Learning from the Global Majority: Redefining Global AI Governance Together

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VUB LSTS LAW, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & SOCIETY RESEARCH GROUP

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FARI AI FOR THE COMMON GOOD INSTITUTE BRUSSELS

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A. Introduction

The workshop **"Learning from the Global Majority – A New Global AI Governance**" took place on 14 July 2025 at FARI – AI for the Common Good Institute in Brussels, as part of the United Nations University's (UNU) 50th Anniversary celebrations. The initiative was led by the Law, Science, Technology and Society (LSTS) Research Group at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), in close partnership with FARI and UNU-CRIS, and co-organised with representatives from the UNU Global AI Network, UNU-eGov, Stellenbosch University, Humane-AI.Asia, Colnodo, and the Laboratory on Public Policy and Internet - LAPIN. The workshop convened leading voices from both the European Union and Global Majority countries to explore collaborative, future-oriented pathways for the responsible and inclusive development of artificial intelligence (AI).

Held in a vibrant setting in the heart of Brussels, the event focused on three interlinked priorities in global AI governance: capacity, safety, and sustainability. Through a combination of plenary sessions, institutional presentations, and interactive breakout discussions, participants engaged in critical reflection on whether current AI governance efforts enable genuine inclusion or risk reproducing existing global asymmetries. Featuring speakers from across Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia, the workshop served as a platform to exchange experiences, foster new partnerships, and strengthen Brussels' position as a hub for interdisciplinary research on international cooperation in AI governance.

B. Showcasing Perspectives: Voices from and for the Global Majority

Note: image created with assistance of AI tools (chatGPT and Canva)

The first part of the workshop, *Global Majority Perspectives*, set the stage by highlighting diverse regional experiences in shaping inclusive, rights-respecting, and sustainable AI governance. Bringing together experts from Latin America, Africa and Asia, the session offered a powerful overview of how communities across the Global Majority are addressing the promises and perils of AI. From ecosystem building and educational initiatives to rights-based safety strategies and sustainability efforts, the speakers shared concrete practices and policy innovations grounded in their local realities. This opening dialogue highlighted the importance of context-specific approaches and South-South cooperation in shaping a more equitable global AI landscape. This session concluded with an example of North–South collaboration through the EU-LAC AI and Supercomputing Network, which promotes bi-regional innovation based on shared infrastructure and inclusive digital development. In the following paragraphs, we share some highlights of the speakers presentations:

Building Foundations for Responsible AI in Vietnam

Minh Tran Vu Ha (Humane-AI.Asia)

Minh Tran presented the experience of Humane-AI.Asia, Vietnam's first consulting firm specializing in AI governance, ethics, and compliance. Her talk highlighted the economic and institutional challenges Vietnam faces in adopting responsible AI, including a significant skills gap, limited regulatory awareness, and a lack of standardized governance frameworks. Through collaboration with FPT Software - Vietnam's largest tech company - Minh's team implemented ISO/IEC 42001, the first international standard for AI Management Systems, as a means to introduce structured, transparent, and ethical practices. She highlighted that in developing countries, efforts should focus on pragmatic, context-sensitive governance strategies that build foundational capacity rather than aiming for ideal models detached from local realities.

The AI Divide: Who Benefits and Who's Left Behind?

Cong Yao (VUB-LSTS)

Cong Yao's presentation, focused on the structural digital divides that prevent equitable AI development across the globe. He introduced three layers of this divide - access, capability, and meaningful participation - and warned of the emerging "AI innovation paradox", in which AI development becomes increasingly centralized in a few countries. With only 10 nations holding 75% of AI patents, the risk is a "winner-takes-all" future. Cong proposed policy solutions rooted in open innovation, ethical safeguards, and cross-border cooperation, urging global policymakers to move from ethics to action to ensure that AI benefits are shared more equitably.

