

Cover Page

Malawi National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy

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Preface

Malawi is implementing a national economic stabilisation and recovery agenda aimed at restoring macroeconomic stability, strengthening fiscal discipline, rebuilding public trust in institutions, and accelerating progress toward the goals of Malawi 2063. Economic stabilisation requires improved revenue mobilisation, efficient expenditure management, strengthened governance systems, and improved productivity in priority sectors, particularly agriculture and small and medium enterprises.

Digital transformation has been identified as a core enabler of this stabilisation agenda. The National Digital Transformation Strategy establishes the digital public infrastructure, governance mechanisms, and service delivery reforms required to modernise the government. Artificial Intelligence now represents the next layer of capability that can further strengthen these reforms.

This National Artificial Intelligence Strategy is therefore not a standalone technology policy. It is a strategic instrument designed to support economic stabilisation, institutional reform, and inclusive growth. Artificial Intelligence will be deployed to enhance fiscal integrity, improve targeting of agricultural inputs and extension services, strengthen health diagnostics, expand access to quality education, and increase efficiency across government systems.

The Strategy is grounded in the findings of the Malawi AI Landscape Assessment and aligns with the broader reform proposals to establish a High-Level Digital and AI Council under the Office of the President and Cabinet. This Council will provide the strategic coordination required to avoid fragmentation, align financing, enforce standards, and ensure responsible deployment of Artificial Intelligence across government.

The Strategy also aligns with Vision 2063, which calls for a knowledge-based economy, robust ICT infrastructure, expanded digital services, and increased investment in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. It reflects regional commitments under the African Union and SADC digital cooperation frameworks and adopts the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence as the foundation for responsible AI governance.

This is a five-year strategy covering 2026 to 2031. It prioritises practical, development-oriented, and fiscally responsible AI deployment. It does not pursue frontier model development or capital-intensive sovereign computing infrastructure. Instead, it focuses on frugal, task-specific AI systems that can operate within Malawi's infrastructure realities and institutional capacity.

Artificial Intelligence must strengthen Malawi's economic recovery and institutional reform agenda. This Strategy provides the governance framework, implementation roadmap, and sector priorities necessary to ensure that AI contributes to national stabilisation, productivity growth, and inclusive development.

Executive Summary

Malawi is implementing a national economic stabilisation and institutional reform agenda aimed at restoring macroeconomic stability, strengthening fiscal discipline, improving public sector performance, and accelerating progress toward Malawi 2063. Digital transformation has been identified as a central enabler of this agenda. The National Digital Transformation Strategy establishes the digital public infrastructure, interoperability standards, and governance mechanisms required to modernise public administration.

This National Artificial Intelligence Strategy builds on that foundation. It defines how Artificial Intelligence will be applied over the period 2026-2031 to strengthen public sector performance, improve productivity in priority sectors, and support economic stabilisation. It is a reform-oriented delivery framework, not an industrial technology strategy. It prioritises practical, fiscally responsible AI applications aligned with Malawi's institutional capacity and development needs.

Strategic Rationale

Malawi's development context is characterised by fiscal pressure, limited institutional capacity, and high service delivery demands in agriculture, health, education, and public financial management. While digital systems are expanding, data remains fragmented and underutilised. The AI Landscape Assessment confirms that Malawi possesses foundational digital assets but faces constraints in interoperability, data quality, compute infrastructure, and AI skills within government.

Artificial Intelligence can enhance analytical capability within existing systems. It can improve anomaly detection in revenue administration, strengthen procurement oversight, support agricultural advisory services, enhance health supply chain forecasting, and assist education performance monitoring. However, these benefits can only be realised through disciplined governance, phased implementation, and alignment with digital public infrastructure.

Policy Position

Malawi adopts a frugal, context-appropriate and governance-led approach to Artificial Intelligence. The AI Strategy is guided by the following principles:

- AI will serve public value, productivity and institutional reform.
- AI will augment human decision-making, not replace institutional accountability.
- Deployment will be phased and risk-based.
- Fiscal discipline and cost sustainability will guide infrastructure choices.
- Inclusion and local language enablement in Chichewa will be prioritised.
- Ethical safeguards will be operational and enforceable.

The Strategy does not pursue capital-intensive sovereign compute infrastructure or frontier model development during this period. It prioritises lightweight, task-specific AI models operating within shared cloud environments.

Foundations for Responsible AI

Before scaling AI applications, the Strategy strengthens four enabling pillars:

1. **Data and Digital Public Infrastructure:** Priority datasets in revenue, agriculture, health, and education will be strengthened. Interoperability and lawful data-sharing mechanisms will be reinforced. AI systems will operate strictly within national digital architecture standards.
2. **Responsible and Ethical AI Governance:** Malawi adopts the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence as the operational basis for governance. The Strategy introduces risk-tier classification, mandatory impact assessments for higher-risk systems, an AI systems registry, human oversight requirements, transparency obligations, and explicit prohibitions on social scoring and unlawful surveillance.
3. **Infrastructure and Compute Model:** AI systems will be hosted within secure shared cloud environments, aligned with national cybersecurity standards. Cost predictability, vendor portability, and energy realism are central design criteria.
4. **Capacity and Institutional Competence:** Public sector capacity will be strengthened in AI literacy, technical integration, procurement, and oversight. University partnerships and structured youth engagement will support applied capacity development.

Priority AI Programmes

AI deployment will focus on four flagship clusters directly linked to stabilisation and service performance:

1. **Public Financial Management and Economic Stabilisation:** AI-enabled analytics will support revenue risk scoring, procurement pattern analysis, and expenditure monitoring. These systems will enhance detection capacity while maintaining human oversight.
2. **Agriculture and Food Security:** AI tools will support crop disease recognition, climate and yield forecasting, and advisory targeting to strengthen extension services and improve productivity.
3. **Health System Strengthening:** AI applications will assist supply chain forecasting, service utilisation analytics, and defined clinical decision-support functions within strict data protection safeguards.
4. **Education and Human Capital:** AI-supported teacher tools, learning assistance systems, and performance analytics will enhance curriculum alignment and monitoring while protecting student data.

Deployment will proceed through pilots, controlled scaling, and institutionalisation phases. Expansion will depend on measurable performance improvements and compliance with governance standards.

Institutional Architecture

To address coordination gaps identified in the AI Landscape Assessment, the Strategy establishes a clear institutional framework:

- A Digital Transformation and AI Council will provide apex policy oversight and cross-sector coordination.

- An AI Delivery Unit will support standards enforcement, registry management, and technical review of proposals.
- Regulatory authorities, including the Data Protection Commissioner and sector regulators, will retain statutory oversight roles.

This layered architecture ensures enforceability, accountability, and alignment with stabilisation priorities.

Implementation and Monitoring

Implementation will follow three phases:

- Phase 1 (2026-2027): Governance consolidation and data strengthening.
- Phase 2 (2027-2029): Flagship pilots and controlled expansion.
- Phase 3 (2029-2031): Institutionalisation and reuse of validated systems.

Monitoring mechanisms will track:

- Development impact indicators linked to service performance and fiscal discipline.
- Compliance with Responsible AI requirements.
- Infrastructure and capacity readiness.

A mid-term review will assess progress and inform adjustments.

Youth Employment and Innovation

The Strategy links AI deployment to structured youth engagement and applied innovation. Internship pathways, university partnerships, and targeted procurement opportunities will support skill development aligned with public service demand. Innovation initiatives will be problem-driven and fiscally disciplined.

Conclusion

The Malawi National Artificial Intelligence Strategy provides a structured, responsible and implementable framework for AI adoption. It aligns with the National Digital Transformation Strategy, supports economic stabilisation, embeds enforceable ethical safeguards, and prioritises measurable improvements in public sector performance.

Artificial Intelligence will be introduced selectively, governed centrally, and scaled cautiously. Its success will be measured not by technological sophistication, but by strengthened institutions, improved service delivery, and enhanced productivity for the people of Malawi.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Part I. Malawi's Development Context and AI Baseline

1. Introduction and National Context

1.1. Malawi's development context and service delivery challenges

Malawi's development context is characterised by a predominantly agrarian economy, a youthful population, fiscal constraints, and significant service delivery pressures. Agriculture accounts for the livelihoods of the majority of the population, yet productivity remains vulnerable to climate variability, limited extension capacity, and information asymmetries. The health system continues to face workforce shortages and diagnostic gaps, particularly in rural districts. The education system is managing high enrolment levels alongside resource constraints, affecting teacher support and learning outcomes.

Public institutions operate under fiscal pressure and are required to maximise efficiency in the use of limited resources. Strengthening revenue administration, improving expenditure control, reducing leakages, and enhancing transparency are central components of the Government's economic stabilisation programme.

Digital transformation is already contributing to these objectives through the expansion of digital public services, financial management systems, and digital connectivity initiatives. However, service delivery challenges persist due to fragmented data systems, limited interoperability, manual administrative processes, and uneven access to timely information.

