.

[6] UNESCO's Pioneering Role in Measuring AI Readiness: A Spotlight on the Oxford Insights AI Readiness Index 2023 | UNESCO

[7] https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/policy-issues/artificial-intelligence.html

# Case in Point: Learning from Kenya's Proactive Approach

In contrast, nations like Kenya have demonstrated a more proactive and integrated approach to human rights in their AI policy development. The Kenya National AI Task Force Report (2019[8]) stands out as a significant example. The report did not merely list human rights as a general principle; it explicitly outlined mechanisms for integrating gender, inclusion, and comprehensive human rights assessments at both the strategic design phase and the practical deployment planning stage of AI systems. It quite attempted to reflect the OECD Framework approach.

This user-friendly framework will allow policymakers to classify different types of applied AI systems. The OECD.AI Network of Experts developed the OECD Framework for Classifying AI Systems[9] as a tool for policy-makers, regulators, legislators, and others so that they can assess the opportunities and risks that different types of AI systems present and to inform their national AI strategies. The Framework links the technical characteristics of AI with the policy implications set out in the OECD AI Principles.[10] The framework allows users to zoom in on specific risks that are typical of AI, such as bias, explainability and robustness, yet it is generic in nature. It facilitates nuanced and precise policy debate. The framework can also help develop policies and regulations, since AI system characteristics influence the technical and procedural measures they need for implementation.

This integrated methodology ensures that ethical considerations are not an afterthought but woven into the fabric of AI development and governance, offering a valuable blueprint for Côte d'Ivoire to emulate. Such an approach would involve establishing clear guidelines for data anonymisation, mandating independent audits for algorithmic fairness, and creating accessible redress mechanisms for individuals affected by AI decisions.

8 https://afyonluoglu.org/PublicWebFiles/Reports/AI/National/National%20AI%20Plan-Kenya_Emerging_Digital_Techno logies.pdf
9 https://oecd.ai/en/wonk/classification
10 https://www.oecd.ai/ai-principles

## 2. Outdated supporting legislation and lack of supporting structures

**The National AI and Data Governance Strategy of Côte d'Ivoire acknowledges the relevance of existing legal frameworks to the ever-expanding AI ecosystem.** However, a critical concern is that many of these foundational laws in Côte d'Ivoire are significantly outdated. Given the novelty and the exceptionally fast-paced evolution of AI technologies and their governance, these existing legal instruments may no longer be adequate to effectively address AI deployment's complex legal, ethical, and societal implications. The lag between technological advancement and legal adaptation creates a potential governance vacuum, leaving individuals and society vulnerable to unforeseen risks and hindering the responsible development and adoption of AI.

While relevant in their original context, several key pieces of Ivorian legislation now require urgent review and modernisation to fit the AI era. These include:

**(i) Personal Data Protection (Law n°2013-450) enacted in 2013:**
While this law establishes principles for data protection, it doesn't adequately address the specific challenges posed by AI systems that often rely on the collection, processing, and analysis of vast amounts of personal data, including potentially sensitive information. Issues such as automated decision-making, Algorithmic use, profiling, and the use of AI in surveillance technologies, amongst others, may require more specific legal provisions and stronger enforcement mechanisms than currently provided. Côte d'Ivoire's data protection law is among the eight African data protection laws that do not appear to regulate automated processing at all.[11]

**(ii) Cybercrime (Law n°2013-451):**
This law addresses various forms of cybercrime, but it needs to be updated to specifically address AI-related cyber threats, such as the manipulation of AI systems for malicious purposes, the use of AI in sophisticated cyberattacks, and the legal implications of crimes committed through or by autonomous AI agents.For example, the law's Articles 4 to 13 cover offenses specific to ICTs, which are in particular access to, maintenance of, obstruction of, introduction into an information system, illegal interception of data, alteration, production or the deletion of data. Articles 15 to 18 concern offenses to child pornography. Offenses relating to infringements of intellectual property and related rights committed through an information system are set out in Article 33. These are not adequate to capture the new dimension of AI.

**(iii) Electronic Transactions (Actn°2013-546):**
This act governs electronic transactions, but the increasing use of AI in online commerce, digital services, and automated contracting necessitates updates to clarify issues of liability, authentication, and the legal validity of AI-driven transactions.