Empowering Aquaculture with Early Warning Systems in South-Eastern Africa

Sunday Oladejo (Stellenbosch University)

Dr. Sunday Oladejo presented his work on developing a temperature-based early warning alert system to support fish farmers in Zambia and Malawi. The project, running from 2022 to 2025, aims to equip small-scale aquaculture communities with real-time environmental data to anticipate temperature-related risks. Dr. Oladejo emphasized the importance of contextual technological solutions tailored to local conditions, particularly in areas vulnerable to climate variability. By integrating data science with on-the-ground needs, the project strengthens food security, supports sustainable aquaculture, and exemplifies how AI-adjacent technologies can be applied to improve rural livelihoods in Africa.

AI for Policy Innovation: Building Institutional Readiness

James Haw (Stellenbosch University)

James Haw introduced the Policy Innovation Lab, housed within the School for Data Science and Computational Thinking at Stellenbosch University, which focuses on applying AI and data science tools to transform public sector policymaking. The Lab's core mission is to accelerate progress toward the SDGs by enhancing institutional readiness, developing human capacities, and prototyping policy-relevant tools such as AI-powered policy briefs, citizen data platforms, and summarization systems. Highlighting multi-country projects across South Africa, India, Brazil, and Kenya, Haw emphasized the need for inclusive, responsible AI adoption in governance and the strategic role of interdisciplinary collaboration in shaping future-ready policy ecosystems.

From Smart Cities to Fair Cities: Local Lessons in the Global South for Global AI Governance

Soumaya Ben Dhaou (UNU-eGov)

Dr. Soumaya Ben Dhaou presented insights from the FAIR Cities initiative, which focuses on fostering inclusive, responsible, and sustainable AI implementation at the urban level, particularly in the Global South. She shared findings from a global assessment that revealed major capacity and governance gaps in city-level AI deployments. The FAIR Cities framework emphasizes co-creation with citizens, local governments, and stakeholders, and promotes people-centered governance to align AI use with human rights and the SDGs. Soumaya argued that local experimentation and inclusive urban innovation can offer critical lessons for shaping more adaptable and accountable global AI governance frameworks.

From Digital Divide to AI Capacity: Grounding Governance in Inclusion

Julián Casasbuenas (Colnodo)

Julián Casasbuenas, from Colnodo, discussed how inclusive digital foundations are essential for equitable AI governance, especially in the Global Majority. Drawing from Latin American experiences, he underscored the barriers posed by digital illiteracy and infrastructural gaps, advocating for community-centered models that localize AI literacy in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. Julián highlighted grassroots initiatives - from community-managed networks to AI literacy frameworks co-created with civil society - and stressed the role of regional forums like the Latin-American and Caribbeans Internet Governance Forum – LACIGF, in shaping people-centered digital policy. His call to action urged international cooperation that prioritizes responsible AI capacity-building and elevates the voices of underrepresented communities in global governance dialogues.

Indigenous Digital Sovereignty in Brazil

José Renato (LAPIN; University of Bonn)

José Renato's presentation explored how Brazilian digital policies intersect with the rights and demands of Indigenous Peoples, particularly in the Amazon region. While Internet access has existed in Indigenous territories since 2003, structural limitations have persisted - especially regarding connectivity in remote areas. The recent adoption of Starlink has catalyzed a rapid digital transformation, enabling communities to access healthcare, education, and state services, as well as monitor territorial invasions. However, this shift has also raised concerns over cultural erosion, environmental impacts, and increased dependence on a single provider. Brazil's current digital strategies lack meaningful consultation and participation of Indigenous Peoples, often prioritizing infrastructure expansion over community-driven needs. José called for inclusive policymaking that centers Indigenous voices and addresses the specific socio-environmental risks of digital inclusion.

From Digital Infrastructure to Bi-Regional Innovation: Building a Transatlantic High Performance Computing (HPC)

Claudia Pablos Lorenzo (European Commission, Directorate-General of International Partnerships)

As a leading example of international cooperation in the AI context, Claudia Pablos Lorenzo from the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) presented the EU-LAC AI and Supercomputing Network initiative, which aims to strengthen bi-regional collaboration between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Developed within the framework of the EU-LAC Digital Alliance, the initiative leverages shared infrastructure - such as the BELLA programme - to address pressing societal challenges including climate change, public health, and clean energy transitions through advanced computing and artificial intelligence. Drawing on a legacy of joint efforts like RISC2, ENERXICO, and EU-LAC ResInfra, the initiative envisions a federated network of HPC resources, enabling collaborative research, training programs, policy dialogue, and mobility schemes that empower researchers and institutions across both regions. Claudia emphasized the importance of building a human-centric, inclusive digital ecosystem by promoting gender balance and the participation of underrepresented groups in HPC and AI fields. Use cases such as the development of Large Language Models in local and indigenous languages, climate modeling, and drug discovery illustrate the initiative's potential to foster innovation based in regional needs while contributing to global scientific advancement.

