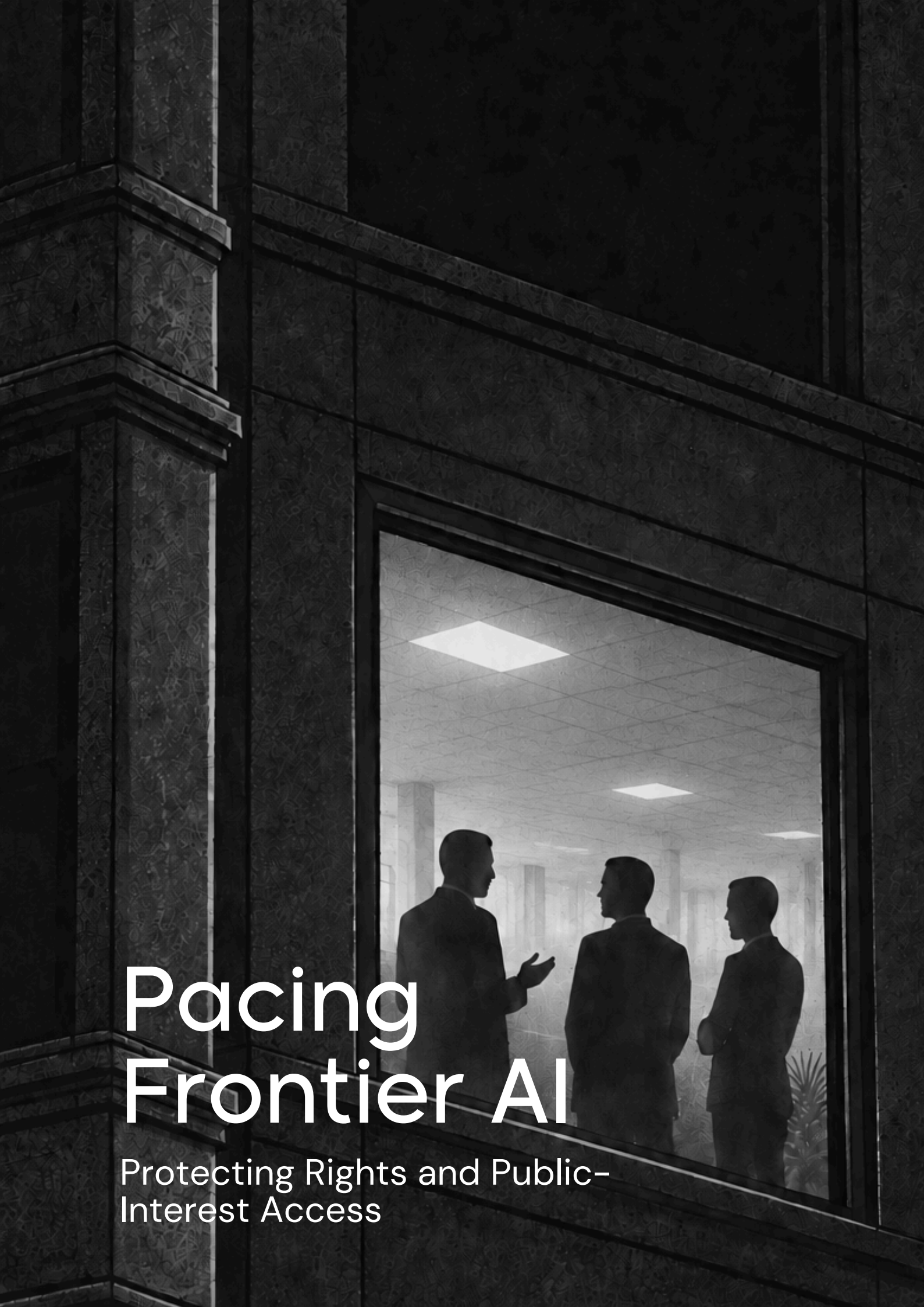


Pacing Frontier AI

Protecting Rights and Public-Interest
Access in Nigeria

A black and white photograph of three men in suits standing in a modern office hallway, viewed through a large window. The men are silhouetted against the bright interior lights. The hallway has a grid ceiling with square light fixtures and a potted plant is visible in the background. The window frame is dark and the building's exterior is visible on the left.

