

Spotlight on AI development in Nigeria

Taking the pulse of AI development in Nigeria

“Nigeria has been the biggest adopter of Artificial Intelligence in Africa.” That’s the view of Sam Altman, CEO of ChatGPT creator OpenAI. During a visit to Nigeria in 2023, [he heralded the country’s success](#) as an investment hub for AI enterprises.

That success – and the enthusiasm of global AI leaders like Altman – are to be welcomed. But the reality on the ground, in Nigeria and across West Africa, is more nuanced.

The country is currently ranked just 103 on the global AI adoption readiness index and a year on from Altman’s visit, a DLA Piper survey found 50% of Nigerian businesses opting not to buy or build any AI solutions.

Barriers to progress

There are pressing challenges facing the development of AI in Nigeria. Not least among them being infrastructure limitations.

Like in many African countries, there’s work to be done to expand digital reach across the country: some remote communities still lack internet coverage. That makes it difficult to access the quality data needed to train AI models.

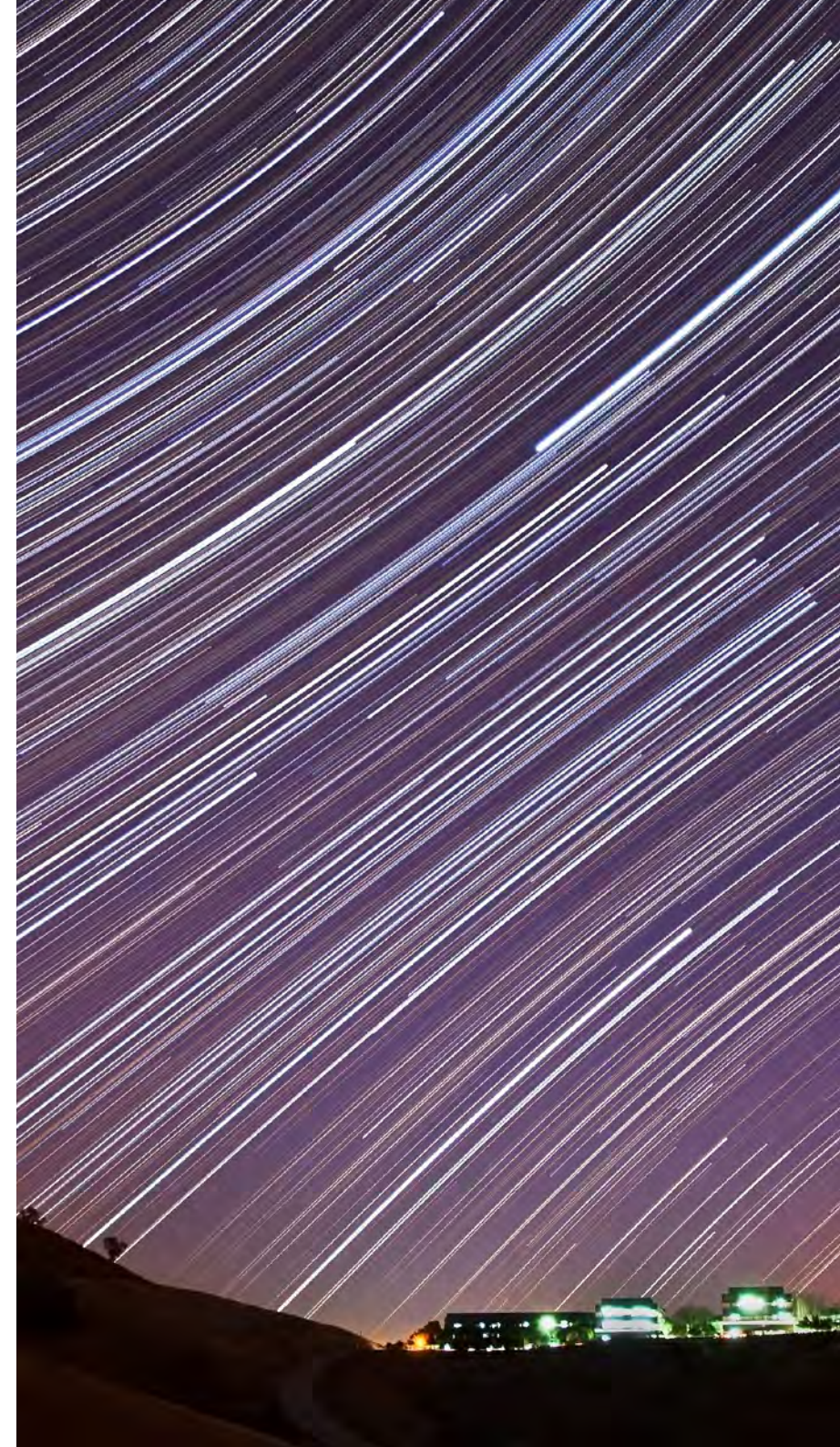
At the same time, there remains a knowledge gap, with AI use still at a foundational level (as it is in most countries).