Artificial Intelligence presents an opportunity to augment existing systems. Properly deployed, AI can improve data analysis, automate routine administrative tasks, enhance decision support in agriculture and health, and detect irregularities in financial systems. However, these benefits can only be realised within a structured governance framework that reflects Malawi's institutional capacity and infrastructure conditions.

1.2. Economic stabilisation as a driver of AI adoption

The Government's economic stabilisation programme places fiscal consolidation, improved public financial management, and domestic revenue mobilisation at the centre of reform. Cabinet has positioned digital transformation and Artificial Intelligence as instruments to strengthen these objectives.

Artificial Intelligence can contribute to economic stabilisation in defined and measurable areas.

In revenue administration, anomaly detection and risk scoring tools can strengthen compliance monitoring and support more targeted audits. Data-driven analysis can identify inconsistencies in declarations, detect irregular transaction patterns, and prioritise enforcement actions. These tools must operate within clear legal boundaries and human oversight.

In public expenditure management, analytics can support procurement monitoring, identify irregular payment patterns, and strengthen budget execution oversight. AI-supported review of transaction data can reduce leakages and improve expenditure discipline when embedded within existing financial management systems.

In subsidy and social support programmes, AI-assisted matching and deduplication tools can improve beneficiary targeting and reduce duplication. However, automated decision-making in

eligibility or enforcement must be accompanied by clear appeal mechanisms and documented human review procedures.

Within agriculture, predictive analytics can assist with crop disease detection, climate risk assessment, and input distribution planning. In health, forecasting tools can support medicine supply planning and resource allocation. These applications directly affect productivity and service performance.

The AI Landscape Assessment emphasises that the value of AI in Malawi lies primarily in applied, sector-specific use cases linked to productivity and fiscal integrity, rather than in frontier model development. It also highlights that gains depend on structured deployment, not isolated pilots.

Economic stabilisation therefore provides the strategic lens for AI adoption. AI initiatives must demonstrate clear contributions to revenue performance, expenditure control, service efficiency, or productivity gains. Projects that do not align with these priorities will not be pursued.

At the same time, stabilisation-driven deployment must not compromise safeguards. AI systems used in revenue enforcement, beneficiary targeting, or compliance monitoring carry high accountability risk. Risk classification, documentation, and human oversight are mandatory components of such deployments.

Artificial Intelligence strengthens stabilisation when it is integrated into end-to-end processes supported by shared digital infrastructure. It weakens stabilisation when introduced as disconnected tools layered on fragmented systems.

1.3. Digital transformation as the foundation for AI

Artificial Intelligence cannot function independently of digital public infrastructure. It depends on structured data, secure systems, and interoperable platforms.

The National Digital Transformation Strategy establishes the foundational architecture required for digital service delivery. This includes:

- Digital identity systems
- Interoperability frameworks and data exchange standards
- Core administrative systems, including public financial management platforms
- Cybersecurity operations and safeguards
- Data hosting and cloud infrastructure
- Institutional coordination mechanisms

The Digital Transformation Strategy also identifies fragmentation, uneven standards adoption, and limited interoperability as persistent constraints. These constraints directly affect AI deployment.

AI systems rely on consistent and machine-readable data. Where data remains siloed, incomplete, or manually reconciled, model performance will be unreliable. Where interoperability is weak, cross-sector insights cannot be generated. Where cybersecurity controls are inconsistent, AI systems increase vulnerability.

The AI Landscape Assessment reinforces this dependency. It identifies data fragmentation, limited interoperability, and weak stewardship as major barriers to scale. It also notes the absence of shared AI architecture, APIs, and affordable compute suitable for government-wide deployment.

AI deployment under this Strategy will therefore follow a layered model.

Digital public infrastructure forms the base layer. AI systems operate as an augmentation layer that improves performance, efficiency, and analytical capacity within existing systems. AI will not replace foundational systems or create parallel architectures.

This integration approach serves three purposes:

- It reinforces reuse of shared platforms.
- It reduces duplication and long-term operating costs.
- It strengthens coherence between digital reform and AI adoption.

The scaling of AI thus depends on progress in interoperability, data quality, and secure infrastructure. Artificial Intelligence is not a substitute for digital reform. It is dependent on it.

1.4. Strategic choice: frugal, responsible, development-oriented AI

Malawi's AI strategy adopts a deliberate and proportionate approach aligned with economic stabilisation priorities and institutional capacity.

The AI Landscape Assessment makes clear that Malawi's constraints are structural. Internet affordability remains uneven. Electricity reliability varies across districts. High-performance computing capacity is limited. AI skills within government are scarce. Enforcement and audit capacity are still developing.

Under these conditions, the Strategy makes three clear choices.

First, AI will be applied in priority sectors where it addresses defined operational bottlenecks. Agriculture, health, education, revenue administration, and public financial management are selected because they directly affect productivity, service delivery performance, and fiscal stability.

Second, deployment will follow a frugal model. The Strategy does not pursue frontier model development or capital-intensive sovereign computing infrastructure. Instead, it prioritises task-specific systems, lightweight models, and shared cloud or hybrid deployment approaches consistent with fiscal constraints. Where appropriate, open-source models and reusable components will be adopted to reduce long-term costs and vendor dependency.

Third, AI deployment will be governance-led. As AI systems are introduced into areas such as compliance monitoring, subsidy targeting, or service prioritisation, risk classification, documentation, audit trails, and human oversight are mandatory. Efficiency gains will not override accountability.

The Strategy also recognises the importance of language and accessibility. AI tools supporting farmers, health workers, students, and citizens must function in both English and Chichewa. Local language enablement is necessary for inclusive service delivery and cannot be treated as an afterthought.

These choices balance ambition with realism. AI adoption must match Malawi's infrastructure, fiscal space, and institutional capacity. It must improve existing systems rather than introduce new fragmentation.

2. National AI Readiness Baseline

Malawi's AI readiness is best understood as “early but promising”, with some foundational assets in place but weak integration and limited scale mechanisms. The Malawi AI Landscape Assessment provides the primary diagnostic foundation for this Strategy. It assesses ecosystem readiness, public sector capability, infrastructure conditions, data governance, regulatory safeguards, and institutional coordination. The assessment indicates that Malawi has some strengths that matter for credible AI adoption, including a national digital ID system and growing digital platforms, alongside political leadership and momentum and emerging university AI initiatives.

At the same time, the assessment identifies that the enabling context remains constrained. AI at scale depends on foundational conditions that are still uneven, including internet access and affordability, reliable electricity, common interoperability rules, and data quality and machine readability of core datasets. The assessment also highlights that trust and safeguards remain a high-risk area. While the Data Protection Act (2024) is a major milestone, institutional capacity for enforcement, audit, and safe data sharing remains limited, and weak trust mechanisms could undermine adoption and public confidence.

2.1. Institutional coordination and governance gaps

The Assessment identifies the absence of a unified national AI governance framework.

There is currently:

- No central AI coordination mechanism.
- No government-wide AI architecture.
- No formal risk-tier classification model.
- No AI-specific impact assessment requirement.
- No central register of AI systems in use.
- No shared procurement standards for AI systems.

AI-related initiatives that exist across institutions are largely project-based and externally supported. They are not coordinated under a common national framework. This creates risks of duplication, vendor dependency, inconsistent safeguards, and rising maintenance costs.

The Assessment also highlights that no single institution currently leads the national AI agenda. This contributes to fragmentation and limits accountability.

The Digital Transformation Strategy identifies similar coordination weaknesses in digital system deployment. The AI Assessment confirms that these weaknesses become more consequential when AI is introduced, because AI systems require continuous monitoring, periodic model updates, and clear accountability for automated outputs.

Strengthening governance is therefore a prerequisite for scaling AI.

2.2. Data and interoperability constraints

AI performance depends on structured, reliable, and interoperable data.

The Assessment identifies several constraints:

- Core administrative datasets are incomplete or inconsistently formatted.
- Parallel spreadsheet-based processes persist in some ministries.
- Data ownership and stewardship roles are not consistently defined.
- Interoperability between systems remains uneven.
- Open data availability is limited and often outdated.
- Machine-readable datasets are not consistently maintained.

In some sectors, digital systems exist but are not routinely integrated with other platforms. This limits cross-sector analytics and reduces the value of existing data assets.

The Assessment makes clear that AI deployment cannot compensate for weak data foundations. Where data quality is low or inconsistent, model outputs will be unreliable. Where identifiers are not harmonised, duplication and exclusion risks increase.

The Digital Transformation Strategy emphasises interoperability and shared standards as cross-cutting reforms. The AI Strategy reinforces this direction by treating data governance and interoperability as structural preconditions for AI scaling.

2.3. Infrastructure and compute pragmatism

Infrastructure conditions impose practical limits on AI deployment.

