

EXPERTS WEIGH IN ON THE ROLE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN REBUILDING AFRICAN ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

By: Hussein Mukisa

The 3-day Electoral Integrity Africa Summit (10-12, September 2024), held in Kampala, Uganda under the theme "Strengthening Electoral Transparency, Public Oversight, and Collaborative Reforms," brought together expert participants to share their visions regarding their contributions as citizen election observers in restoring electoral integrity across the continent.

One of the key sessions, featuring technocrats such as Christopher Okidi, Mbaye Dione and Silver Kayondo explored the critical role Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays in ensuring the integrity of African elections.

Silver Kayondo, a founding partner of Ortus advocates conceded the importance of ensuring that elections are not only free, fair, transparent but also verifiable.

"We must account for every result with AI's help. In some countries, more people vote than are registered. Digital fraud is a challenge, but the upside is the rise in data protection laws," he emphasized.

Mbaye Dione, a computer engineer at AfricTivistes, shared his experience during the Sunu Elections 2024, where he discovered 800 fake voting stations impacting 10% of voters.

"With AI, we cleaned and verified data to remove erroneous locations, improving the reliability of electoral rolls and voter registration," he said.

While some speakers agreed that AI can be a game-changer in democracy, other summit participants urged that it is crucial to establish solid democratic principles and regulate its use in elections.

"Automation alone won't fix underlying issues and adds complexity. AI adoption requires digitizing public systems to cross-check databases and verify voter registers," Martin Etoru from One Young Africa noted.

Christopher Okidi, executive director of Kampala Analytica, emphasized that AI is only as good as the human input it receives. He stressed that AI's effectiveness relies heavily on human integrity, highlighting the crucial role of responsible and ethical human involvement in ensuring the success and reliability of AI systems.

Samson Itodo from Yiaga Africa emphasized that Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) should create guidelines on AI usage, and election observers should update their metrics to monitor AI's appropriate use

Despite the challenges, Chris Okidi still stands firm about AI's potential in enhancing electoral integrity

"AI can be a game-changer in democracy. We are now bringing a Digital Public Square that cannot be affected by teargas!" Okidi said before adding that *"Technology is an important part of development and civilization. We are not just talking AI but civilization".*

The discussion underscored the importance of leveraging AI to strengthen electoral integrity in Africa. By addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by AI, African nations can ensure free, fair, and transparent elections.