

DataScientia Symposium 2026

Theme: Diversity-Aware Sovereign AI

22nd - 24th July 2026

Programme Details
Tentative/Final

© 2026 DataScientia – All rights reserved



Table of Contents

Overview	3
• Day 1 (22 July) – Diversity-aware AI	3
• Day 2 (23 July) – Diversity-aware sovereign AI for Africa (Policy & Regional Perspective)	3
• Day 3 (24 July) – The DataScientia Initiative (Collaboration & Action)	3
• Day 4 (25 July) – Social Program	3
Programme Outline	5
July 22nd - (Open to Public)	5
Opening Ceremony	5
- Day 1 -	
Workshop on Diversity-aware AI	5
July 23rd (morning) - (Open to Public)	7
Day 2 – Morning	
Workshop on “Diversity-aware Sovereign AI for Africa”	7
July 23rd (Afternoon) - (Open to Public)	8
Day 2 – Afternoon	
Parallel Sessions	8
July 24th - (Invitations Only)	10
The “DataScientia Initiative” workshop	10
*Panel Discussion - DataScientia: towards Diversity-aware Sovereign AI	11
Appendix A	12



Overview

The **DataScientia Symposium 2026**, to be hosted in South Africa at Durban University of Technology (DUT), will take place **from 22 to 24 July 2026**, followed by a dedicated day of social and networking activities on 25 July. The event marks a significant step in advancing a global dialogue on **Diversity-aware Sovereign AI**; an approach to artificial intelligence that respects cultural diversity, local knowledge, and data autonomy across regions and communities.

Bringing together leading researchers, policymakers, industry experts, and international organizations, the meeting is designed as a **multi-day collaborative platform** combining scientific exchange, policy dialogue, and strategic co-creation. Participants will engage in a dynamic program of talks, workshops, and discussions aimed at shaping the future of inclusive and culturally aware AI systems.

The event will open with an **Opening Ceremony at DUT**, setting the stage for three thematic workshops:

- **Day 1 (22 July) – Diversity-aware AI**

The goal of this workshop is to provide a high level overview, via survey talks, and case studies, of the **state of the art in Diversity-aware AI**, problems and solutions, across the main diverse application domains and case studies across diverse cultures and languages. Talks will present cutting-edge research and interdisciplinary approaches to building AI systems.

- **Day 2 (23 July) – Diversity-aware sovereign AI for Africa (Policy & Regional Perspective)**

Building on the scientific foundations of the first workshop, this workshop will shift toward **policy, governance, and regional implementation**, with a particular focus on South Africa and the broader African landscape. Speakers will include representatives from governments, academia, and international bodies, offering insights into current initiatives and strategic priorities. The session will conclude with a multi-stakeholder panel discussion addressing pathways toward African leadership in Diversity-aware sovereign AI.

- **Day 3 (24 July) – The DataScientia Initiative (Collaboration & Action)**

The final day is dedicated to the DataScientia Initiative, focusing on its core pillars: **community building towards shared information, education, research, innovation and**. The participants will actively contribute to shaping ongoing and future activities, fostering partnerships, and defining concrete actions for collaboration at both regional and global levels. The session will conclude with a panel Q/A section where the participants will discuss difficulties, open problems, and concrete ways of how to proceed.

- **Day 4 (25 July) – Social Program**

The meeting will conclude on **25 July** with a **social program**, offering participants the opportunity to experience the richness of beautiful South Africa while strengthening informal connections and fostering long-term international collaboration.





A Manifesto for Diversity-aware Sovereign AI for Africa

A central outcome of the event will be the co-creation of a Manifesto on diversity-aware sovereign AI, developed through structured contributions from leading researchers, senior policymakers, institutional representatives, and international partners. The manifesto will be conceived not as a declarative statement, but as an **evidence-informed and action-oriented framework**, grounded in the discussions and outputs of the meeting.

Its development will draw on the three core pillars of the program: the **scientific evidence presented during Day 1**, capturing the state of the art and key research challenges; the **policy and governance perspectives of Day 2**, reflecting regulatory approaches, public sector priorities, and international cooperation efforts, including contributions from institutions such as the European Commission and African governmental bodies; and the **implementation-oriented work of Day 3**, translating these insights into operational priorities across capacity building, data governance, education, and innovation.

To ensure continuity and impact beyond the event, the manifesto will be accompanied by **concrete follow-up mechanisms**, including the establishment of thematic working groups, the identification of pilot initiatives and joint projects, and its integration into the ongoing activities of the DataScientia Initiative across research, education, and innovation. In this sense, the meeting is designed not only as a forum for exchange, but as a **mechanism for coordination and alignment**, inviting participants to actively contribute to shaping both the conceptual foundations and the practical trajectory of Sovereign AI in Africa and globally.