The Assessment identifies:

- Uneven internet access and affordability.
- Variable electricity reliability across districts.
- Limited access to affordable high-performance computing.
- Absence of shared AI hosting environments within government.

These constraints shape the model strategy.

The Assessment does not recommend sovereign large-scale AI model training or capital-intensive compute infrastructure in the near term. Instead, it emphasises access to affordable compute through shared arrangements and cloud-based solutions.

AI systems introduced under this Strategy must therefore:

- Operate under variable connectivity conditions.
- Be compatible with shared cloud or hybrid deployment.
- Avoid heavy infrastructure dependence.
- Minimise capital expenditure.

Infrastructure pragmatism is a defining parameter of Malawi's AI Strategy.

2.4. Skills and ecosystem capacity

AI readiness depends on human capacity as much as technical infrastructure.

The Assessment highlights:

- Limited availability of advanced AI and data science skills.
- Scarcity of experienced data engineers within government.
- Limited AI literacy among senior decision-makers.
- Weak linkage between university research and public sector demand.
- Limited depth in AI-focused private sector enterprises.

Government ministries often rely heavily on external consultants for digital system design and integration. This reduces internal capacity to evaluate model performance, enforce standards, or adapt systems over time.

Procurement capacity is also constrained. Ministries have limited experience specifying AI assurance requirements, evaluating model transparency, or managing long-term vendor relationships for AI systems.

The Assessment emphasises that scaling AI without strengthening internal capacity risks dependency and weak oversight.

Capacity development is therefore not peripheral. It is central to credible deployment.

2.5. Trust, safeguards and enforcement readiness

AI systems introduce new accountability requirements, particularly when used in revenue enforcement, beneficiary targeting, prioritisation of services, or compliance monitoring.

The Assessment identifies that while the Data Protection Act (2024) provides an important legal foundation, institutional enforcement capacity remains limited. There are currently:

- No AI-specific impact assessment procedures.
- No formal risk-tier classification model.
- No mandated human oversight requirements for high-risk AI systems.
- No systematic transparency mechanisms for AI deployment.

Trust is a structural risk area.

The Assessment notes that uneven internet access and high data costs widen the digital divide. Poor data quality and limited interoperability can deepen exclusion. If AI systems are deployed without inclusion measures, rural populations and citizens reliant on assisted channels may be disadvantaged.

The absence of standardised safeguards increases reputational risk and may undermine public confidence in digital reforms.

Responsible AI governance must therefore be operational, not declarative. Risk classification, documentation, auditability, and appeal mechanisms are required for high-impact use cases.

2.6. Structural implications derived from AI assessment

The AI Landscape Assessment does not present artificial intelligence in Malawi as a frontier innovation challenge. It presents it as a coordination, integration, and capacity challenge. The Assessment makes clear that Malawi possesses foundational digital assets, but these assets are not yet sufficiently integrated, standardised, or governed to support large-scale AI deployment.

Three structural implications arise from this baseline.

First, AI deployment must follow digital integration, not precede it.

Where data systems remain fragmented or inconsistently structured, AI models will produce unreliable outputs. The Strategy therefore places early emphasis on strengthening data stewardship, interoperability, and shared infrastructure before expanding sector-level AI applications. AI scaling should be sequenced alongside progress in Digital Public Infrastructure consolidation.

Second, governance mechanisms must be operational before high-impact AI use.

The Assessment highlights limited institutional oversight capacity and the absence of structured AI governance processes. This Strategy therefore embeds enforceable governance mechanisms, including risk classification, documentation standards, impact assessment requirements, and system registration. High-risk AI applications, particularly in revenue enforcement or eligibility determination, will not be deployed without these safeguards in place.

Third, capacity constraints require selective prioritisation.

Malawi does not have the institutional bandwidth to pursue broad AI experimentation across multiple sectors simultaneously. The Strategy therefore limits initial deployment to clearly defined priority programmes linked to economic stabilisation and service performance. This selective approach reduces fiscal risk and allows institutional learning before broader expansion.

The fourth implication relates to fiscal pragmatism. **AI investment must be justified through measurable gains.**

Given fiscal constraints, AI initiatives must demonstrate clear improvements in expenditure control, service efficiency, or productivity. Investments that do not directly contribute to stabilisation or priority sector outcomes should not be prioritised.

AI will thus be introduced gradually, governed centrally, aligned with Digital Public Infrastructure, and focused on high-impact use cases. Expansion beyond initial priority sectors and use cases will depend on demonstrated results and strengthened institutional readiness.

Part II. National AI Policy Position and Strategic Direction

3. Vision and Strategic Objectives (2026-2031)

3.1. Vision

The vision of this Strategy is to apply Artificial Intelligence in a disciplined and responsible manner to strengthen public sector performance, improve productivity in priority sectors, and support Malawi's economic stabilisation agenda.

Artificial Intelligence will function as an augmentation layer within Malawi's digital public infrastructure. It will enhance analytical capability, improve operational decision-making, and support more efficient service delivery. It will not replace core institutional accountability mechanisms. It will not operate outside established governance frameworks. It will not be pursued as an end in itself.

This Strategy also recognises that AI will increasingly influence private sector productivity and competitiveness. Malawi's approach supports responsible AI adoption beyond government by strengthening data foundations, building skills, improving access to practical tools, and providing clear safeguards. However, the Strategy remains anchored in fiscal realism and national capacity. It prioritises applied use cases and shared foundations over large-scale investment in capital-intensive compute infrastructure.

By 2031, Malawi aims to:

- Integrate AI tools into selected high-impact public systems in revenue administration, public financial management, agriculture, health, and education.
- Establish enforceable governance standards for responsible AI deployment.
- Strengthen institutional capacity to procure, manage, and monitor AI systems.
- Improve the quality, interoperability, and lawful use of priority datasets.
- Demonstrate measurable improvements in service performance and operational efficiency through AI-enabled systems.

Responsible deployment is a core requirement. Malawi adopts the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence as the foundation for governance. This is operationalised through risk-tier classification, mandatory impact assessments, human oversight requirements for high-risk systems, transparency and redress mechanisms, and enforceable procurement standards.

3.2. Strategic objectives (2026-2031)

The Strategy adopts a limited set of strategic objectives. These objectives reflect the AI Landscape Assessment's diagnosis of readiness gaps and the Government's stabilisation and service delivery priorities. They are designed to be implementable within Malawi's institutional and fiscal realities.

Objective 1. Strengthen national data foundations and secure interoperability for AI use

AI adoption at scale depends on data quality, stewardship, and lawful sharing. Malawi will strengthen priority datasets needed for flagship programmes, establish stewardship

arrangements, and apply secure interoperability standards aligned to the Digital Transformation Strategy. This objective includes improving machine readability, routine updating, metadata standards, and lawful data sharing arrangements for priority datasets. It also includes aligning AI-ready data reforms with existing digital public infrastructure programmes to avoid duplication.

Objective 2. Deliver a limited set of high-impact AI programmes that support stabilisation and productivity

AI deployment will be prioritised in areas that directly support fiscal stabilisation and service performance. These include revenue administration analytics, expenditure monitoring, agricultural advisory systems, health supply chain forecasting, and education performance support tools. Deployment will follow a phased and evaluated approach.

Objective 3. Embed ethical and responsible AI as enforceable governance practice

Responsible AI is not treated as a separate policy principle. Malawi will operationalise responsible AI principles through enforceable tools and procedures. This includes risk-tier classification, mandatory AI impact assessments, clear human oversight requirements for high-risk use cases, auditability requirements, and an AI systems registry. Alignment with the UNESCO Recommendation will be implemented through enforceable procedures rather than advisory guidance.

Objective 4. Build public sector capability and national skills for applied AI

Malawi will strengthen AI capability within government institutions and build the broader skills pipeline required for sustained adoption. This includes targeted training for public officials in AI literacy, data governance, procurement, and risk management, as well as development of technical capability in data engineering and analytics.

The Strategy also supports stronger linkages between universities, training institutions, and applied government and private sector demand, to ensure that skill development aligns with practical needs rather than standalone academic programmes.

Objective 5. Ensure infrastructure and compute choices are fiscally sustainable and fit for purpose

Malawi will adopt a shared cloud and hybrid approach to AI compute and hosting, aligned to infrastructure constraints and fiscal discipline. The Strategy prioritises reusable platforms, cost-controlled model hosting arrangements, portability standards, and secure operating practices.

This objective responds to the Assessment's finding that access to affordable compute is limited and that Malawi should not pursue capital-intensive sovereign compute programmes in the near term.

4. Malawi's AI Policy Position

This Strategy sets a clear policy position to prevent fragmentation, avoid overreach, and guide practical decision-making across institutions. The policy position defines what Malawi will prioritise, what it will require, and what it will not pursue during 2026-2031.

