THE ETHICAL DATA DISCUSSION SERIES

The Ethical Data Discussion Series is a collaborative project between the [Association of African Universities](), the [University of Nottingham](), and the Ethical Data Initiative. The series aims to explore ethical considerations surrounding digital technologies, data collection, and data-driven research. It highlights the importance of providing ethical training for digital professionals. The ongoing set of programmes, originally broadcast on AAU TV, features expert panel discussions on various topics related to data ethics, research, and education.

We have launched a global education campaign to advocate for the inclusion of data ethics in all data science and research-based higher education courses. Our goal is to train the next generation of data and research professionals about their legal and ethical responsibilities regarding the use, reuse, and sharing of data.

This initiative aligns with UNESCO's focus on human rights economy, the right to science, academic freedom, and international scientific cooperation. As Africa has been declared a UNESCO Global Priority this campaign is a significant contribution of the AAU to [UNESCO's Operational Strategy for Priority Africa]().

The following webinars have been run so far:
- Data Ethics in Higher Education, 23 May 2023

- Data Ethics and Human Rights in Platform Economy, 20 June 2023

- The Ethics of AI and Data in Higher Education, 30 November 2023

- Unveiling Bias: Navigating Gender Disparities in Data and AI, Thursday 14 November, 2024

- Child Protection in the Age of AI, 1st of October, 2024

- Building Resilient Education Systems through Responsible Research and Innovation, Thursday 14 November, 2024

Webinar 1: Data Ethics Policy in Higher Education, 23 May 2023

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YtQlQYCLVU

Data Ethics Policy in Higher Education was the first in the ongoing Ethical Data Discussion series, which aims to explore important topics and questions surrounding digital technology, data collection and data-driven research; highlighting the need for training digital practitioners in the ethics of their craft. Future events will cover themes such as: Human rights, data colonialism, data feudalism, gender and research ethics.

The lively panel discussion took place between African experts in International Development, Data Science, Technology and Education and touched on pressing questions such as whether, and why, it might be time for data ethics to become an integral part of the

education curriculum; and how we can can best build capacity for Data Ethics in industry and higher education.

Webinar 2: Data Ethics and Human Rights in Platform Economy, 20 June 2023

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUXd9zhsPGs

A panel of ICT law, human rights, international development and education policy experts discussed a wide range of questions through the lens of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, discussing what has already been done to identify and mitigate potential harms and what more can be done. Topics covered included the potential impact on AI and related technologies on human rights, and avoiding discrimination against vulnerable and marginalised groups in data use and collection.

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Webinar 3: The Ethics of AI & Data in Higher Education, 30 November 2023

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTsfCdgp54g

This online event was broadcast as part of a week-long celebration of Africa Universities' Day 2023, which commemorated the AAU's 56 years of service to Africa's higher education sector. The overarching theme of Africa Universities' Day 2023 was *Artificial Intelligence in African Higher Education Institutions*.

Given the rapid technological advancements and the increasing significance of AI and data across various industries, the event focused on how these developments (IoT, AR, VR, language processing, etc.) impact teaching, learning, research, collaboration, ethics, privacy, and administrative functions within African Higher Education Institutions. The panel discussed how the rapid technological advancements have influenced the education sector on the Continent, and the ethical considerations arising from these changes.

The panel of experts also explored the role of AI and other emerging technologies in higher education and research, and the challenges this presents for policymakers, educators, researchers, and students, emphasizing the importance of integrating ethics into education.

Webinar 4: Unveiling Bias – Navigating Gender Disparities in Data and AI

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZGYJ-XhisQ

The issue of gender bias in artificial intelligence (AI) and data technologies is increasingly recognized as a significant concern affecting societal equity and fairness. Biased datasets and algorithms can perpetuate gender disparities, leading to discriminatory outcomes in various domains, including employment, finance, and social interactions. Addressing these biases requires proactive measures, ethical considerations, and diverse representation in AI development

- Role of Data and Technology in Perpetuating Gender Biases
- Challenges in Combating Gender Bias in AI
- Strategies to Mitigate Gender Bias

Webinar 5: Child Protection in the Age of AI, 1st of October, 2024

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l87cCAHQmoU&t=21s

In the rapidly advancing age of artificial intelligence (AI), the protection of children from potential risks has become a paramount concern on a global scale. As AI technologies continue to permeate various aspects of our lives, including education, entertainment, and social interaction, international agreements are crucial to ensure the safety and well-being of children in this digital era.