C. Bridging Perspectives: Interactive Roundtable Dialogues

Note: image created with assistance of AI tools (chatGPT and Canva)

In the second part of the workshop, dynamic breakout sessions allowed to expand the discussion on the topics presented in the previous session. These interactive roundtable dialogues created space for speakers and participants to engage in open, focused conversations, promoting co-creation of ideas and cross-regional exchange. These paralell sessions were split into two thematic groups, with the goal to surface grounded insights, identify pressing challenges, and propose avenues for international collaboration in AI governance and development.

Rethinking Digital Sovereignty: Building AI Capacity with Inclusion

The first group engaged in a critical discussion on what it truly means to build inclusive AI ecosystems, emphasizing the need to rethink digital development beyond connectivity and technical access. Participants highlighted the global imbalance of power, where a handful of corporations and countries dominate digital infrastructure and innovation, often imposing technologies and values without community input. This sparked a debate around the meaning and viability of *digital sovereignty*, with participants exploring not only national control over data and infrastructure, but also more decentralized and community-led alternatives. The idea of *popular digital sovereignty* emerged as a promising approach - one that enables communities themselves to shape and govern the technologies that impact their lives. Decentralized alternatives, such as those promoted by grassroot movements were brought as prominent examples.

This group also discussed foundational aspects of *digital inclusion* and *capacity building*, noting that current regulatory approaches often assume universal connectivity and digital literacy - an assumption that does not reflect reality. True inclusion must start with addressing gaps in access and skills, while also acknowledging that people have the right to opt out of digital life without being excluded from essential services. Participants argued that *digital literacy* should be treated not only as a technical skillset but as a civic right, supported

by education and training policies that empower individuals to engage with technology on their own terms. Inclusion, they concluded, must be rooted in dignity, agency, and respect for diverse ways of participating—or not participating—in digital society.

Addressing Complexity: Building Interoperable and Inclusive AI Governance

The second group focused on the evolving landscape of AI safety and governance, highlighting both the promise and complexity of designing frameworks that balance innovation with human rights and accountability. Participants acknowledged the increasing fragmentation of AI regulation across jurisdictions, with national, regional, and international bodies developing their own frameworks which risk not being compatible between each other. Therefore, there was broad agreement on the urgent need for *regulatory interoperability*, not only across governance models, but also through clearer definitions and alignment of key concepts such as "AI ethics", "AI safety", "trustworthy AI" and "responsible AI", which are often used inconsistently. Participants argued that without a shared vocabulary and clearer distinctions between these concepts, coordination and implementation will remain a challenge. There was also consensus on the need to move from voluntary ethical frameworks towards enforceable, human rights-based approaches, particularly as AI systems increasingly affect fundamental aspects of people's lives.

The group further explored how lessons from Internet governance might contribute to emerging AI governance frameworks, despite the differences in their technological foundations and affordances. While AI governance typically follows a more top-down regulatory trajectory, there was agreement that adopting multi-stakeholder and community-driven approaches - central to internet governance - could add significant value to AI governance. The role of civil society was repeatedly emphasized, particularly in addressing gaps in implementation and ensuring that AI governance includes those most often left behind. Practical challenges, including black-box models, unclear regulatory boundaries, and digital literacy, were identified as barriers to effective governance. Finally, the discussion emphasized that frameworks should prioritize the responsible development and use of AI, grounded in inclusive processes, context-sensitive regulation, and shared principles - especially as AI capabilities advance in an increasing speed.

