

Kenya's AI Bill is a wake-up call for Uganda



PAUL KWIRINGIRA

Early this year, Kenya's Senate introduced the Artificial Intelligence Bill, 2026. This is a comprehensive framework for how AI should be developed, deployed, and governed. It is a landmark moment, not just for Kenya, but for East Africa. And Uganda should be paying close attention.

Our two countries not only share a border but a common market through the East African Community and a rising shared digital economy. When Kenya sets the rules for how AI operates within its territory, those rules will ripple across the region. For instance, Ugandan businesses operating in Kenya, Ugandan workers whose remittances pass through AI-powered financial platforms, banks and their operating systems powered by AI. We need to ask whether Uganda will be a passive recipient of those decisions or an active shaper of them.

WHAT KENYA IS DOING

Kenya's Bill establishes an Office of the AI Commissioner, introduces a risk classification system for AI applications, mandates transparency from AI providers, and creates regulatory sandboxes for innovation. High-risk AI systems such as those deployed in healthcare, education, finance, agriculture, and public administration face the heaviest obligations, including mandatory human rights impact assessments and five-year records of data use and outputs.

Crucially, the Bill also mandates AI literacy programmes at national and county level. Citizens are to be educated about what AI is, how it works, and what rights they hold when AI systems make decisions that affect their lives. This may be the most important clause in the entire document because governance without an informed citizenry is governance that floats above the people it is meant to serve.

UGANDA MUST MOVE FASTER

Uganda is not without its own AI ambitions. The National Information Technology Authority

(NITA-U) has been exploring AI policy discussions, and Uganda's National Development Plan III acknowledges the role of digital technology in economic transformation. But policy discussion is not policy. Ambition is not a framework. Kenya now has a Bill in the Senate. Uganda does not.

This is not a call to copy Kenya's Bill wholesale. Every country's AI governance framework must reflect its own economy, its own institutions, and its own priorities. Uganda's agricultural economy, its large rural population, and the particular pressures on its public health and education systems mean that our AI risks and opportunities are distinct. But the urgency is the same.

AI IS ALREADY HERE

This debate is not about the future. It is about today. Ugandans are already using AI-powered mobile money platforms. Farmers in the Albertine region are receiving AI-generated crop advice through agricultural apps. Medical diagnostic tools powered by algorithms are being piloted in rural health centres. School admissions processes at some institutions are beginning to incorporate data-driven scoring. In each of these cases, AI is making or influencing decisions that affect real people's lives and most of those people do not know it.

Who is accountable when an AI system gives a Ugandan farmer bad advice that destroys a season's harvest? Who does a patient turn to when an algorithm flags them incorrectly in a health screening? Right now, in Uganda, there are no clear answers. Kenya is beginning to build those answers. We need to start too.

LITERACY, NOT JUST LEGISLATION

Kenya's Bill is right to insist on AI literacy as a pillar of governance. Uganda must do the same and arguably must invest even more heavily in it. Our digital literacy levels remain uneven across urban and rural populations. The gap between a software developer in Kampala and a subsis-

tence farmer in Karamoja is not merely economic; it is informational. If AI is to serve Uganda's development goals rather than deepen existing inequalities, then the ordinary Ugandan must be able to understand and question the systems shaping their lives.

This means embedding AI literacy into our schools, our vocational training programmes, our community radio stations, and our local government structures. It means investing in translation, not just of language, but of concepts, so that AI governance is not the exclusive preserve of the educated elite in Nakasero and Kololo.

A REGIONAL MOMENT, IF WE CHOOSE TO SEIZE IT

The East African Community has an opportunity to develop a coherent, regionally-coordinated approach to AI governance, one that gives member states collective weight in shaping global AI standards, rather than each country navigating alone. Kenya is making the first move. Rwanda has been building its digital governance architecture for years. Tanzania and Uganda must not be left as rule-takers in a game being written by others.

Uganda's Parliament, Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, and NITA-U should treat Kenya's Bill as a catalyst. Study it seriously. Consult widely, not just with tech companies and lawyers, but with teachers, health workers, farmers, and the citizens whose lives AI is already touching. Then draft a framework that is authentically Ugandan in its priorities, while connected to the regional and global conversation.

The writer is an advocate and a legal associate at KTA Advocates