4.1. Frugal and context-appropriate AI

Malawi will prioritise AI approaches that fit local infrastructure and delivery conditions.

This includes:

- Task-specific applications that address defined operational problems rather than general-purpose or compute-intensive models.
- Lightweight deployment approaches that function under variable connectivity and energy reliability conditions.
- Use of shared cloud and hybrid hosting models with clear hosting and security standards to avoid large capital expenditure.
- Preference for reusable components and open standards to reduce vendor dependency.

AI systems will be designed around Malawi's practical constraints, including data quality limitations and institutional capacity to operate and monitor systems.

The Strategy does not position Malawi to invest in frontier AI model development or sovereign compute infrastructure during this period. Where advanced models are used, they will be accessed through shared and controlled hosting arrangements aligned to government standards.

4.2. AI as augmentation, not replacement

AI will be used to augment decision-making and service delivery processes, not to replace accountability.

AI systems will support:

- Faster analysis of large datasets.
- Improved forecasting and risk detection.
- Automation of routine administrative work where appropriate.
- Decision support for frontline workers and administrators.

However, AI will not be used to remove human accountability in high-stakes decisions. In cases where AI informs enforcement action, eligibility, or prioritisation, human oversight and documented review will be mandatory.

For example, in revenue administration and public financial management, AI models may assist in identifying anomalies or prioritising audit cases. Final enforcement decisions will remain subject to institutional review. In agriculture, AI tools may assist extension officers with crop diagnostics or climate risk analysis, but advisory engagement with farmers will remain human-led. In health settings, AI-supported triage or diagnostic tools will support clinicians, not replace clinical judgment.

This approach aligns with Malawi's current institutional capacity and reduces the risk of harm, mistrust, or exclusion. Institutional capacity constraints require tools that enhance productivity without reducing accountability. Maintaining human oversight ensures that errors can be corrected, context can be considered, and public trust can be preserved.

4.3. AI to strengthen fiscal stabilisation and service performance

AI adoption will be justified through clear contributions to stabilisation, development priorities, and public service performance.

Priority outcomes include:

- Reduced leakages and improved oversight in public financial management.
- Strengthened revenue compliance monitoring.
- Better targeting and effectiveness of agricultural programmes.
- Improved planning and forecasting in health systems.
- Efficiency gains in administrative processes.

The selection of AI applications will therefore be guided by two criteria:

- Clear linkage to stabilisation, productivity, or service performance outcomes.
- Feasibility within existing data and infrastructure conditions.

Applications that do not meet these criteria will not be prioritised during the initial implementation phase.

This disciplined focus ensures that AI investments are aligned with national reform objectives and measurable outcomes.

4.4. Inclusion, accessibility, and local language enablement

Malawi's AI policy position recognises that digital and AI-enabled services must be accessible across geographic and socio-economic divides. Uneven connectivity, cost barriers, and literacy constraints require deliberate inclusion measures.

The Strategy therefore prioritises:

- Local language enablement, including Chichewa and English, particularly for AI tools used in agriculture, health, and education.
- Structured development of Chichewa language datasets will be prioritised where AI systems rely on text or voice interfaces. Voice-based tools may be introduced in selected contexts to support users with limited literacy.
- Design that functions in low-bandwidth environments.
- Assisted channel integration, ensuring frontline workers can use AI tools to support citizens without requiring direct digital access.
- Monitoring of exclusion risks, especially where AI tools influence service targeting or prioritisation.

Inclusion is treated as a design and governance requirement, not as an optional or desirable feature.

4.5. Phased, governance-led scaling

AI deployment under this Strategy will follow a phased model aligned with institutional capacity and governance readiness.

Phase 1 will focus on strengthening foundations: data quality improvements, governance mechanisms, hosting standards, and capacity building. Limited pilot deployments will be undertaken in carefully selected use cases.

Phase 2 will expand selected flagship priority applications where pilots demonstrate measurable benefits and governance mechanisms are functioning effectively.

Phase 3 will focus on institutionalisation, reuse of shared models and datasets, and consolidation within national architecture standards.

Scaling will not be driven by technological enthusiasm. It will be driven by evidence of impact, compliance with governance standards, and demonstrated institutional readiness.

This phased approach reduces fiscal risk, strengthens institutional learning, and ensures that AI adoption remains aligned with Malawi's development priorities.

Part III. Foundations for Responsible and Scalable AI

5. Data and Digital Public Infrastructure for AI

Artificial Intelligence systems depend on structured, reliable, and lawfully accessible data. AI cannot compensate for fragmented or low-quality data systems. The AI Landscape Assessment identifies that Malawi's challenge is not the absence of digital assets. The challenge is weak integration, uneven data quality, and inconsistent stewardship.

5.1. Priority national datasets

The AI Landscape Assessment makes clear that Malawi's readiness challenge is not the absence of data. Administrative data exists across revenue administration, agriculture, health, education, procurement, and financial management systems. The constraint lies in integration, quality, and usability. Strengthening selected high-impact datasets is therefore a priority before scaling AI applications.

AI deployment will therefore focus first on datasets directly linked to flagship programme areas. These include:

- Revenue administration datasets, including tax declarations, transaction records, compliance history, and audit records.
- Public financial management datasets, including procurement records, payment transactions, budget execution data, and supplier information.
- Agricultural datasets, including crop production statistics, extension coverage data, input distribution records, climate and rainfall information, and market pricing data.
- Health system datasets, including facility-level service records, medicine stock data, supply chain movements, and disease surveillance reports.
- Education administrative datasets, including enrolment data, attendance records, examination results, and teacher deployment records.

For each dataset supporting AI deployment, the following minimum conditions must be verified:

- Structured, machine-readable format.
- Defined data ownership and stewardship within the responsible ministry.
- Unique identifiers where applicable to prevent duplication.
- Routine update processes with documented frequency.
- Secure storage aligned with national cybersecurity standards.

Where datasets do not meet these conditions, AI deployment will not proceed at scale. Data improvement becomes a prerequisite activity.

The Strategy therefore requires that each flagship programme define a "data readiness plan" prior to model development or deployment.

5.2. Data quality and stewardship

The AI Landscape Assessment identifies inconsistent data quality and unclear stewardship responsibilities as major constraints.

In several ministries, digital systems coexist with manual or spreadsheet-based processes. Parallel processes reduce reliability and introduce inconsistencies that directly affect model performance. Inconsistent coding standards, missing fields, and unverified entries reduce the predictive accuracy of AI systems.

To address this, the Strategy requires:

1. Formal designation of data stewards for priority datasets.
2. Documentation of data definitions, field formats, and update processes.
3. Periodic data quality review for datasets used in AI systems.
4. Standardising identifiers across systems
5. Eliminating duplicate records
6. Removal or integration of parallel manual processes where feasible.
7. Version control and audit logging for data modifications.

Data stewardship is not treated as an IT function alone. It is an institutional accountability function. The responsible ministry retains ownership, but compliance with national standards is mandatory.

AI systems must include mechanisms to flag anomalies in input data. However, responsibility for data accuracy remains with the data-owning institution.

5.3. Secure interoperability and lawful data sharing

AI use cases often require combining datasets across ministries. For example:

- Revenue compliance monitoring may require linking tax records with procurement data.
- Agricultural forecasting may require linking climate data with production and subsidy distribution records.
- Health analytics may require combining facility service data with supply chain and demographic information.

The Digital Transformation Strategy identifies interoperability frameworks and secure data exchange as a cross-cutting reform. AI systems deployed under this Strategy will operate strictly within those frameworks.

Data sharing arrangements will adhere to the Data Protection Act (2024) and relevant sector regulations. For datasets involving personal information, data minimisation and purpose limitation principles will apply. AI systems will only access data necessary for defined operational purposes.

The AI Strategy reinforces that direction.

Data exchange for AI purposes must comply with:

- National interoperability frameworks.
- Data Protection Act requirements.
- Clearly defined lawful purpose.
- Role-based access controls.
- Audit trails documenting access and processing.

The Strategy prohibits informal or undocumented data pooling for AI experimentation. All cross-ministerial data use must be approved under defined governance procedures.

Secure interoperability reduces duplication and strengthens oversight. It also reduces the risk of shadow data environments created outside official systems.

5.4. Alignment with DPI

DPI forms the base layer for AI deployment. Core components include digital identity systems, interoperability frameworks, cybersecurity coordination, and shared hosting infrastructure. AI systems will be designed to integrate with these components rather than bypass them.

They must operate within:

- Approved digital identity systems for authentication and verification.
- National interoperability frameworks for data exchange.
- Approved hosting and cloud environments.
- National cybersecurity standards and monitoring mechanisms.

The AI Landscape Assessment highlights the absence of shared AI architecture and common APIs as a scaling constraint. This Strategy addresses that by requiring AI components to align with existing architecture standards and reusable services.