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Disclaimer: This brief is intended for policy discussion and general information. It draws on publicly available reporting as of September 2026 and does not constitute legal or technical advice. References to AI executives' statements should not be read as evidence of a binding agreement or an implemented slowdown. The implications for Nigerian nonprofits and civil society organisations are analytical assessments, not findings from a sector-wide study. The recommendations are the author's and do not imply endorsement by any organisation mentioned.

Abstract

In September 2026, Dario Amodei, co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Anthropic (the AI research lab behind Claude), published a public appeal calling on the artificial intelligence industry and international regulators to deliberately pace the development and deployment of frontier AI systems.

Amodei proposed granting independent evaluators deep, employee-level access to frontier laboratories, instituting binding technical safety standards, and establishing international coordination mechanisms before models reach catastrophic capability thresholds.

Amodei's call received immediate, high-profile public support from Sam Altman, Chief Executive Officer of OpenAI, and Elon Musk, founder of xAI and Chief Executive Officer of Tesla. While Altman pledged continued cooperation with independent evaluators and OpenAI reportedly ruled out an immediate initial public offering (IPO) citing safety and pacing considerations, Musk expressed philosophical backing for a slowdown despite continuing the aggressive scale-up of xAI's supercomputing infrastructure.

Crucially, voluntary rhetoric from foreign technology executives does not constitute a legally binding treaty or an enforceable regulatory framework. For

Nigerian non-profits and civil society organisations (CSOs), this debate creates two equally urgent priorities:

A. Guarding against unvetted systemic risks: Unchecked frontier models present serious cross-border vulnerabilities in cybersecurity, automated disinformation, and critical infrastructure that emerging markets are ill-equipped to absorb.

B. Preventing digital marginalisation and cartelisation: Risk mitigation frameworks designed exclusively by Silicon Valley laboratories and Western regulators risk institutionalising regulatory capture, inflating access costs, and entrenching technological dependency across the Global South.

Nigerian CSOs must reject both unchecked technological deployment and exclusionary, paternalistic gatekeeping. Instead, CSOs should leverage domestic instruments such as the Nigeria Data Protection Act (NDPA 2023) and the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (NAIS), alongside the African Union Continental AI Strategy, to demand that pacing mechanisms include verifiable developer commitments, funded Global South red-teaming, strict data sovereignty protections, and equitable public-interest access.

What the Executives Have Proposed

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Frontier AI refers to state-of-the-art, highly capable general-purpose foundation models that can perform a vast range of cognitive tasks and could exhibit dangerous capabilities (such as autonomous cyber-offense, biological weapon design assistance, or catastrophic deceptive alignment).

Pacing does not imply an abrupt cessation of software development or the withdrawal of existing digital services; rather, it refers to introducing deliberate regulatory checkpoints, red-teaming phases, and capability gates before training or releasing more capable systems.

Amodei's proposed framework centres on three core pillars:

- **In-Depth Independent Evaluation:** External safety bodies and vetted independent evaluators would be granted sustained, inside-the-perimeter access to internal model weights, code repositories, training checkpoints, and safety logs to audit systems throughout the training lifecycle.
- **Harmonised Industry Standards:** Leading frontier developers would coordinate on safety thresholds, agreeing to pause capability scaling or withhold deployment if pre-

defined safety margins are breached, with explicit regulatory supervision to resolve anti-trust barriers.

- **Multilateral Coordination:** National governments would formalise cross-border risk-sharing agreements, harmonising testing protocols across jurisdictions to prevent a competitive race to the bottom.