**(iv) Intellectual Property (Law n°2016-555) established in 2016:**
The development of AI raises complex questions regarding intellectual property rights, including the ownership of AI-generated content, the patentability of AI inventions, and the protection of algorithms and training data. The current intellectual property law needs to be adapted to provide clearer guidance in these novel areas.

11 https://dataprotection.africa/ai-and-data-protection-regulation/

**(v) Consumer Rights (Law n°2016-412):**
As AI becomes increasingly integrated into consumer products and services, updates to consumer rights legislation are needed to address issues such as algorithmic transparency in consumer interactions, redress mechanisms for harm caused by AI-powered products, and the prevention of unfair or discriminatory practices facilitated by AI.

Beyond updating existing legislation, there is also a lack of dedicated supporting structures and institutions specifically tasked with overseeing and regulating the development and deployment of AI. This could include specialised regulatory bodies, ethics committees with AI expertise, or dedicated units within government ministries responsible for AI governance. The absence of such structures could hinder effective implementation of the AI strategy and make it challenging to address emerging challenges and ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards.

## 3. Missing Focus on Equity, Gender, and Vulnerable Groups

A significant gap in Côte d'Ivoire's National AI Strategy is the lack of attention to critical issues of equity, gender considerations, and the specific needs and rights of vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities.

The deployment of AI without an explicit equity lens can lead to Algorithmic Discrimination, Exclusion from Benefits, Reinforcement of Harmful Stereotypes, Lack of Representation and Voice in the design, development, and oversight of AI technologies.

## 4. Absence of Implementation Milestones

For a strategy of this national importance, the inclusion of detailed milestones, timelines for key deliverables (e.g., legislative updates, pilot projects, capacity-building programs), and a public-facing dashboard for progress tracking is not merely a best practice; it is an essential component for ensuring transparency, and guaranteeing the successful realization of country's AI aspirations.

Without defined benchmarks, it becomes virtually impossible to objectively assess whether the strategy is being implemented as intended, at what pace, and whether resources are being utilised effectively. This lack of visibility hinders adaptive management and course correction.

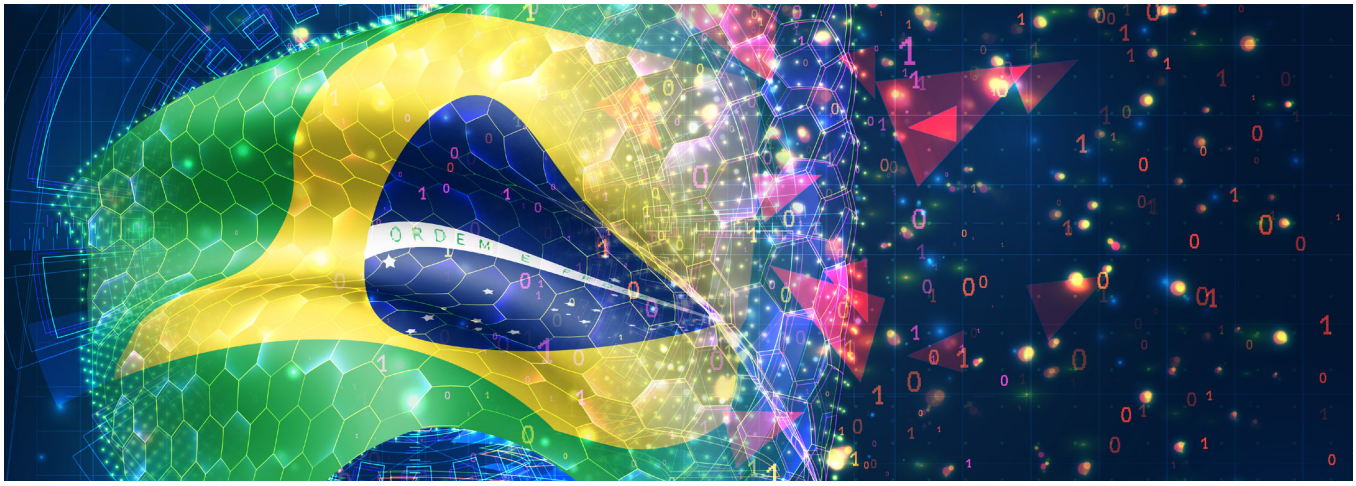
strategy without an implementation roadmap can easily lose momentum, become a theoretical exercise rather than a practical endeavor, and ultimately fail to deliver its intended impact on national development.