This alignment ensures that AI strengthens system coherence rather than creating parallel architectures. It also reduces duplication of effort and supports long-term sustainability.

The integration principle is operational: any proposed AI system that does not demonstrate compatibility with digital public infrastructure standards will not proceed to implementation approval.

6. Responsible and Ethical AI Governance Framework

AI systems influence decisions, resource allocation, compliance monitoring, and access to public services. When poorly governed, they can increase exclusion, weaken accountability, expose the State to fiscal and legal risk, and undermine public trust in digital reforms.

The AI Landscape Assessment identifies governance and trust as critical readiness gaps in Malawi. It notes:

- Absence of AI-specific assurance mechanisms
- Lack of formal risk classification procedures
- Limited enforcement capacity

- Heavy reliance on external vendors
- Risk of fragmented adoption across ministries

Fragmented AI deployment under Malawi's institutional constraints would increase operational cost, multiply security exposure, and weaken accountability. Governance discipline is therefore not a secondary issue. It is a precondition for responsible scaling.

Malawi adopts the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence as the normative foundation for AI governance. However, alignment is operational rather than declaratory. Ethical principles are implemented through defined procedures, approval requirements, documentation standards, monitoring mechanisms, and enforceable oversight mechanisms.

Responsible AI governance under this Strategy rests on the following structural pillars:

- Risk-tier classification
- AI appropriateness and impact assessment
- Human oversight and decision accountability
- Transparency and public communication
- Independent assurance and multi-stakeholder review
- Procurement discipline and lifecycle governance
- Explicitly prohibited and restricted uses
- Alignment with broader UNESCO policy action areas

Ethical compliance under this Strategy is mandatory.

6.1. Alignment with the UNESCO recommendation

The UNESCO Recommendation establishes principles including:

- Respect for human rights and dignity
- Non-discrimination and fairness
- Transparency and explainability
- Accountability and redress
- Human oversight
- Data protection and privacy
- Proportionality and necessity

This Strategy operationalises those principles within Malawi's legal and institutional context.

UNESCO emphasises that governance must be proportionate to risk, sensitive to national context, and avoid excessive administrative burden that disadvantages smaller actors. Malawi's governance model reflects this guidance. Oversight intensity is tiered. High-risk systems receive enhanced scrutiny. Low-risk pilots are not subjected to unnecessary review.

UNESCO also defines eleven policy action areas, including data policy, gender equality, environment, labour, communication, health, education, and monitoring. These are embedded across this Strategy and explicitly referenced in Section 6.8.

UNESCO alignment is therefore embedded across approval processes, oversight mechanisms, procurement rules, and institutional accountability structures.

6.2. Risk-tier classification model

Not all AI systems pose equal risk. A proportional governance approach is therefore required.

All AI systems must undergo formal risk classification prior to development or procurement.

Risk classification will assess:

- Whether the system influences eligibility, enforcement, financial obligations, or access to essential services
- The scale of population affected
- Use of personal or sensitive data
- Sector context (revenue, health, education, etc.)
- Potential impact on individual rights and entitlements
- Risk of bias, discrimination, or exclusion
- Reversibility of errors
- Impact on vulnerable populations

Systems will be categorised into three tiers:

Low Risk: Systems supporting administrative efficiency without materially affecting citizen rights or access to services. Examples include document classification, workflow automation, or internal analytics dashboards.

Moderate Risk: Systems informing operational prioritisation or service delivery decisions but not independently determining eligibility or enforcement outcomes. Examples include agricultural advisory tools, supply chain forecasting, or internal risk analytics.

High Risk: Systems influencing or informing decisions related to eligibility, enforcement, financial obligations, compliance monitoring, or access to essential public services. Examples include revenue risk scoring systems, subsidy targeting models, or enforcement prioritisation tools.

High-risk systems require enhanced safeguards, including impact assessment, mandatory human review, structured oversight, and periodic audit.

Risk classification must be documented and approved before deployment.

This tiered model ensures proportionality while preserving enforcement strength where needed.

6.3. AI appropriateness and mandatory impact assessments

Before adopting AI in any public function, ministries must demonstrate that AI is an appropriate solution.

The appropriateness assessment must confirm:

- The problem cannot be resolved more effectively through administrative reform or rule-based automation
- Data foundations are sufficiently reliable
- The expected benefit justifies operational and reputational risk

For moderate- and high-risk systems, a formal AI Impact Assessment is mandatory prior to deployment.

The Impact Assessment will evaluate:

- Purpose and scope of the system
- Datasets used and lawful basis under the Data Protection Act
- Data quality, completeness, and representativeness
- Bias and exclusion risks
- Gender-differentiated impacts where relevant
- Language and cultural considerations
- Cybersecurity safeguards
- Hosting and infrastructure alignment
- Human oversight arrangements
- Appeals and grievance pathways
- Workforce impact considerations where automation is involved
- Institutional accountability arrangements

High-risk systems require multidisciplinary review, including legal, technical, sectoral, and data protection input.

No high-risk AI system may proceed without documented approval.

Templates and approval procedures will be standardised to ensure consistency.

6.4. Human oversight and decision accountability

AI augments decision-making. It does not replace human responsibility.

For moderate- and high-risk systems:

- Named officers within implementing ministries must be accountable for oversight
- Human review must be available for decisions affecting eligibility, enforcement, or sanctions
- Override procedures must be documented
- Automated outputs must be traceable to model version and input data

- Appeals and redress mechanisms must be accessible

Fully autonomous high-stakes decision-making without human review is not permitted during this strategy period.

Where citizens interact directly with AI systems, disclosure must be provided and human assistance must be available upon request.

This requirement safeguards trust and reinforces accountability.

6.5. AI systems registry

A central AI Systems Registry will be established.

Registration is mandatory prior to operational use.

The registry will record:

- System name and purpose
- Responsible ministry
- Risk classification
- Datasets used
- Hosting environment
- Approval status
- Oversight arrangements
- Status of impact assessment
- Date of deployment

The registry improves visibility, reduces duplication, and supports monitoring.

It also strengthens cross-government coordination and prevents undocumented proliferation of AI tools.

6.6. Transparency, documentation, and public communication

Transparency supports public trust and informed oversight.

For citizen-facing or high-risk systems:

- Ministries must disclose the purpose of the system
- The role of AI in decision-making must be explained
- Complaint and inquiry channels must be clearly communicated

Documentation standards must include:

- Model purpose and limitations
- Data sources
- Risk classification

- Model version control
- Performance monitoring schedules
- Incident records

Transparency does not require publication of sensitive operational details but must allow citizens to understand how automated systems influence decisions.

6.7. Independent assurance and multi-stakeholder review

Given Malawi's enforcement capacity constraints, oversight must be structured and proportionate.

High-risk systems will undergo structured review panels including:

- Legal officers
- Data protection representatives
- Sectoral experts
- Technical specialists

The Data Protection Office will be consulted where personal data is involved.

Designated AI assurance leads will be established within ministries and within the central AI Delivery Unit.

These leads will monitor performance, document incidents, and escalate risks.

Oversight intensity remains proportionate to risk.

Low-risk experimentation will not be overburdened.

6.8. Procurement and lifecycle governance

AI systems create ongoing operational, fiscal, and security obligations.

Procurement documentation must require:

- Compliance with national architecture standards
- Disclosure of model capabilities and limitations
- Documentation of training data sources where feasible
- Portability provisions to prevent vendor lock-in
- Security certification where applicable
- Update and maintenance obligations
- Audit access provisions
- Incident reporting requirements

Contracts must include termination and exit provisions.

Vendor dependency without knowledge transfer is not acceptable for high-risk systems.

Lifecycle governance includes periodic review and reclassification where scope changes.

6.9. Restricted and prohibited uses

Certain AI uses may be restricted or prohibited where risk outweighs benefit.

These may include:

- Social scoring of citizens
- Biometric mass surveillance without lawful basis
- Processing of personal data without lawful authority
- Fully automated decision-making, eligibility or enforcement decisions in certain critical contexts without human oversight.
- Systems using unlawfully obtained or unverified datasets.
- Systems lacking traceability or auditability.
- Deployments that introduce clear discrimination risk without mitigation.

The governance framework will define restricted uses and require prior approval for sensitive deployments. Restricted uses require prior approval under defined legal and oversight conditions.

Explicit prohibition provides clarity and protects against misuse.

6.10. Alignment with broader UNESCO policy action areas

Responsible AI governance extends beyond procedural safeguards. It also extends to data policy, gender equality, environmental sustainability, education, labour, communication, and health.