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The Reality Behind the Rhetoric

Civil society must treat corporate pledges with rigorous scepticism:

- **Divergence Between Words and Operational Commitments:** While Sam Altman publicly endorsed independent scrutiny, OpenAI continues multi-billion-dollar infrastructure campaigns to expand compute capacity. Similarly, Elon Musk frequently warns of civilizational collapse while simultaneously expanding xAI's massive compute clusters (such as the Memphis 'Colossus' supercomputer) and disputing third-party oversight in other commercial domains.
- **Contested Scientific Grounding:** Amodel's warnings of catastrophic biosecurity threats and rapid autonomy are grounded in internal risk modelling. Prominent independent computer scientists contest these timelines, cautioning that existential warnings often overshadow immediate, tangible harms such as algorithmic bias, labor exploitation, and copyright infringement.
- **Absence of Enforcement Mechanisms:** A voluntary pledge without legal sanctions provides no accountability. Without statutory backstops, commercial pressures will routinely override voluntary self-restraint whenever competitive advantages are threatened.

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A detailed illustration of a bustling night market street in Nigeria. The scene is filled with people walking, shopping, and interacting. On the left, a woman in a patterned headscarf and apron is selling produce from a stall under a large umbrella. In the center, a man in a white t-shirt and a woman in a patterned dress are walking. To the right, a man is cooking at a street food stall. The background shows a busy street with yellow vans, cars, and a motorcyclist. The buildings are multi-story and lit up, creating a warm and lively atmosphere.

Implications for Nigeria and the Global South

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Strategic Dependency and Policy Enclosure

Nigerian institutions rely almost exclusively on foundational models developed, trained, hosted, and governed in the United States and China. If frontier laboratories agree among themselves to pace development through high-cost compliance barriers, these costs will be passed down to end users through prohibitive API pricing or restrictive enterprise licensing.

Furthermore, proprietary decisions made abroad, such as unilaterally deprecating an API endpoint, modifying model alignment filters, or restricting access to specific jurisdictions, directly disrupt Nigerian start-ups, healthcare programmes, educational platforms, and governance monitors that have integrated these tools into their operational workflows.

Frontier Risks vs Everyday Harms

Western frontier governance debates are overwhelmingly preoccupied with speculative existential hazards, often neglecting the systemic, everyday harms that currently affect African societies:

- **Linguistic and Cultural Erasure:**

Frontier foundation models are trained predominantly on high-resource English datasets. They frequently hallucinate, misinterpret, or degrade when processing major Nigerian languages such as Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and Nigerian Pidgin. Pacing frameworks that evaluate models solely for offensive cyber capabilities will do nothing to address cultural marginalisation or poor linguistic fidelity.

- **Information Ecosystem Disruption:**
Low-cost multimodal generation fuels hyper-localised political disinformation, deepfake identity manipulation, and financial fraud across platforms like WhatsApp and X, creating acute challenges for electoral integrity and community peacebuilding.
- **Exploitative Digital Supply Chains:**
The safety and alignment of Western frontier models are subsidised by African data workers. Across East and West Africa, content moderators and data annotators endure low wages and severe psychological trauma reviewing toxic inputs to make models safe for Western markets. Pacing protocols must account for labor rights within the broader AI supply chain.

National and Continental Alignment

Nigeria is not operating in a regulatory vacuum. A Nigerian civil society response should draw legitimacy from and reinforce existing institutional initiatives:

- **Nigeria's National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (NAIS):** Formulated under the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy (FMCIDE) and the National Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics (NCAIR), the strategy prioritises national sovereignty, ethical AI deployment, and local capacity development.
- **National Multilingual Large Language Model Initiatives:** Public-private partnerships spearheaded by the Nigerian government, domestic AI startups (such as Awarri), and international philanthropic partners are building native foundational models. CSO interventions should advocate for resources to be channelled toward these sovereign initiatives rather than relying entirely on foreign commercial ecosystems.
- **Nigeria Data Protection Act (NDPA 2023):** The Nigeria Data Protection

