

NIGERIA IS BUILDING AN AI FUTURE

WITHOUT ITS YOUNG PEOPLE



JULY

2026

About Us

Saving African Youths Dream Initiative (SAYDi) is a youth-led nonprofit organization that promotes inclusive development through research, education, democratic governance, digital inclusion, gender equity, and social justice. SAYDi works to strengthen the interface between citizens and institutions while advancing evidence-based solutions for sustainable development.

Executive Director/Editor:

Abdulkareem O. Abdullateef

Lead Researcher:

Olorunniyi Kehinde

Data Visualisation/Design Concept:

Tijani Shehu Ahmad

Contact:

Email: contact@saydi.org

Tell: +234-701-432-5262 / +234-816-124-6411

Website: www.saydi.org

© 2026 Saving African Youths Dream Initiative (SAYDi)



Disclaimer

This publication has been produced by SAYDi to contribute to public discourse and evidence-informed policymaking. While reasonable care has been taken in preparing this document, SAYDi accepts no responsibility for any errors or omissions, or for actions taken based on the information contained herein.

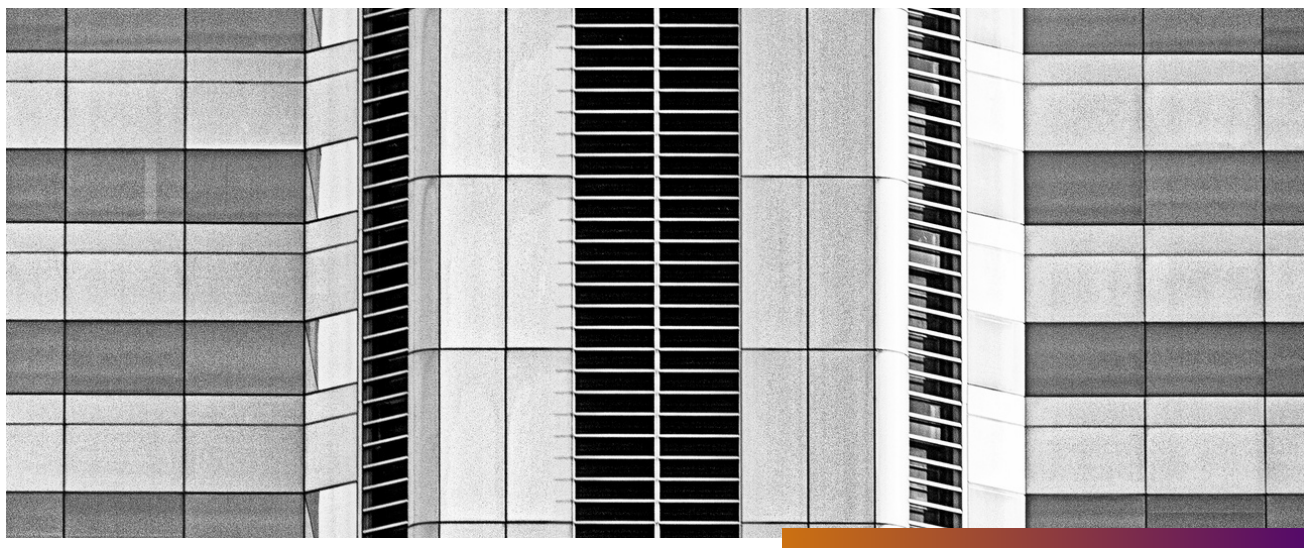


Table of Content

About Us	01
Table of Content	02
Executive Summary	03
How AI could predict insecurity in Nigeria	04
How AI policy is made (and Why Youth are Missing in Nigeria)	05
References	06

Executive Summary



As Nigeria moves towards a digital-first economy, the relationship between technology, education, and community life is rapidly changing. While artificial intelligence (AI) and digital tools present significant opportunities for economic change, a major issue remains in our national strategy: the ongoing exclusion of rural and underserved youth from digital platforms and data representation.

Recent statistics highlight the complexity of this situation. The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2023) notes that Nigeria's youth unemployment rate has reached 53%. This figure is stark compared to pre-2022 estimates, where youth unemployment was around 42.5% in 2020. These numbers reveal serious structural problems in Nigeria's labor market (Nwonye et al., 2023; Chege & Wang, 2020). Although many experts acknowledge that Nigeria has potential in the digital economy, there is still a critical gap in connecting digital skill development to youth employment. Many studies focus on structural issues and general discussions, failing to provide detailed insights into how specific digital training can lead to actual jobs. Despite alarming reports indicating that over 85% of Nigerian graduates lack relevant digital skills (GreenCape Survey, 2023), effective policy designs to bridge this gap are missing or poorly implemented in Nigeria. Currently, the dialogue is mostly anecdotal and lacks solid, data-driven insights into the skills gap, sector needs, and policy changes needed to help youth gain employable digital skills.