D. A Turning Point for Global AI Governance: Learning from and with the Majority of the World

The workshop closed with a strong call for inclusive international cooperation in AI governance - emphasizing that the Global Majority must not only be seen through the lens of vulnerability but also as relevant stakeholders to propose local, regional and global solutions to the challenges that AI brings upon us. As illustrated by the speakers cases, across the Global South, innovative, context-specific uses of AI are already helping address climate change, healthcare, agriculture, and education.

In a powerful closing keynote, Dr. Paula Hidalgo-Sanchis of the UNU Global AI Network highlighted the urgent need to confront global inequality in the context of the accelerating evolution of AI systems. She shared some alarming estimatives: by 2030, 600 million people may be living in extreme poverty (earning less than $2.50 a day), while the wealth of ultra-rich families is expected to double (up to $9.5 trillion). She warned that AI could exacerbate these disparities through deepening data inequality, digital exclusion, and the unchecked spread of misinformation. Meanwhile, over 650 million people are already engaging with AI companions - systems designed to simulate human interaction and provide emotional support - often without sufficient awareness of the potential risks to mental health or the implications of such intimate personal data exchanges.

Dr. Hidalgo-Sanchis stressed that no single stakeholder can govern AI effectively in isolation. By themselves, the private sector often lacks accountability, academia risks becoming detached from real-world impact, governments face persistent infrastructure gaps, and civil society struggles to stay abreast of rapid developments. Addressing these challenges requires governance that is truly collaborative, transparent, and inclusive - placing actors from the Global Majority at the center of decision-making. A just and sustainable AI future, she concluded, must be grounded in shared responsibility and global solidarity, not in narrow visions of technological progress.

ANNEX
GUEST SPEAKERS AND CO-HOSTS

One of the main goals of this conference was to gather experts from different regions of the globe to share their experiences with one another and with representatives of European institutions. Following is the list of guest speakers and co-hosts of this workshop.

1. Guest Speakers

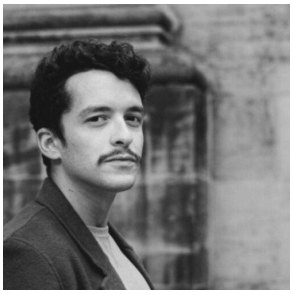
Minh Tran Vu Ha – *Humane.AI-Asia*

Minh Tran is the Founder & CEO of Humane-AI Asia, a pioneering firm in Vietnam specializing in responsible and ethical AI. She has advised major clients such as FPT Software, one of the largest technology companies in Southeast Asia, on implementing responsible AI practices through the ISO 42001 AI Management System. Previously a policy and international development consultant at Deloitte Japan, she is currently developing practical frameworks for responsible AI adoption tailored to small and medium enterprises in developing countries, grounded in real-world cases and applied research. Having lived, studied, and worked in Japan for 15 years, Minh holds degrees in Law and Business Administration from Hitotsubashi University, a Master's in Accounting and Auditing from Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo, and is currently a lawyer trainee in Vietnam.

Soumaya Ben Dhaou – *UNU eGov*

Soumaya Ben Dhaou is a Research Specialist at the United Nations University Operating Unit on Policy-Driven Electronic Governance (UNU-EGOV), where she leads the research line on digital transformation, innovation, and emerging technologies. Her work focuses on the impact of technologies such as AI, blockchain, IoT, and data analytics on digital governance, smart cities, and public services, with a strong emphasis on sustainable and inclusive development. Soumaya coordinates global research initiatives, including a major survey on the responsible use of AI in cities with UN-HABITAT and IDRC. She also leads collaboration with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), notably through U4SSC working groups. In addition to advising governments and institutions worldwide, she is an invited professor at the University of Minho and a visiting professor at South Mediterranean University. Soumaya holds dual PhDs in Information Systems and Digital Governance from institutions in Canada and France, reflecting her deep academic and practical expertise.