Programme Outline

Note that all talk titles are tentative and must be confirmed by the respective presenter.

✓ denotes confirmation from the speaker; including talk title and abstract

July 22nd - (Open to Public)

Opening Ceremony			
T1	08:00	Registration for the Event	1 hour
T2	09:00	Opening Ceremony	45 min
T3	09:45	Introduction to the Workshop Theme <i>By Fausto Giunchiglia</i>	15 min

- Day 1 - Workshop on Diversity-aware AI					
Morning Session AI for X Session Chair: Prof Sunday Ojo					
T4	10:00	Capturing patient diversity across molecular and clinical phenotypes with foundation models <i>[Ai for Health]</i>	Valentina Giunchiglia	25+5	Imperial College London, Harvard University
T5	10:30	Accelerating scientific discovery with agentic AI <i>[Ai for science]</i>	Owen Queen	25+5	Dept. of Computer Science, Stanford University
T6	11:00	Tentative Title: ? <i>[AI for Society]</i>	Hao Xu	25+5	Jilin University
T7	11:30	Diversity-aware AI	Davide Cavicchini	25+5	University of Trento
	12:00	Lunch Break		1 hour	ALL



	13:00	DUT Lab Facilities Tour		1 hour 30 min	ALL
Evening Session Diversity-aware AI (a) <i>Session Chair: Hao Xu</i>					
T8	14:30	Language Diversity, Dialectical Pluralism and Grassroot Digital Technologies	Professor Aimé Sègla	25+5	University of Abomey-Calavi
T9	15:00	Language diversity – a linguistic point of view	Prof Paul Oye Taiwo	25+5	University of Ibadan
T10	15:30	AI design and knowledge diversity – potentials, conundrums and research questions	Gertraud Koch	25+5	University of Hamburg
T11	16:00	Co-Designing for Pluriversal AI	Rachel Charlotte Smith	25+5	Aarhus University
T12	16:30	Community-Centred Priorities for Artificial Intelligence in Africa	Rachel Oluwatuyi/A lvin Castro	25+5	University of Cape Town
	17:00	Coffee Break		20 min	ALL
Evening Session Diversity-aware AI (b) <i>Session Chair: Davide Cavicchini</i>					
T13	17:20	Adaptive Games for Learning Endangered Languages	Gabor Bella	25+5	IMT – Atlantique
T14	17:50	Diversity-aware Word Sense disambiguation model for South African Languages- A case study of Sesotho sa Leboa	Dr Daniel Masethe	25+5	Tshwane University of Technology
T15	18:20	Diversity-aware Data Collection for South African languages Word Sense Disambiguation-enhanced Machine Translation – A Case study of English–Setswana Machine Translation	Dr Tebatso Moape	25+5	University of South Africa
	18:50	DAY END			



July 23rd (morning) – (Open to Public)

Day 2 – Morning Workshop on “Diversity-aware Sovereign AI for Africa”					
Morning Session (a) <i>Session Chair: Dr Robyn Thompson</i>					
	08:50	WELCOME	Prof Oludayo Olugbara	10	Durban University of Technology
T16	09:00	Diversity-aware Sovereign AI for Africa in Perspective	Prof Sunday Ojo	25+5	Durban University of Technology
T17	09:30	African Diversity-aware Sovereign AI: Higher Education Perspective	Prof Oludayo Olugbara	25+5	Durban University of Technology
T18	10:00	African Diversity-aware Sovereign AI: Socio-Ethno-Linguistics of African Languages Diversity	Prof Moufoutao u Adjéran	25+5	University of Abomey-Calavi, Benin Republic
	10:30	Coffee Break		20 min	ALL
Morning Session (b) <i>Session Chair: Sunday Ojo</i>					
T19	10:50	African Diversity-aware Sovereign AI Capacity Building	Prof Pius Owolawi	25+5	Tshwane University of Technology
T20	11:20	African Diversity-aware Sovereign AI: EC Perspective	Vincenzo Lorusso	25+5	Policy Officer EU-Africa Cooperation on Science, Technology and Innovation, European Commission, DG RTD
T21	11:50	“Chinese + AI” Training in Africa: From Language Bridge to Citizen-Generated Data for Person-Centric AI.	Lin Wu	25+5	Confucius Institute, DUT
	12:20	Lunch Break		1 hour	ALL



July 23rd (Afternoon) – (Open to Public)

The afternoon program will feature **two concurrent activities: a Dialogue Forum and a Tutorial Session**. The specific activities within each session are detailed below.