This Strategy operationalises UNESCO's broader action areas as follows:

- **Data policy:** Embedded in Section 5 through lawful data sharing, stewardship, interoperability, and quality standards.
- **Gender and inclusion:** This is embedded in capacity programmes and sector design, including monitoring for bias and supporting women's participation in AI skills development. Impact assessments consider gender-differentiated effects. Capacity programmes support women's participation in AI skills development.
- **Environment and sustainability:** Hosting and compute decisions consider energy reliability and efficiency, addressed in section 7.
- **Education and skills:** AI literacy and applied research linkages are addressed in section 8.
- **Economy and labour:** Automation projects must assess workforce impact. Youth employment measures are addressed later in the Strategy.
- **Communication and information integrity:** Citizen-facing AI tools must include disclosure and safeguards to prevent misinformation.
- **Health and social well-being:** Clinical and social protection systems require enhanced safeguards, safety testing, and human review.

Responsible AI governance therefore operates across the Strategy, not only within this Section.

7. Infrastructure and Compute Model for AI

The AI Landscape Assessment identifies infrastructure and compute access as structural constraints in Malawi's AI readiness. Internet affordability remains uneven. Electricity reliability varies across districts. Government institutions do not currently operate a shared AI hosting environment. High-performance computing capacity is limited and unevenly distributed.

Under these conditions, infrastructure choices must be realistic, fiscally disciplined, and aligned with the National Digital Transformation Strategy. AI will not be supported through fragmented ministry-level infrastructure investments or capital-intensive sovereign compute ambitions. Infrastructure decisions must reinforce coherence, reuse, and long-term sustainability.

7.1. Open-source and small AI model strategy

Malawi's infrastructure environment supports a strategy centred on task-specific, resource-efficient, and lightweight AI models. These may include:

- Small language models adapted for Chichewa-English use
- Smaller-scale models suitable for defined use cases.
- Open-source tools that reduce licensing costs and vendor lock-in.
- Modular architectures that support incremental scaling.
- Classification and anomaly detection models for structured datasets
- Predictive analytics tools for defined operational tasks

Small AI-model and open-source strategies improve accessibility for local institutions and reduce long-term dependency. Small AI-model strategy also aligns with fiscal discipline, infrastructure constraints, and capacity development. It also reduces exposure to unsustainable compute expenditure.

Wherever feasible, open-source frameworks will be preferred. This approach reduces licensing costs, supports transparency, and enhances adaptability. However, open-source adoption must still meet security and documentation standards.

The Strategy does not support the development of large frontier models in the immediate term. Instead, it prioritises adaptation and fine-tuning of existing models to Malawi's datasets and service needs.

This approach reflects the strategic choice to focus on applied, development-oriented AI rather than industrial AI positioning. AI infrastructure must enable practical service improvements in high impact sectors such as agriculture, health, education, and fiscal systems. It is not a vehicle for prestige investment.

7.2. Shared cloud and hybrid deployment

Malawi will adopt a shared cloud and hybrid deployment model for AI systems. This approach avoids the high capital costs and technical maintenance burdens associated with sovereign high-performance computing infrastructure.

Under this model:

- Core AI workloads will be hosted on secure, standards-compliant approved cloud environments or shared hosting platforms aligned with national cybersecurity and interoperability standards.
- MDAs will not independently procure isolated AI hosting environments without alignment to national standards.
- Hybrid configurations may be used where data sensitivity or regulatory requirements necessitate partial on-premise storage. However, even in hybrid arrangements, architecture standards, security protocols, and interoperability rules must be consistent with national frameworks.

The Digital Transformation Strategy already establishes principles for shared hosting and infrastructure coordination. AI systems will operate within those established frameworks rather than creating parallel infrastructure arrangements.

This shared approach reduces duplication, improves security oversight, and lowers lifecycle operating costs. It aligns directly with the Digital Transformation Strategy's emphasis on common infrastructure and reuse across government.

7.3. Hosting, portability and security standards

AI systems introduce additional cybersecurity and operational risks. Model repositories, training datasets, and inference engines must be secured against unauthorised access and manipulation.

Hosting environments for AI systems must comply with national cybersecurity, data protection, and architecture standards.

AI systems must:

- Integrate with existing authentication and access control mechanisms.
- Maintain encryption of data in transit and at rest.
- Provide audit logging of access and system changes.
- Support version control for models and configuration changes.
- Operate within approved hosting environments.

Vendor portability is a critical safeguard. Contracts for AI systems must include provisions that:

- Prevent exclusive dependence on proprietary platforms where feasible
- Ensure exportability of trained models and datasets
- Require documentation of system architecture and dependencies

This reduces long-term vendor lock-in risk and protects the Government's ability to transition systems if required.

Security requirements will apply proportionately to risk-tier classification. High-risk systems will require enhanced monitoring and stricter audit procedures.

Infrastructure governance thus ensures that AI systems will strengthen, rather than weaken, Malawi's cybersecurity posture.

7.4. Cost discipline and energy considerations

Compute-intensive AI systems can generate significant recurring costs, particularly where models require continuous retraining or high-volume data processing. Under fiscal constraints, cost predictability and sustainability are essential.

AI deployment proposals must therefore include:

- Estimated compute and storage requirements
- Projected recurring hosting costs
- Clear justification of expected efficiency or productivity gains

The infrastructure model therefore favours centralised compute with distributed access rather than distributed high-performance hardware.

Malawi will not pursue large-scale sovereign model training infrastructure in the immediate term. The AI Landscape Assessment indicates that such investment would exceed current institutional and fiscal capacity.

Compute resources will be provisioned in line with verified demand from high priority and flagship programmes and readiness conditions. Expansion will follow demonstrated use and performance, not speculative projections.

Energy reliability is also a design consideration. In rural or district-level deployments, AI tools must operate within intermittent power conditions. Systems that require continuous high-energy processing at edge locations will not be prioritised.

AI deployments must thus consider:

- Hosting in environments with stable power supply.
- Avoidance of energy-intensive on-premise infrastructure where feasible.
- Efficient configuration of inference workloads.
- Lifecycle cost projections covering maintenance and monitoring.

Environmental sustainability considerations align with UNESCO's policy action area on ecosystems and responsible resource use. In Malawi's context, sustainability is linked directly to operational reliability and cost exposure.

8. Capacity, Skills and Ecosystem Development

The AI Landscape Assessment identifies skills, institutional capacity, and ecosystem maturity as binding constraints on Malawi's ability to adopt Artificial Intelligence responsibly and at scale. While there are emerging university initiatives and pockets of technical expertise, there is no coordinated national programme for AI capability development within government. Ministries rely heavily on external vendors and consultants. Procurement, oversight, and lifecycle management skills remain limited.

The Digital Transformation Strategy identifies similar delivery constraints, including uneven technical capability, weak vendor management, and limited reuse of shared standards. These constraints become more consequential when AI systems are introduced, because AI requires continuous monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation.

Capacity development is therefore treated as a core foundation for AI scaling, not as an auxiliary or long-term aspiration. AI systems cannot be sustained without institutional ownership.

8.1. Public sector AI capability programme

A structured public sector AI capability programme will be established to support ministries responsible for flagship programmes and cross-government AI oversight.

This programme will focus on practical competencies rather than abstract technical theory. Priority skill areas include:

- Data management and data stewardship.
- Interpretation of AI system outputs.
- Risk classification and impact assessment processes.
- Vendor evaluation and procurement discipline.
- Model performance monitoring and incident reporting.
- Integration of AI systems into service delivery workflows.

This programme will be tiered and prioritise the following four capability areas:

AI Skills for Policy and Decision-Makers

Senior officials must understand the capabilities, limitations, and risks of AI systems. Targeted executive briefings and structured training modules will be introduced to support informed oversight and procurement decisions.

Technical and Integration Skills within ICT Units

Government ICT teams require practical training in AI system integration, API management, data preprocessing, model monitoring, and documentation standards. This does not require large-scale model development training, but it does require operational competence to supervise vendors and manage lifecycle risks.

Procurement and Vendor Management

Procurement units must be able to specify AI requirements, evaluate technical proposals, and enforce compliance with governance standards. Standard procurement templates and evaluation guidelines will be developed under this Strategy.

AI Assurance and Audit Capacity

Oversight institutions, including audit and regulatory bodies, will require training in AI system review, risk-tier evaluation, and documentation assessment. This ensures that AI governance mechanisms are enforceable in practice.

The Central AI Delivery Unit will coordinate this programme in collaboration with relevant training institutions and civil service training bodies.

8.2. Government<>Academia partnerships

Malawi's universities and academia represent an emerging but limited pool of AI and data science expertise. However, linkages between academia and government service delivery remain limited.

The Strategy promotes structured collaboration between government, academia, and higher education institutions to:

- Support development of local datasets and language resources.
- Applied research aligned with flagship programmes, particularly in agriculture and health.
- Provide internships and secondments linked to flagship AI programmes.
- Develop short-course programmes in data engineering and applied AI oversight.
- Joint supervision of student projects using anonymised public datasets where lawful.
- Short-term technical advisory arrangements.