On the regulatory front, meanwhile, Nigeria has no primary legislation governing AI (again, like many other countries). However, various existing laws do apply to its use. These include the Copyright Act, 2022 and Nigeria Data Protection Act, 2023.

Considering these barriers, how is Nigeria’s government promoting the development of a flourishing AI industry?

Nigeria’s AI strategy is currently being driven by the Federal Ministry of Communication, Innovation and Digital Economy (FMCIDE). The National Innovation and Technology Development Agency (NITDA), operating under the FMCIDE, has stated that the government’s overriding priority is not to regulate AI. Its key objectives are two-fold:

Firstly, to ramp up readiness for the safe deployment and adoption of AI by Nigerian organisations. And secondly, to build the skills Nigerians will need to create solutions that meet the national economy’s needs, as well as global standards.



Spearheading AI development

With those goals in mind, the FMCIDE has recently published a draft [National Artificial Intelligence Strategy \(NAIS\)](#).

This landmark document aims to position Nigeria as the continent's leader when it comes to harnessing the transformative power of AI. It sets out a comprehensive roadmap for the integration and application of AI technologies, based on five pillars:

- Building a foundational AI infrastructure
- Building and sustaining a world-class AI ecosystem
- Accelerating AI adoption and sector transformation
- Ensuring responsible and ethical AI development
- Developing a robust AI governance framework

At the same time, the strategy underlines the threats associated with AI technology and emphasises the need for responsible, ethical and inclusive AI innovations that address Nigeria's socio-economic challenges.

It should be noted that the strategy is still in draft form, and may go through significant revisions. In our view, this draft is a work in progress and same is commendable.

Looking forward

Despite its shortcomings, Nigeria boasts a resilient tech foundation. Prior to publishing the NAIS, the government had introduced a number of measures to promote digital and AI innovation in recent years:

- The National Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics promotes R&D on emerging technologies and their applications in areas of national interest.
- The Strategic Roadmap and Action Plan 2021 – 2024 includes key strategies and initiatives anchored on seven pillars, for digital innovation and transformation over the period.
- The National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy 2020 – 2030 was developed to transform the Nigerian economy to enable it to capitalize on the numerous opportunities offered by digital technologies.
- The three million Technical Talent Program aims to train three million Nigerians on AI, machine learning and other technical skills by 2027.
- The Nigeria Artificial Intelligence Research Scheme provides grants to AI startups and researchers in fields such as agriculture, education and healthcare.

What's more, this encouraging landscape is accentuated by a very young population: the [median age in Nigeria is under 18](#). That's the ideal demographic for technological development and adoption.

With sustained government support, and a collaborative effort from stakeholders, Nigeria is ideally placed to become an AI leader on the African continent – and a shining example globally.

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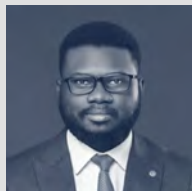


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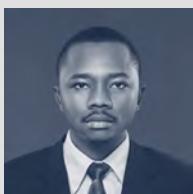


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