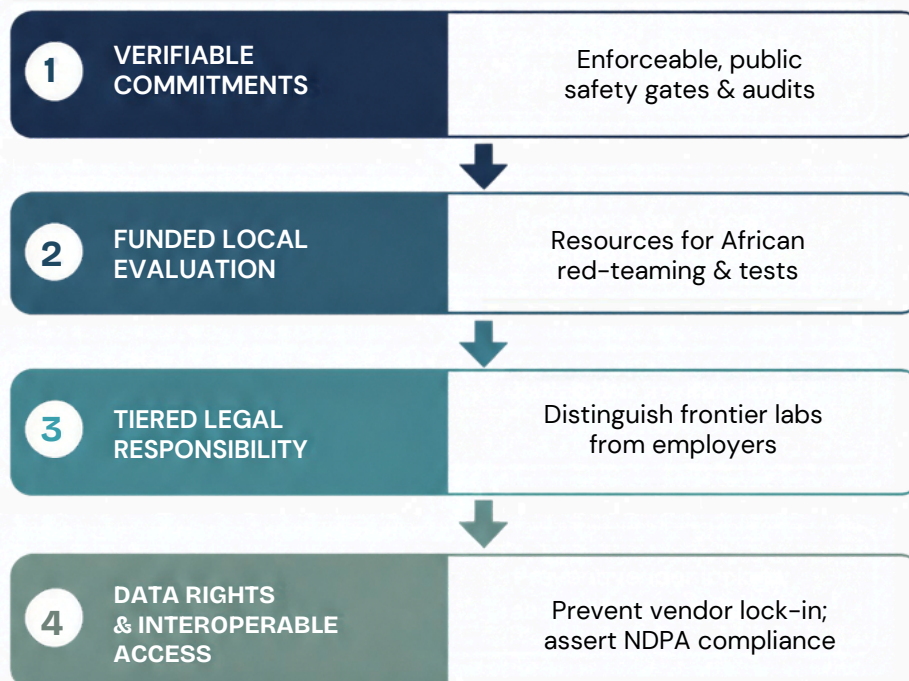
Commission (NDPC) possesses statutory authority over personal data processing. Non-profits handling vulnerable community records must ensure foreign AI deployments comply with domestic data transfer and consent provisions.

- **The African Union Continental AI Strategy:** Adopted to forge an integrated African position, the AU strategy warns against digital dependency, promotes regional data-sharing compacts, and stresses that international safety agreements must not serve as technical barriers to African industrialisation.

*Recommended Policy Priorities
for CSOs*

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Nigerian CSOs should adopt a balanced posture: support risk-based, independent safety checks while actively contesting monopolistic control, digital exclusion, and regulatory capture.



1. Demand Verifiable, Enforceable Commitments

Advocacy Targets: Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy (FMCIDE), International AI Safety Institutes (UK, US, EU).

- CSOs must insist that calls for pacing transition from corporate public relations to transparent, statutory benchmarks:
- Safety audits must be conducted by independent third parties rather than internal corporate teams, with evaluators granted legal protection from non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) to publish adverse findings.
- Compliance metrics must be open to public inspection, providing sufficient technical detail for outside researchers to verify safety claims without disclosing exploitable model weights or hazardous code.

2. Fund and Institutionalise African Red-Teaming and Research

Advocacy Targets: International Philanthropic Donors, Development Financial Institutions, NCAIR.

Safety testing conducted exclusively in San Francisco, London, or Brussels fails to capture systemic risks in emerging economies:

- Donors and labs must allocate dedicated technical and financial grants for Nigerian universities, research consortia, and CSOs to conduct sovereign red-teaming.
- Evaluation rubrics must specifically test model performance on Nigerian socio-political dynamics, ethnic diversity, local languages, and fraud vectors.
- Civil society coalitions must be directly included in international AI Safety Institute networks and consultative panels to represent public-interest priorities from the Global South.

3. Establish Tiered Liability and Proportional Compliance

Advocacy Targets: National Assembly of Nigeria, Nigerian Law Reform

Commission, Industry Regulators.

Oversight frameworks must establish clear distinctions between primary frontier model builders and downstream deployers:

- Frontier Model Developers must bear strict legal liability for structural design flaws, baseline model safety, and insufficient testing.
- Downstream Organisations (including CSOs) should face proportionate responsibilities based entirely on the specific application, context, and potential impact of the tool. A community non-profit using an AI tool to summarise an administrative meeting must not be subjected to the rigorous compliance burdens required of an agency deploying an automated biometric triage tool for humanitarian aid distribution.
- Automated systems used in consequential decisions (e.g., social welfare allocation, legal rights, community interventions) must guarantee human oversight where the reviewer possesses real institutional authority, time, and training to override model recommendations.