José Renato de Laranjeira Pereira – *LAPIN / University of Bonn*



José Renato Laranjeira de Pereira is a co-founder of the Brazilian think tank Laboratory of Public Policy and Internet – LAPIN and a PhD Researcher at the University of Bonn's Sustainable AI Lab. He investigates the environmental sustainability of artificial intelligence and its impacts in Indigenous communities in Brazil. José Renato has also been a UNESCO consultant for the 2024 Brazilian Presidency of the G20 within the Digital Economy Working Group, with a focus on information integrity and AI. In 2021, he was awarded the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung's German Chancellor Fellowship to research the AI Act's provisions on transparency and sustainability as a Visiting Researcher at the European Parliament. José Renato is a Full Member of the Brazilian Federal Administration's Central Committee on Data Governance and a former member of the multistakeholder groups that reviewed the Brazilian AI Strategy.

Julián Casasbuenas - *Conoldo*

Julián Casasbuenas G. is the Director of Colnodo, a Colombian non-profit and member of the APC network, with over 25 years of experience in environmental and ICT fields. A chemical engineer by training, Julián leads Colnodo's efforts to promote inclusive digital development through strategic programmes in e-government, e-democracy, ICT policy, and digital citizenship. Under his leadership, Colnodo integrates cross-cutting priorities such as free and open-source software, gender equity, and sustainable development. Julián is a member of the APC Council and Executive Board and previously served as its chair. He was also a member of the IGF Multistakeholder Advisory Group (2016–2018) and remains active in Colombia's IGF initiative. His extensive engagement includes participation in global forums such as IGF, ISOC conferences, LACIGF, ICANN, and RightsCon. Julián also leads advocacy efforts for community networks in Colombia, working with civil society and government to support digital inclusion in underserved communities.

Sunday Oladejo – *Stellenbosch University*

Dr. Sunday O. Oladejo is currently a lecturer at the School for Data Science and Computational Thinking, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa, where he also serves as the Chair of the Standard Bank Lab for Recommender Systems. He was a postdoctoral research fellow at the same School from 2021 to 2022. He obtained a B.Eng in Electrical and Electronic Engineering from the Federal University of Technology Akure, Nigeria; an M.Eng in Communication Engineering from the Federal University of Technology, Minna, Nigeria; an MBA in Strategic and Project Management from the École Supérieure de Gestion, Paris, France; and a Ph.D. in Electrical and Electronic Engineering from the University of Cape Town, South Africa. From 2007 to 2017, he worked as a Senior Core Network Engineer with Glo-Mobile, Nigeria. His research interests include artificial intelligence, metaheuristics, machine learning, optimization, computational thinking, data science, and analytics.

Cong Yao – *VUB LSTS*

Cong Yao is a doctoral researcher at the Law, Science, Technology and Society (LSTS) research group and a member of the Health and Aging Law Lab (HALL) at Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Paul Quinn, he began his PhD in October 2022. His research focuses on the legal and ethical implications of extended reality (XR) technologies in contexts such as rehabilitation, workplace safety, and communication for individuals with speech impairments, as part of the EU-funded SUN project. He is also involved in the ARC II project, supporting GDPR awareness and compliance among SMEs. Cong holds an LL.M. in Law and Digital Technologies from Leiden University, where he explored intermediary liability and counterterrorism online. He also earned a Juris Master's degree in China, focusing on biometric data protection and comparative data privacy law. His research interests include health data, sensitive data, human rights, and emerging digital technologies.

Claudia Pablo Lorenzo – *European Commission (DG INTPA)*

Claudia Pablo Lorenzo is a digital consultant at the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), working within Directorate B, which focuses on Latin America, the Caribbean, and relations with all Overseas Countries and Territories. She contributes to advancing digital cooperation and inclusive development in the region. Claudia holds a Postgraduate Master's in European Law from the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) and a double degree in Economics and International Relations from Universidad Rey Juan Carlos. Her academic background and professional experience reflect a strong commitment to international collaboration, digital transformation, and EU external action, particularly in strengthening ties between Europe and partner countries in the Global South.

Paula Hidalgo-Sanchis – *UNU Global AI Network*

Dr. Paula Hidalgo-Sanchis has worked over 20 years in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, enabling the adoption of innovations and the development of governance frameworks to achieve sustainable development. Over the past nine years, Dr. Hidalgo Sanchis has supported adoption of AI technologies in the Global South's by managing the development of cutting-edge prototypes, supporting the formulation of governance frameworks, and facilitating strategic partnerships. She holds a PhD in human geography and is a strong advocate for the responsible adoption of AI for all. She currently serves as the coordinator of the United Nations (UN) AI Network, and she recently expanded her horizons, authoring the novel 'Teaching Machines How To Cry.'