Day 2 – Afternoon Parallel Sessions					
Session 1 Tutorial: Lexical semantics for diversity-aware sovereign AI <i>Facilitator: Dr Hadi Khalilia, PTU</i> <i>Coordinators: Dr Sibusiso Dlamini, DUT, Mr Dira Thokwane, TUT, Dr. Mosima Masethe, SMU</i>					
		Introduction to the Tutorial	Dr Mosima Masethe		
1	14:00	The Universal Knowledge Core (UKC) organization	Hadi Khalilia	1 hour	Palestine Technical University
2	15:00	Applications of the Universal Knowledge Core / UKC in Practice: Applications for Language Technologies and LLMs	Hadi Khalilia	30	Palestine Technical University
	15:30	Coffee Break		30 min	ALL
3	16:00	Hands-on Introduction to UKC Resource Collection	Students	30	South Africa
4	16:30	Collaborative UKC Population Exercise and Inter-Evaluator Validation	Students	1 hour	South Africa
Session 2 Diversity-Aware Sovereign AI (DASAI) Dialogue Forum Session <i>Session Chair: Prof Sunday Ojo</i>					
1	14:00	Introduction to to the Forum Section	Prof Sunday Ojo	30 min	Durban University of Technology
2	14:30	Break Away Dialogue Sessions (see details in Appendix A)	Group Facilitators (See Appendix A)	1 hour 30 min	ALL
	16:00	Coffee Break		30 min	ALL
3	16:30	Group Reportings	Group Facilitators (See Appendix A)	1 hour 30 min	ALL



4	18:00	Rounding Up	Prof Sunday Ojo	30 mins	Durban University of Technology
	18:30	DAY END			



July 24th - (Invitations Only)

The talks listed below are currently tentative and will be finalized in the coming days.

The “DataScientia Initiative” workshop					
T1	08:50	WELCOME	Fausto Giunchiglia	10	University of Trento
T2	09:00	Round Table Introduction	ALL	25+5	ALL Participating Institutions
T3	09:30	The DataScientia Initiative: Towards Diversity-aware Sovereign AI	Fausto Giunchiglia	25+5	University of Trento
T4	10:00	The DataScientia Joint lab collaboration model	Matteo Busso	25+5	University of Trento
T5	10:30	The ZCST Joint Lab (China) { Talk title here }	Li Zi	25+5	Zhuhai College of Science and Technology
	11:00	Coffee Break		15 min	ALL
T6	11:15	The DUT Joint Lab (South Africa) { Talk title here }	Sunday Ojo	25+5	Durban University of Technology
T7	11:45	The ABAI Kazakh Joint Lab { Creating a Human-Centered AI Ecosystem: From Localized MOOCs to Collaborative AI Labs }	Zhanat Nurbekova	25+5	Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University
T8	12:15	The NUM Joint Lab (Mongolia) { Talk title here }	Amarsanaa Ganbold	25+5	National University of Mongolia
	12:45	Lunch		1 hour	ALL
T9	13:45	The Jilin University Joint Lab (China) { Talk title here }	Hao Xu	25+5	Jilin University
T10	14:15	The University of Trento Joint Lab (Italy) { Talk title here }	{ Marco Roveri or Ali Hamza }	25+5	University of Trento



T11	14:45	The DataScientia Community – Role of Universities and society	Ali Hamza	25+5	University of Trento
T12	15:15	The DiversityOne competition – an example of DataScientia joint project	Andrea Bontempelli	25+5	University of Trento
T13	15:45	The SmartCampus App – how to enable the DataScientia student Community	Li Dalin	25+5	Zhuhai College of Science and Technology
	16:15	Coffee Break		15 min	ALL
T14	16:30	Disseminating DataScientia for Impact: How to Join?	Margherita Trestini	25+5	Apodissi
T15	17:00	*Panel Discussion – DataScientia: towards Diversity-aware Sovereign AI	Fausto Giunchiglia	1 hour	University of Trento
	18:00	DAY END			

***Panel: Diversity-aware Sovereign AI - a manifesto**

Coordinated by: Fausto Giunchiglia

#	Name	Affiliation
1	Yanchun Liang	Zhuhai College of Science and Technology
2	Hao Xu	Jilin University
3	Sunday Ojo	Durban University of Technology
4	Margherita Trestini	Apodissi
5	Vincenzo Lorusso	Policy Officer EU-Africa Cooperation on Science, Technology and Innovation, European Commission, DG RTD
6	Ali Hamza/ Marco Roveri	University of Trento



