Centre of African Excellence for Applied and Responsible Artificial Intelligence (Kenya)

Background, Relevance and Thematic Focus

1. Background and Relevance

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a key technology with significant transformative potential for the economy, science, and society. It can make an important contribution to addressing societal challenges, for example through more efficient use of resources, the promotion of technological and social innovation, and the improvement of public services. At the same time, the responsible use of AI places high demands on legal compliance, transparent and secure data governance, and the definition and adherence to ethical standards.

To ensure that AI serves the common good and is used responsibly, practical, human-centred and context-sensitive applications are required. Equally crucial are the education and training of qualified professionals and experts, as well as the development and expansion of teaching and research capacities. This particularly includes strengthening interdisciplinary competences at the interface between computer science and relevant application domains, supporting early-career researchers, and establishing sustainable research and teaching infrastructures for applied AI.

Kenya has established itself as a pan-African innovation hub for digitalisation and AI, characterised by a vibrant start-up ecosystem, strong application expertise, and clear political prioritisation. With the adoption of the Kenya AI Strategy 2025–2030 in March 2025, the Kenyan government aims to further strengthen the country's regional role and visibility as a hub for AI research, model development, and scalable innovation. The strategy positions AI as a driver of inclusive socio-economic development. Its operational implementation includes the targeted expansion of scientific capacities at universities and research institutions and the training of qualified AI talent to meet the growing demands of the AI ecosystem. This dynamic development environment not only offers substantial innovation potential for Kenya itself but also provides attractive opportunities for international academic and innovation partnerships.

Against this background, the funding initiative of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), financed jointly by the German Federal Foreign Office (AA) and the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR), supports the establishment of a Centre of African Excellence for Applied and Responsible Artificial Intelligence in Kenya. The initiative connects the scientific and technological expertise of German higher education institutions with innovation ecosystems and application contexts in Kenya and contributes to sustainably strengthening German-Kenyan academic cooperation in applied AI.

The cooperation project aims to support the development of academic programmes as well as practice-oriented AI solutions with market and scaling potential, while improving access to qualified talent. In addition, it facilitates strategic innovation partnerships and access to regional markets, thereby generating added value for participating German and Kenyan stakeholders.

2. Political and Strategic Context

The funding initiative is embedded within:

- the High-Tech Agenda Germany (2025)
- the BMFTR Artificial Intelligence Action Plan (2023)
- the African Union Continental AI Strategy (2024)

- the Kenya AI Strategy 2025–2030 (2025)
- the German Federal Government Policy Guidelines for Africa (2025)
- the coalition agreement of the German Federal Government for the 21st legislative period concerning internationalisation and cooperation with Africa

The initiative focuses on contributing to the above-mentioned (sectoral) strategies in Germany and Kenya by promoting deeper partnership-based cooperation, systematic capacity development, and enhanced international visibility of participating partners in the field of applied and responsible AI.

Synergies arise from the migration agreement signed between Germany and Kenya in September 2024, which highlights opportunities for trusted cooperation in labour markets, education and training, and skilled migration. The initiative follows a triple-win approach, benefiting migrating professionals (individuals), the country of origin (Kenya), and the receiving country (Germany) alike.

3. Thematic Focus

Within the Centre for Applied and Responsible AI, teaching and research capacities as well as practice-oriented and public-interest-driven AI solutions are to be developed or further expanded in order to generate tangible societal benefits.

In line with the OECD AI Principles (including the 2024 update), common good-oriented AI refers to an approach whereby AI is developed, deployed and governed in ways that promote inclusive growth, sustainable development and societal well-being. Innovation processes are deliberately aligned with addressing societal challenges. Human-centredness, transparency, fairness and the protection of fundamental rights – consistent with the provisions of the EU AI Act – serve as qualitative guiding principles to ensure trust, acceptance and the long-term effectiveness of AI-based innovations.

This orientation also corresponds to the objectives of the Kenya AI Strategy 2025–2030, which positions AI as an instrument for inclusive development, strengthened public services, and the management of societal challenges, while systematically integrating ethical and governance considerations.

Against this background, German-Kenyan cooperation aims to promote the responsible, context-sensitive and participatory development of AI applications, strengthen local capacities, and enhance the exchange of knowledge, technologies and best practices. In doing so, it combines technological innovation, societal benefit and sustainable impact. Given the global dynamics in the field of AI, a long-term thematic orientation extending beyond the funding period of the Centre will ensure the establishment of a sustainable cooperation structure.

The Centre shall cover the following two components:

a) Development and further enhancement of teaching and research programmes in computer science or AI departments to build multidisciplinary competences related to responsible AI development, AI application and technology assessment, for example in the following areas:
    - Data Science
    - Responsible AI, ethics and governance
    - Fairness, bias mitigation and transparency
    - Sustainability aspects in the use of AI (Green AI)
    - Co-creation of locally relevant datasets and open-source tools supporting inclusive and sustainable AI ecosystems
    - Community- and needs-driven AI innovation

b) Integration of applied AI into selected study and research fields, preferably focusing on one or more of the following thematic clusters

- AI for Environment, Climate Resilience, and Natural Resource Management
  Examples of possible application areas:
  - Disaster early warning and response
  - Biodiversity and ecosystem monitoring
  - AI-driven climate and weather modelling
  - Climate resilience and climate adaptation
  - Water resource management
  - Urban resilience and smart cities
- AI for One Health, Public Health and Biomedical Innovation
  Examples of possible application areas:
  - Epidemiology, Public Health surveillance and early warning
  - Medical imaging, enhanced diagnostics and clinical decision support
  - Digital health assistants and chatbots
  - Telemedicine and remote monitoring
- AI for Higher Education, Research and Skills Development
  Examples of possible application areas:
  - Personalized and inclusive teaching and learning, including adaptive learning platforms, intelligent tutoring systems and learning analytics
  - AI literacy, pedagogy and assessment
  - Smart research data management and AI-powered research analytics
  - AI-enabled translation and localisation of learning content