Without targeted interventions, the rise of AI may worsen existing inequalities. Based on the community-validated methods from SAYDi's Rural Education Needs Assessment Project (RENAP), this brief urges a collaborative, evidence-based approach to digital inclusion, AI governance, and youth civic engagement, all grounded in African communal values.

How AI could predict insecurity in Nigeria



In many parts of Nigeria, communities continue to face recurring insecurity. This usually follows several patterns such as seasonal farming cycles, land tenure disputes, displacement pressures, economic stress etc. These are measurable variables and a predictive models built on enough historical data, can flag communities at elevated risk before an incident happens.

This is where AI is often presented as a solution, and the idea is simple. With enough historical data, a model can identify areas at elevated risk and trigger early warnings. In controlled settings, these systems have shown strong accuracy when data quality is maintained [1]. Platforms like the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) already aggregate incident reports, economic stress indicators, and historical attack patterns across conflict-prone regions [2]. The Violence and Impacts Early-Warning System (VIEWS), developed by the Peace Research Institute Oslo and Uppsala University, also produces monthly conflict forecasts up to three years ahead [3]. In fact, its December 2025 forecast projected Nigeria to be among the countries with the highest battle-related death tolls in 2026 [3].

However, there are practical challenges that hinder the deployment of this model. Firstly, conflict data from Nigerian states are usually incomplete. Incidents in remote areas may go unreported for days, and information can be inconsistent or delayed. This can be detrimental as a model built on such data can miss critical signals or make wrong connections. Research has shown that AI systems built on datasets like ACLED and similar sources can misclassify events or overlook anomalies due to gaps in the data [4].

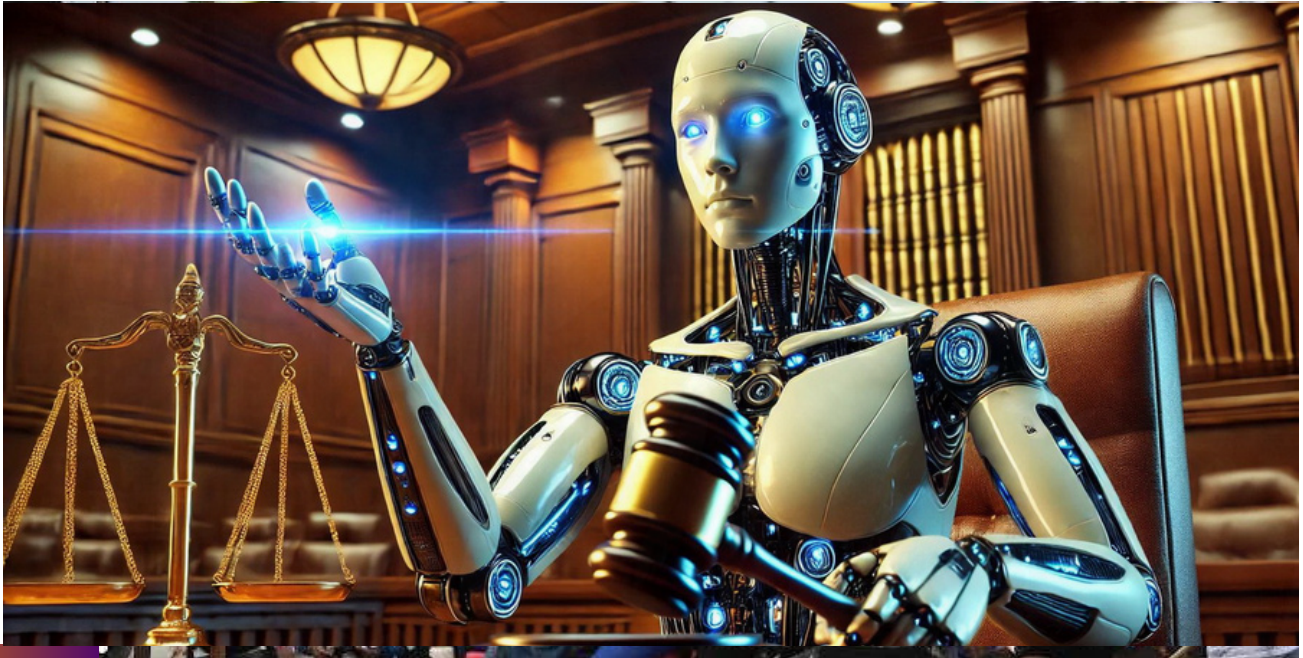
There is also the issue of infrastructure as many predictive tools require structural infrastructure as real-time or near-real-time data pipelines. That includes reliable internet connectivity and consistent field reporting, much of which Nigeria does not have. This also includes designated agencies with capacity to provide prompt institutional follow-through on alert systems.