These partnerships will focus on applied problem-solving rather than theoretical AI research disconnected from service delivery needs. Wherever feasible, joint research initiatives will prioritise agriculture analytics, health decision support tools, and public finance monitoring use cases.

University collaboration strengthens domestic capability and reduces long-term reliance on external technical providers.

8.3. Innovation ecosystem - startups and SME participation

Malawi's innovation ecosystem remains small but growing. The AI Landscape Assessment highlights limited access to compute resources, financing constraints, and lack of overall opportunities for public sector engagement.

The assessment also notes limited private sector AI capacity but identifies growing interest among technology startups and digital service providers. This Strategy recognises that local firms can contribute to adaptation, localisation, and maintenance of AI tools, particularly small-model and mobile-based applications.

The Strategy aims to create structured entry points for SMEs, startups, and innovative ventures through:

- Participation in controlled pilot projects linked to flagship programmes.
- Access to defined datasets under lawful and secure data-sharing protocols.
- Transparent procurement pathways for small-scale AI solutions.
- Technical standards guidance to reduce integration barriers.
- Transparent procurement processes for pilot projects.
- Modular contracting arrangements that allow smaller firms to contribute to defined components.
- Collaboration with local developers for Chichewa language tools and domain-specific applications.

The Strategy does not create broad AI grant programmes detached from priorities. Instead, innovation opportunities will be linked to clearly defined public sector use cases.

This approach aligns ecosystem development with stabilisation objectives and service performance improvement.

8.4. AI literacy and workforce readiness

AI deployment within public services will affect workflows and operational practices. Basic AI literacy across the public workforce is therefore necessary to reduce resistance, prevent misuse, and improve adoption. Similarly, AI adoption affects not only public servants but also frontline workers, and citizens interacting with AI-supported systems.

A national AI literacy initiative will therefore focus on:

- Basic understanding of AI capabilities and limitations.
- Awareness of rights and redress mechanisms under AI-supported services.
- Responsible use of AI tools within ministries.
- Inclusion of local language resources to improve accessibility.
- Introductory training modules for frontline staff interacting with AI-supported tools.
- Clear operational guidelines explaining system capabilities and limitations.
- Communication materials clarifying that AI systems are support tools, not workforce displacement mechanisms.

AI literacy supports trust, reduces misuse, and strengthens adoption.

In line with Malawi's policy position, AI will be deployed to support decision-making and reduce routine administrative burden, not to replace core public service functions.

In the broader labour market context, this Strategy aligns with national skills development initiatives under Malawi 2063. However, it does not attempt to transform the entire national skills ecosystem within five years. Workforce readiness efforts will focus on enabling effective use of AI in priority sectors rather than broad national AI specialisation. Youth employment linkages and digital job pathways are addressed more fully in Part VII.

Part IV. Priority AI Programmes (Focused and Sequenced)

9. Programme 1: Public Financial Management and Economic Stabilisation

9.1. Strategic rationale and development problem

Malawi's economic stabilisation agenda depends on strengthening domestic revenue mobilisation, improving expenditure control, and reducing leakages across public systems. The Digital Transformation Strategy and the AI Landscape Assessment both highlight constraints in analytical capacity, cross-system visibility, and timely identification of irregular patterns within revenue and procurement systems.

Revenue and expenditure platforms generate large volumes of transactional data. However, this data is not consistently analysed using advanced analytical methods. Manual review processes and static rule-based controls limit the ability to detect complex or emerging patterns of non-compliance.

Artificial Intelligence offers the ability to enhance analytical capability within existing systems. It can assist in identifying anomalies, prioritising audit cases, and detecting procurement irregularities. These applications directly support fiscal discipline and institutional reform objectives.

The programme is therefore positioned as an analytical enhancement to existing public financial management systems, not as a structural overhaul of legal or institutional mandates.

9.2. Scope of AI applications and system dependencies

AI applications under this programme will focus on:

- Risk scoring and anomaly detection within revenue administration datasets
- Pattern analysis within procurement and expenditure systems
- Predictive analytics to support expenditure monitoring and compliance prioritisation

All AI tools will function as decision-support systems. They will generate risk indicators and analytical insights to inform institutional review. Final enforcement and corrective decisions will remain subject to established legal procedures and human oversight.

Deployment depends on:

- Structured and reliable revenue, procurement, and expenditure datasets
- Secure interoperability mechanisms between relevant systems
- Hosting environments compliant with national infrastructure standards
- Governance controls defined under the Responsible AI Framework

Applications affecting compliance or enforcement decisions will be classified as high risk and subject to mandatory impact assessment and oversight requirements.

9.3. Safeguards, accountability and phased implementation

Given the sensitivity of financial and taxpayer data, this programme will operate under enhanced safeguards. These include:

- Mandatory AI Impact Assessments for high-risk applications
- Defined human oversight roles within revenue and audit institutions
- Secure data access controls and audit logging
- Documentation of model logic, limitations, and performance metrics

Primary accountability will rest with the Ministry responsible for finance, the revenue authority, and procurement oversight institutions. Cross-government technical coordination will follow the institutional architecture defined in Part V.

Implementation will follow a phased approach:

- Initial pilots in defined datasets following data quality improvements
- Evaluation of model performance and cost-effectiveness
- Controlled scaling only where measurable benefits are demonstrated

This sequencing ensures that AI deployment strengthens fiscal stabilisation without introducing unmanaged operational or legal risk.

10. Programme 2: Agriculture and Food Security

10.1. Strategic rationale and development problem

Agriculture remains the backbone of Malawi's economy and the primary livelihood source for the majority of the population. Productivity in the sector is vulnerable to climate variability, limited access to timely information, constrained extension capacity, and fragmented agricultural data systems. The AI Landscape Assessment identifies agriculture as a high-impact sector where applied, task-specific AI could deliver measurable gains if foundational data and governance conditions are met.

The Digital Transformation Strategy recognises that digital tools alone do not resolve structural bottlenecks in extension services, input distribution, or climate risk management. Information asymmetries persist between central authorities and smallholder farmers. Early detection of crop disease, forecasting of yield variability, and planning of input distribution remain constrained by limited analytical capacity and uneven data flows.

Artificial Intelligence offers the opportunity to strengthen agricultural decision support without replacing frontline service structures. AI can enhance climate and yield forecasting, support crop disease identification, improve targeting of agricultural inputs, and assist extension officers in delivering more timely and accurate advisory services.

This programme is therefore positioned as a productivity enhancement layer built on existing agricultural information systems, meteorological data, and extension service frameworks. It is not a structural replacement of extension systems, but an augmentation tool aligned with food security and economic stabilisation objectives.

10.2. Scope of AI applications and system dependencies

AI applications under this programme will focus on defined and development-oriented use cases, including:

- Crop disease detection support tools, potentially using image-based or pattern-recognition models adapted to local crop varieties.
- Climate and yield forecasting models to assist planning at national and district levels.
- Advisory support systems for extension officers, integrating agronomic best practices and localised data.
- Predictive analytics to improve input distribution planning and reduce duplication or leakage in agricultural subsidy programmes.

All AI tools will function as decision-support systems. Final agronomic advice, subsidy allocation decisions, and programme implementation choices will remain under institutional and human oversight.

Deployment depends on:

- Reliable agricultural production datasets and farm registries where available.
- Meteorological and climate data streams.
- Interoperability between agricultural management systems and digital identity systems where beneficiary targeting is involved.
- Hosting environments compliant with national infrastructure standards.
- Governance controls under the Responsible and Ethical AI Framework.

Applications influencing subsidy targeting or beneficiary eligibility will be classified as high risk and subject to mandatory impact assessment and oversight requirements. Advisory tools supporting extension officers are likely to fall within a lower risk tier but will still require documentation and monitoring.

Local language enablement in Chichewa and English is essential to ensure accessibility for smallholder farmers and extension workers. Systems must be designed for low-bandwidth and assisted-channel environments consistent with Malawi's rural connectivity realities.

10.3. Safeguards, accountability and phased implementation

Agricultural AI systems will operate under safeguards appropriate to their risk classification and service impact.

These include:

- AI Impact Assessments for high-risk applications, particularly those affecting subsidy targeting or eligibility.
- Defined human oversight roles within the Ministry responsible for agriculture and extension services.
- Documentation of model limitations, especially where climate forecasts or disease predictions carry uncertainty.

- Secure data access controls and audit logging for systems using beneficiary or farm registry data.
- Monitoring of model performance across regions to identify bias or performance disparities affecting rural communities.

Primary accountability will rest with the Ministry responsible for Agriculture and relevant implementing agencies overseeing extension services and agricultural programmes. Technical coordination and standards enforcement will follow the institutional architecture defined in Part V, including oversight by the AI Delivery Unit and strategic direction from the Digital Transformation and AI Council.

