

Second IJCAI AI for Good Symposium in Africa

Co-Chairs

-Avishkar Bhoopchand, Staff Research Engineer at Google DeepMind; Deep Learning Indaba 2024 Executive Board Member.

-Girmaw Abebe Tadesse, Principal Research Scientist and Manager at Microsoft AI for Good Research Lab.

-Sibusisiwe Makhanya, Senior Research Manager, IBM Research Africa.

-Frank Dignum, Full Professor and Director of TAIGA at Umea University, Distinguished Chair in AI focusing on Agent based social simulation for policy making.

-Georgina Curto, Senior AI Researcher and Team Lead, United Nations University Institute in Macau.

Preface

The IJCAI AI for Good Symposia in Africa explore how Artificial Intelligence can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals through the unique lens of African AI research. These symposia are organized in close collaboration with local researchers and co-hosted alongside major regional conferences. The inaugural symposium took place in 2023 in Johannesburg, South Africa, in conjunction with the Southern African Conference for Artificial Intelligence Research (SACAIR). The second followed in 2024, co-hosted with the Deep Learning Indaba in Dakar, Senegal. Through these gatherings, the IJCAI AI for Good Symposia recognize the global leadership of African researchers in advancing problem-driven, context-aware, and responsible AI. They aim to foster stronger connections between African AI communities and the broader international ecosystem—including conferences, research institutions, and publication venues.

AI research across Africa, driven by a growing network of vibrant grassroots organizations, holds the potential to shape a new trajectory for the global AI research ecosystem. It contributes not only to advancing the fundamental state of the art in AI, but also to addressing pressing social and environmental challenges. This dual impact is rooted in the strong community-based engagement of African AI researchers, who often focus on areas such as Natural Language Processing (NLP), Small Language Models (SLMs), Computer Vision, Geospatial Machine Learning, and Agent-Based Modeling—fields that align closely with local needs and priorities.

While a significant gap remains between Africa's purpose-built, locally grounded AI research landscape and the broader international AI research ecosystem, these symposia aim to build meaningful bridges between them. By connecting Africa's unique, problem-driven AI agenda with key global stakeholders, the symposia foster mutual learning and collaboration. Equally important is the need for the global AI community to recognize and learn from Africa's context-aware, impact-focused research efforts. As the world seeks to ensure the equitable development and application of AI technologies, amplifying Africa's contributions is essential to shaping a more inclusive and responsible global AI future.

The Second IJCAI AI for Good IJCAI Symposium in Africa (2024) consisted of:

- A panel discussion, with the participation of the following speakers: Vukosi Marivate, ABSA UP Chair of Data Science at the University of Pretoria, Avishkar Bhoopchand, Staff Research Engineer at Google DeepMind, Serge Stinckwich, Head Of Research at United Nations University Institute in Macau, Sibusisiwe Makhanya, Senior Research Manager, IBM Research Africa, Girmaw Abebe Tadesse, Principal Research Scientist and Manager at Microsoft AI for Good Research Lab, Sekou Remy, Senior Research Scientist, Google, Frank Dignum, Full Professor and Director of TAIGA at Umea University, Distinguished Chair in AI focusing on Agent based social simulation for policy making, and Georgina Curto, Senior Researcher and Team Lead at the United Nations University Institute in Macau. The discussion facilitated cross collaborations across global institutions and resulted in internship opportunities for two African researchers at Umea University, Sweden and United Nations University Institute in Macau, China.
- The symposium featured dedicated presentation tracks where participants shared their work through oral and poster sessions. A total of 22 projects were presented, with 13 subsequently submitting full papers. Of these, 8 papers were accepted for publication as part of the inaugural track of the IJCAI AI for Good Symposia in Africa. Looking ahead, our goal is to strengthen and expand this track by encouraging a higher number of high-quality submissions and accepted papers in future editions.