Appendix A

Break Away Dialogue Session Details

DASAI Dialogue Forum Discussion Rubrics		
Idea to discuss	Diversity-Aware Sovereign AI (DASAI): Diversity-Aware Sovereign AI (DASAI) integrates a continent/region/nation's data independence with ethical inclusivity, with core pillars which define the framework for developing inclusive, self-determined AI science & technology, being :centered on ensuring local control over digital resources while actively mitigating algorithmic bias and cultural erasure in marginalized regions.	
Modalities	Participants divided into groups based on the sub-ideas to discuss, with assigned Group Facilitator and Repertoire	
#	Subgroups with Sub-Ideas to Discuss	Facilitators/Co-Facilitator/ appertoire
1	ELI Group: Ethno-Linguistic (Cultural and Linguistic) Inclusivity (ELI) AI models must be trained on localized data to preserve regional languages, dialects, and cultural norms, to avoid AI systems that suffer from semantic drift and cultural erasure, and thus safeguarding indigenous heritage from being absorbed or exploited. .	Prof Moufoutaou Adjéran/ Professor Aimé Sègla UAC, Benin/ Dr Tebatso Moape, UNISA, South Africa
2	LDS Group: Local Data Sovereignty (LDS) Countries require legal, operational, and technical control over data governance, to avoid "data colonialism," whereby external entities extract local knowledge to train models that do not benefit the originating community.	Dr Dimane Mpoeleng, BIUST, Botswana/Prof Mzwamadoda Phillip Cekiso, TUT, South Africa/ Mrs Omolola Haastrup, HUD, UK,
3	ICC Group: Infrastructure and Compute Control(ICC) Sovereign AI relies on domestically controlled infrastructure, ranging from high-performance computing (like local GPU clusters) to edge computing networks, to guarantee that a nation's AI capabilities are not entirely dependent on foreign cloud providers or subject to external technological embargoes.	Prof Nalin Naicker, DUT, South Africa/ Prof Michael Oshin PAN-Afristite, Australia/Prof Justice Emuoyifarhe, LAUTECH, Nigeria
4	OMMS Group: Open-Modular Model Sovereignty (OMMS) The use of open-source and modular small/compact language models (SLMs) tailored to national needs, to avoid technology monopolies and enable contextualization/customization of AI models/algorithms for specific public sectoral needs, such as education, healthcare, agriculture, etc.	Prof Babatunde Olofin, AU, Nigeria/ Prof Bennet Makunzi, MUST, Malawi/ Ms Nkosinam Dlungwana, HUAWEI Enterprise, South Africa



<p>5</p>	<p>IEDCG Group: Indigenous Expertise (Talent) Development and Community Governance</p> <p>Homegrown expertise entailing investment in AI-ready human capital, digital literacy programmes, and community-driven institutions, through participatory governance, with stakeholders' underrepresentation avoidance in AI tools building and deployment decision making-AI model transparency.</p>	<p>Prof Pius Owolawi TUT, South Africa//Wonder Ndlovu, WITs, South Africa/</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>SMAITS Group: Social Management of AI Technologies and Systems (SMAITS):</p> <p>Every AI System as a technological solution, is both Universal and Particular, a problem-solving tool, value-laden (not value-neutral), and has side-effects and thus risks. Hence, AI requires management of Risks, Abuse, Future, and Informing Public through appropriate home-grown ethical and regulatory frameworks based on 2-Eye Seeing principle</p>	<p>Dr. Tebogo Gumede-Mazwai, HSRC, South Africa/ Prof Mammo Muchie GU, Ethiopia/Dr Michael Kizito, MAK, Uganda/</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>SESPB Group:</p> <p>Sustainable Equitable Strategic Partnership Building(ESPB): The dynamics of equity, mutual benefit, and sustainability in DASAI partnerships- fostering balanced, impactful intra-/inter-regional/national/institutional collaborations</p>	<p>Prof Dalin Li ZCST, China/Prof Frederick Awuor KSU, Kenya/ Prof Fausto GiunChigliis, UTrento, Italy</p>
<p>8</p>	<p>DASAI Business Model Group</p> <p>A DASAI Business Model for Africa centers on state-backed, community-driven computing infrastructure designed to protect local data, support African languages, and drive inclusive economic growth. It treats sovereign infrastructure, localized data, and ethical regulation as key strategic priorities. Monetizes specialized models trained on regional data for high-impact sectors;Co-funds data centers and AI factories through PPP;Provides low-cost access to foundational models for local startups, academia, and public services through government subsidies, Promotes Language Services market sector.</p> <p>From Data to Value: Rethinking Sovereign AI in Africa</p> <p>An exploration of what it would take to build forms of sovereign AI in Africa that are not only technically viable, but also economically meaningful, and institutionally sustainable. It considers how value is created across the AI pipeline, who captures that value, and how governance and business model choices shape inclusion, accountability, and long-term viability.</p>	<p>Dr Wayne Moodaley, UCT Business School/ Prof Olive Stumke, DUT, South Africa/ Dr Daniel Maasethe, TUT, South Africa</p>