On the 1st of October, 2024, the Association of African Universities, the University of Nottingham, and the Ethical Data Initiative held a panel discussion on Child Protection in the Age of AI as part of their Ethical Data Discussion Series.

The event brought together education professionals, child protection experts, and legal experts, to discuss the pressing need to influence and shape national and international policies governing children's safety online. It highlighted the importance of international and interdisciplinary collaboration, and evidence-based recommendations in this complex domain.

One of the key points raised during the event was the importance of considering the evolving capacities of children when crafting policies related to online safety. Additionally, it was noted that a strict application of the law can sometimes be counterproductive, particularly in cases where children are victims. The panel highlighted the need for a balanced approach that protects children while also ensuring their access to valuable online content and services.

The discussion also shed light on the varying levels of digital literacy among parents and caregivers. It was broadly emphasised that not all parents possess the necessary digital confidence to make informed decisions about their children's online activities. As a result, there was a call for schools to play a greater role in implementing digital literacy as part of the core curriculum. This approach could help ensure that children receive consistent education on online safety, regardless of the digital literacy levels of their parents. Abhlash Nair, Vice Chancellor and Professor of Internet Law at the University of Exeter Law School warned we should avoid "a situation where children are excluded from content and services

that they should have access to and that have benefit or value for them." Trust is a crucial factor, and panelists emphasised the need for technology companies and governments to go further to build trust with schools and parents.

While existing legal and policy frameworks for cybersecurity and data protection, such as the Malabo Convention and GDPR, provide a good basis on which to build enhanced online protection measures; a broader approach might be needed.

One of the key international agreements addressing child protection in the age of AI is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This landmark treaty, adopted in 1989, outlines the basic human rights that should be afforded to children and provides a comprehensive framework for their protection. In the context of AI, the UNCRC underscores the importance of safeguarding children from harmful content, exploitation, and privacy violations in digital environments.

Such is the importance of child protection and safety within the international community that the UNCRC has the most signatures of any international agreement. Only one country has not yet ratified it (though they were instrumental in the creation of the accord) due to legal issues, domestic politics and concerns around parental rights.

International Policy Advisor and Expert, Stefano Rimini, underscored the importance of children and communities having a voice in the debate. Initiatives like the EU Children's Participation Platform provide a unique opportunity to include the main stakeholders – young people – in the co-creation of the laws and policies designed to protect them.

Furthermore, the panel addressed the role of policymakers in addressing online safety concerns. It was highlighted that there is a pressing need for comprehensive policies that take into account the interests of children and the complexities of the online environment. Dr Admark Moyo, Senior Lecturer in Family Law at Stellenbosch University, underlined the necessity of collaboration between policymakers, educators, and parents to create a safe online environment for children.

As AI continues to evolve, international cooperation and coordination are essential to address the complex challenges of child protection in the digital age. Governments, technology companies, and civil society organizations must work together to uphold the principles enshrined in international agreements and ensure that children can harness the benefits of digitisation and AI while being shielded from potential harms.

Webinar 6: Building Resilient Education Systems through Responsible Research and Innovation, Thursday 14 November, 2024

https://youtu.be/tnCazdDXJmE

Considering the African Union's designation of 2024 as the "Year of Education," the Association of African Universities has this year decided to focus its prestigious African Universities' Day celebrations on Education for the 21st Century.

This special edition of the Ethical Data Discussion Series, part of the Africa Universities Day Celebrations, focused on the theme: "Building Resilient Education Systems through Responsible Research and Innovation." The webinar explored how ethical data and research practices can enhance access to inclusive, lifelong, and quality learning across Africa. It featured insights from educators, policymakers, and data experts who addressed the critical role of ethical governance in transforming research assessment within higher education, especially as science and academia undergo rapid digital transformations. They considered strategies for responsible research governance needed to address the educational challenges posed by digitisation and explored its potential for capacity development.

Indeed, as technologies such as AI, IoT, AR, and VR reshape research, teaching, and administration, it is essential for universities to establish responsible assessment frameworks that uphold academic integrity while meeting the needs of students, faculty, researchers, and society. Together we can explore strategies for reforming research assessment that empower higher education institutions in Europe, Africa, and around the world. This way we can, together, foster accountability and responsible innovation to meet the demands of our advancing digital and technological society.