## 5. Narrow Definition of Human Rights Risks

While Côte d'Ivoire's AI strategy makes a commendable initial step by highlighting the importance of data and algorithmic transparency, its definition of human rights risks in the context of AI remains too narrow and limited. The current focus primarily addresses issues of data privacy and the internal workings of algorithms, but it largely overlooks a broader spectrum of fundamental digital rights that are critically impacted by the deployment of AI systems such as Freedom of Expression, Right to Non-Discrimination, Data Ownership and Consent . **This omission leaves significant vulnerabilities unaddressed and risks the inadvertent infringement of civil liberties.**

A critical oversight in the strategy is the lack of emphasis on the imperative for proactive risk assessment by government entities and private deployers of AI technologies before these products are brought to market or integrated into public services. The strategy encourages the use of AI for development, which is laudable, but it fails to mandate a rigorous and transparent process for identifying, evaluating, and mitigating potential human rights risks associated with specific AI applications. Without such a requirement, there is a significant danger that harmful or ethically problematic AI systems could be deployed, leading to adverse consequences for citizens and undermining public trust in AI.

## Case in Point: Brazil's Holistic Approach to AI Regulation



Brazil offers a compelling example of a nation grappling with the comprehensive implications of AI and striving for a broader definition of rights in its proposed legislation. The Brazilian draft AI law[12], the culmination of three years of legislative efforts, demonstrates a meticulous approach to safeguarding user rights in AI interactions.Thedocument, part of a comprehensive Senate committee report, categorising AI systems based on the societal risk they pose[13]. This tiered approach allows for differentiated regulatory scrutiny, with higher-risk AI applications subject to more stringent requirements, including mandatory human rights impact assessments and ethical audits. This proactive regulatory stance, which focuses on identifying and mitigating risks before deployment, serves as a valuable model for Côte d'Ivoire to consider in refining its own AI governance framework. It illustrates the importance of moving beyond a reactive approach to one that anticipates and prevents potential harms across a wide spectrum of digital rights.

12 Brazil's AI Act: A New Era of AI Regulation - GDPR Local
13 AI regulation around the world, from China to Brazil - The Washington Post

# Conclusion

Côte d'Ivoire has taken a commendable first step with its National AI and Data Governance Strategy, but a critical analysis reveals it is not yet robust enough to guarantee a rights-based and inclusive digital future. While the strategy articulates a forward-thinking vision, it lacks the detailed ethical and human rights framework necessary to mitigate risks such as algorithmic bias and data misuse. Its reliance on outdated legislation and the absence of a clear focus on equity for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities and women, are significant omissions. The strategy's lack of a public-facing implementation roadmap also undermines transparency and accountability, making it difficult to track progress and ensure its aspirations translate into tangible outcomes.

To transform this promising policy into a truly effective one, Côte d'Ivoire must integrate a comprehensive human rights addendum, drawing on global instruments such as the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI and the OECD Framework for Classifying AI Systems. This would involve establishing clear standards for data protection in AIs, algorithmic accountability, and legal safeguards against discrimination. The nation should also prioritize the modernization of its foundational laws to specifically address the unique challenges posed by AI, by embracing these recommendations;

## Recommendations:

**1.** Develop and adopt a detailed Human Rights Addendum/complementary document to the National AI Strategy. This addendum should provide concrete mechanisms for integrating human rights principles throughout the AI lifecycle, developed through a collaborative process with civil society, human rights defenders, and affected communities.

**2.** Enact a comprehensive Digital Rights Act in 2025. This legislation should establish clear standards for data protection, algorithmic accountability, legal safeguards against discrimination in digital systems, and effective enforcement mechanisms.

**3**. Establish a publicly accessible milestone tracker with clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and commit to semi-annual progress updates on implementing the National AI Strategy. This will enhance transparency and facilitate public oversight.

**4.** Create a permanent multi-stakeholder task force to oversee the ethical implementation of AI in Côte d'Ivoire. This body should comprise representatives from government, civil society, academia, the private sector, and international organizations.

**5.** The civil society should work together with the Government for the creation of a rights-respecting AI framework.

**6.** The civil society should also advocate against the harms caused by AI systems to human rights to create awareness.



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