4. Safeguard Digital Rights, Sovereign Data, and Provider Interoperability

Advocacy Targets: Nigeria Data Protection Commission (NDPC), Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC).

- Pacing agreements must not become an excuse for Big Tech vendors to build anti-competitive cartels that lock out open-source development or trap African institutions in single-vendor software ecosystems.
- Procurement and funding agreements should explicitly mandate data portability, non-exclusive API arrangements, and ironclad assurances that institutional prompts and beneficiary interactions will not be absorbed into proprietary datasets for commercial model training.
- International vendors marketing services within Nigeria must be compelled to respect the NDPA (2023), including strict local consent mechanisms for sensitive beneficiary data.

5. Allocate Governance Funding Alongside Adoption Grants

Advocacy Targets: Philanthropic Funders, Bilateral Aid Agencies.

International donors frequently pressure African non-profits to adopt artificial intelligence in programmatic delivery without providing commensurate funding for risk management, digital infrastructure, or ethical oversight:

- Grantmakers ought to structure technology grants to ensure that budget allocations for digital tools include designated funding for privacy impact assessments, staff digital-literacy training, security audits, and continuous local-language testing.
- Project monitoring metrics should explicitly validate decisions to reject or discontinue AI tools when analogue methods, rule-based systems, or simple spreadsheets offer greater transparency, safety, and community trust.

An illustration of three professionals in a modern office setting at night. A man with glasses and a beard is seated on the left, writing on a document. A woman with braided hair is seated in the center, looking at a document. A woman wearing a colorful headwrap and patterned jacket is standing on the right, pointing at a laptop screen. The desk is cluttered with papers, a laptop, and a pen holder. A desk lamp provides warm light on the left. In the background, there are bookshelves, a potted plant, and a window showing a city skyline at night.

*Recommended Policy Priorities
for CSOs*

Operational Action Checklist for Non-Profits

Organisations should not wait for international consensus or domestic legislation to protect their operations and constituencies. Non-profits should implement five internal controls immediately:

1. **Conduct an Internal Usage Audit:** Compile an inventory of all AI applications currently utilised by staff, contractors, and volunteers. Distinguish between formally sanctioned enterprise tools and informal, personal accounts used on personal devices for official work.
2. **Restrict Transmission of Sensitive Data:** Enforce strict prohibitions against entering identifiable beneficiary information, case files, legal records, or internal whistleblowing reports into consumer-grade, unencrypted AI models whose terms of service permit training on user prompts.
3. **Mandate Human Oversight for Consequential Work:** Implement formal policies requiring experienced staff members to verify AI-generated outputs before they inform community interventions, legal submissions, donor reporting, or public statements.
4. **Demand Explicit Supplier Terms:** Require software vendors to provide written clarity regarding data retention schedules, zero-data-retention options, API deprecation notice periods, and independent security certifications.
5. **Engage in Collective Sector Bargaining:** Join civil society working groups to pool institutional knowledge, share anonymised incident reports, co-create standard open-source procurement templates, and reduce software onboarding costs across the sector.



Conclusion

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The mid-2026 statements by Dario Amodei, Sam Altman, and Elon Musk mark a critical pivot: the creators of frontier artificial intelligence publicly concede that unrestricted development poses serious, unmanaged hazards to global stability.

However, voluntary restraint from foreign corporate leaders will not protect Nigerian sovereignty, shield civic space from algorithmic harm, or guarantee affordable access for public-interest initiatives.

Nigerian civil society must intervene actively in this debate. By asserting existing data protection statutes, demanding verified technical commitments, and insisting on funded local evaluation, Nigerian non-profits can help ensure that the pacing of artificial intelligence serves democratic rights, social justice, and equitable development across the Global South.

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