James Haw – *Stellenbosch University*

James Haw is a digital transformation and regulatory analyst at the Policy Innovation Lab in Stellenbosch University, South Africa. His current work involves advising the South African Presidency on how AI can support more effective policy development and coordination. In his personal research, James explores how South African labour law may need to evolve to address the challenges posed by AI technologies.

2. Co-Hosts

Gloria González Fuster – *VUB-LSTS*

Prof. Dr. Gloria González Fuster is a Research Professor at the Faculty of Law and Criminology of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and Director of the Law, Science, Technology and Society (LSTS) Research Group. She holds a BOF research position on 'Digitalisation & a Europe of Rights and Freedoms' and teaches privacy and data protection law at VUB and the University of Göttingen. Her research focuses on data protection, fundamental rights, and digitalisation, and she currently contributes to several EU and national projects, including ALTEP-DP, ACT, and LEADS. Dr. Fuster serves on the Steering Committees of the Data Protection Law Scholars Network (DPSN) and Cyber & Data Security Lab (CD), and is affiliated with RHEA, BCUS, and the Brussels Privacy Hub. She is also an editor for leading academic journals and part of the European Commission's Multistakeholder Expert Group on the GDPR. Her background spans law, journalism, and modern languages.

Luk Van Langenhove – *UNU-CRIS*

Prof. Dr. Luk Van Langenhove is Professor Emeritus at VUB and Honorary Professorial Fellow at Warwick University. Trained as a psychologist, he began his career at VUB and later served as Chef de Cabinet and (Deputy) Secretary-General of Belgium's Ministry of Science Policy. He founded UNU-CRIS after launching the Bruges Initiative for Opening the Social Sciences. Returning to VUB in 2017, he directed the Institute for European Studies and played a key role in shaping the EUTOPIA university alliance. A prolific scholar with over 18,000 Google Scholar citations, his work spans diverse areas of the social sciences. He co-authored foundational papers on Positioning Theory with Rom Harré and has published widely, including *Innovating the Social Sciences* (2011) and *The Legacy of 1947* (2024). He remains active in science diplomacy and was a lead author of the 2025 report *Towards a EU Strategy Framework for Science Diplomacy*.

Martin Canter – *FARI*

Martin Canter is the Head of the Smart Region Hub at FARI, the AI for the Common Good Institute. He holds a PhD in Sciences from the University of Liège, and worked previously in AI consultancy as an ML engineer. He currently facilitates the implementation of AI use-cases by grouping the academic knowledge from the ULB and the VUB and the available data resources and use-cases from the public sector in the Brussels Capital Region and larger. Specifically, he focuses on AI Regulatory Sandboxing and is involved in various initiatives on the local, regional, national and EU levels. He is also engaged in Digital Twins initiatives, and specifically Smart City applications, and building a dataspace for any stakeholder in the Brussels Capital Region.

Thiago Moraes – *VUB LSTS / UNU-CRIS*

Thiago Moraes is a Brazilian PhD Fellow at UNU-CRIS and Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), where he researches how "by design" approaches—such as privacy, ethics, and legal protection by design—can support responsible innovation and protect fundamental rights in AI regulatory sandboxes (AIRS). Pursuing a joint PhD in Law through a partnership between the University of Brasília (UnB) and VUB, his work is supervised by Prof. Dr. Gloria González Fuster and Prof. Dr. Alexandre Kehrig Veronese. He also works as a Specialist in Data Protection and AI Governance at Brazil's Data Protection Authority (ANPD), where he previously served as Coordinator of Innovation and Research and as its first Data Protection Officer. He is a co-founder of LAPIN, a civil society organization focused on digital policy and has actively participated in global and national Internet Governance Forums since 2018. His research promotes inclusive, multistakeholder methods for designing rights-based, innovation-enabling AI regulatory sandboxes.