But beyond these limitations, there is a deeper concern. Systems designed to predict risk are often built without input from the people living in those environments. A model may detect patterns, but it cannot fully understand local realities without community insight. It may be technically sound yet still overlook context.

This raises a broader question. Who is involved in building these systems, and who gets to decide how they are used?

How AI policy is made

(and Why Youth are Missing in Nigeria)



In Nigeria, the governance of AI sits within the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, with agencies such as the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) and the National Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics (NCAIR) playing key roles. The policy process has been ongoing for several years, with calls for stakeholder input, draft publications, and expert consultations. A first draft was completed in 2023, followed by the release of the National AI Strategy, which was later finalised in 2025 [5].

The National AI Strategy speaks about inclusion, youth participation, and the need to build systems that serve everyone [6]. However, there is a gap between what the strategy promises and how it is being shaped.

The process that produced it has been driven largely by government actors, consultants, and established institutions. A key stage in its development was a workshop that brought together about 120 experts in Abuja [7]. Although, many of the young people who will live with the outcomes of these systems were never meaningfully part of the conversation.

Current national efforts focus more on training than participation. Programs like the 3 Million Technical Talent initiative aim to train young people and expand digital capacity, with targets such as improving AI literacy among Nigerians aged 16–35 [8]. However, training people alone to use technology is not the same as including them in deciding what that technology should do, who it should serve, or what safeguards it needs.



Young people are not just end users of AI systems in Nigeria. They are among those most affected by how these systems are designed and deployed, whether in education, employment, surveillance, or security interventions. When they are excluded from governance structures, decisions about these systems are made without a clear sense of how those systems will actually function in everyday life.

There is also a clear missed opportunity here as Nigeria has one of the youngest populations in the world, with a median age of about 17.3 years [9].

Across campuses and tech communities, young people are already building tools, experimenting with data, and solving local problems. However, this energy is not reflected in how national systems are being shaped.

Initiatives aimed at digital skills and AI literacy are important, but they do not give young people a role in decision-making. As such, meaningful youth inclusion has to be prioritised in decision making processes in AI governance. This means creating clear pathways for youth representation within policy bodies, advisory groups, and regulatory processes, not as symbolic additions, but as active voices with defined roles. Without this shift, the gap between those building AI systems and those shaping the rules around them will continue to widen.

AI has real potential to support efforts against insecurity in Nigeria. However, young people need to be identified as key collaborators in making this happen. It is important that they are given key roles in decision making processes to design policies and shape implementation plans. Without that, Nigeria risks building AI systems that do not translate to real impact.

References

- Manju, S. (2026, April). Artificial Intelligence Early Warning Systems as Shields for Sahel Elections Amid Multipolar Competition. Fulcrum Analytics Blog.
- TRENDS Research & Advisory. (n.d.). The Impact of AI and Machine Learning on Conflict Prevention.
- Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). (2025, December 11). AI model warns of deadliest conflict zones in 2026.
- Centre for Emerging Technology and Security (CETaS), Alan Turing Institute. (2025, May 7). The State of AI for Strategic Warning.
- Digital Watch Observatory. (2024, September 26). Nigerian National AI Strategy (NAIS) 2024 | Draft.
- Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy. (2024). Nigeria National AI Strategy (NAIS) 2024 – Draft. NCAIR/NITDA.
- Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy. (2024, April 15). Ministry's Artificial Intelligence Strategy Workshop to Attract 120 Experts from Across the World.
- RichlyAI, (2025). Nigeria's National AI Strategy: A Vision for Inclusive Innovation and Global Leadership.



SAYDi

SAVING AFRICAN YOUTHS DREAM INITIATIVE



JULY 2026