Implementation will follow a phased approach:

- Initial pilots in defined crops or districts following data quality assessment and stakeholder consultation.
- Evaluation of agronomic accuracy, usability by extension officers, and cost-effectiveness.
- Controlled scaling aligned with demonstrated productivity gains and governance compliance.

Scaling decisions will consider operational sustainability, training capacity, and infrastructure readiness. AI deployment in agriculture will prioritise measurable improvements in productivity, resilience, and service delivery efficiency without creating new exclusion risks.

11. Programme 3: Health System Strengthening

11.1. Strategic rationale and development problem

Malawi's health system faces persistent workforce shortages, uneven diagnostic capacity across districts, supply chain inefficiencies, and limited real-time visibility into service delivery performance. Rural facilities in particular operate with constrained specialist capacity and limited access to timely diagnostic support.

The AI Landscape Assessment identifies health as a high-potential sector for applied AI, particularly where decision support can augment scarce clinical expertise and improve system-level forecasting. However, it also highlights governance, data quality, and trust constraints that must be addressed before scaling.

The Digital Transformation Strategy has advanced digital health records and supply chain systems in parts of the health system. Yet analytical capability remains limited. Forecasting of medicine demand, early detection of stock-outs, and support for triage and referral decisions are not consistently optimised.

Artificial Intelligence can enhance decision support within existing health information systems. It can assist in forecasting demand for essential medicines, identifying abnormal supply chain patterns, and supporting clinical triage in defined contexts.

This programme is positioned as a system-strengthening measure that augments health professionals and improves operational efficiency. It does not replace clinical judgement or regulatory authority.

11.2. Scope of AI applications and system dependencies

AI applications under this programme will focus on practical and clearly defined use cases, including:

- Supply chain forecasting to reduce medicine stock-outs and optimise distribution planning.
- Predictive analytics to identify high-risk inventory gaps or distribution anomalies.
- Clinical decision-support tools for defined conditions, where structured data allows augmentation of diagnostic processes.
- Telemedicine augmentation tools that support referral prioritisation and triage in resource-constrained settings.

All AI systems will function as decision-support tools. Final clinical and administrative decisions will remain under the authority of licensed health professionals and health system managers.

Deployment depends on:

- Reliable and standardised health information system datasets.
- Interoperable health data architecture consistent with national data governance rules.
- Secure hosting environments aligned with national infrastructure standards.
- Strong privacy and confidentiality controls under the Data Protection Act (2024).
- Governance mechanisms defined under the Responsible and Ethical AI Framework.

Applications influencing clinical decisions or patient prioritisation will generally fall into the high-risk category and require mandatory impact assessments, enhanced documentation, and continuous oversight.

Given the sensitivity of health data, secure interoperability and strict access controls are non-negotiable prerequisites.

11.3. Safeguards, accountability and phased implementation

Health-sector AI systems will operate under enhanced safeguards due to the potential impact on patient safety and rights.

These include:

- Mandatory AI Impact Assessments for clinical decision-support applications.
- Clear documentation of model accuracy, limitations, and appropriate use conditions.
- Defined human oversight responsibilities within health facilities.
- Explicit prohibition of fully autonomous diagnostic decision-making.
- Monitoring for bias that may disproportionately affect rural populations or vulnerable groups.
- Secure audit logging of system usage and override decisions.

Primary accountability will rest with the Ministry responsible for Health and relevant health service delivery authorities. Regulatory oversight bodies within the health sector will be engaged where clinical tools are introduced. Cross-government technical coordination will follow the institutional architecture defined in Part V.

Implementation will follow a phased approach:

- Initial pilots in defined facilities or supply chain segments.
- Independent evaluation of clinical safety, usability, and cost-effectiveness.
- Controlled expansion only after validation of governance compliance and operational performance.

Scaling will prioritise improvements in system efficiency, reduced stock-outs, and enhanced clinical support in underserved districts. AI deployment in health will be evidence-based and safety-first.

12. Programme 4: Education and Human Capital

12.1. Strategic rationale and development problem

Malawi's education system faces high enrolment levels, constrained teacher capacity, uneven learning outcomes, and limited access to structured learning support outside the classroom. Rural schools in particular operate under resource constraints, with large class sizes and limited specialist subject support.

The AI Landscape Assessment identifies education as a sector where applied AI tools could support learning assistance, curriculum analysis, and teacher support, provided deployment remains aligned with governance safeguards and infrastructure realities. However, it also emphasises digital divide risks and the need for inclusive, language-accessible systems.

The Digital Transformation Strategy recognises that digital platforms alone do not guarantee improved learning outcomes. Information systems for education management are expanding, but analytical and adaptive capabilities remain limited.

Artificial Intelligence can augment teacher capacity, provide structured learning support tools, and enhance data analysis for education planning. It can assist in identifying learning gaps, supporting curriculum alignment, and improving visibility into performance patterns.

This programme is positioned as a teacher-support and learning-augmentation initiative. It does not replace educators or curriculum authority.

12.2. Scope of AI applications and system dependencies

AI applications under this programme will focus on defined and development-oriented use cases, including:

- Teacher support tools that assist lesson preparation and structured curriculum alignment.
- Learning assistance systems that provide structured practice and feedback to students.
- Analytics tools to identify performance gaps and inform resource allocation decisions.

- Curriculum analytics to improve alignment between instructional materials and national standards.

All AI tools will operate as support systems. Teachers and education authorities will retain final authority over instructional decisions and assessment outcomes.

Deployment depends on:

- Reliable education management information system datasets.
- Access to structured curriculum content and approved learning materials.
- Hosting environments aligned with national infrastructure standards.
- Governance controls under the Responsible and Ethical AI Framework.

Applications influencing student evaluation or progression decisions will be classified as high risk and subject to mandatory impact assessment and oversight requirements. Learning assistance tools that provide supplemental support without formal assessment authority are likely to fall within a lower risk tier but will still require documentation and monitoring.

Local language enablement in Chichewa and English is critical to ensure accessibility and equity. Systems must function effectively in low-bandwidth or assisted digital environments consistent with school infrastructure conditions.

12.3. Safeguards, accountability and phased implementation

Education-sector AI systems will operate under safeguards designed to protect fairness, inclusion, and data privacy.

These include:

- AI Impact Assessments for high-risk applications affecting assessment or progression.
- Documentation of model limitations and appropriate use cases.
- Monitoring for bias that may affect students from rural or disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Secure data protection measures for student records.
- Clear communication to teachers and parents regarding the supportive nature of AI tools.

Primary accountability will rest with the Ministry responsible for Education and relevant education authorities. Technical standards enforcement and cross-government coordination will follow the institutional arrangements defined in Part V.

Implementation will follow a phased approach:

- Initial pilots in defined districts or grade levels following data readiness checks.
- Evaluation of learning outcomes, usability by teachers, and cost-effectiveness.
- Controlled expansion aligned with infrastructure readiness and governance compliance.

Scaling decisions will prioritise measurable improvements in learning support and teacher workload reduction. AI deployment in education will remain aligned with the principle of augmentation rather than replacement.

Part V. Institutional Architecture and Delivery

13. Digital Transformation and AI Council

13.1. Strategic oversight and national coordination

The AI Landscape Assessment identifies the absence of a central AI coordination mechanism as a primary structural weakness. No institution currently provides unified direction, enforces standards, or maintains visibility over AI initiatives across government. This fragmentation risk mirrors the broader institutional coordination challenges identified in the National Digital Transformation Strategy.

To address this gap, Malawi will adopt a unified governance model for digital transformation and Artificial Intelligence anchored in a Digital Transformation and AI Council at the apex level.

The Council will:

- Provide strategic direction for digital and AI priorities.
- Approve cross-government AI policies and standards.
- Align AI investments with economic stabilisation objectives.
- Resolve inter-ministerial dependencies affecting flagship programmes.
- Ensure that AI deployment reinforces, rather than duplicates, Digital Public Infrastructure investments.

This arrangement prevents parallel governance tracks for digital and AI initiatives. AI will be governed as an extension of digital transformation, not as a separate technology domain.

13.2. Policy approval and standards authority

The Council will hold formal authority to:

- Approve national AI governance standards and risk-tier frameworks.
- Endorse priority AI programmes and sequencing.
- Require compliance with shared infrastructure and interoperability standards.
- Mandate reporting on AI system deployment and risk classification.

Policy authority at Council level ensures that AI adoption remains aligned with fiscal discipline and national reform priorities.

The Council will not manage technical implementation. Its role is strategic direction, standards endorsement, and cross-sector accountability.

13.3. Cross-sector coordination and reform alignment

AI initiatives cut across revenue administration, agriculture, health, education, and public financial management. Without coordinated oversight, sectoral deployments risk fragmentation and inconsistent safeguards.

The Council provides a forum for:

- Coordinating shared datasets and interoperability needs.
- Aligning sectoral AI projects with national infrastructure constraints.
- Ensuring that stabilisation-focused AI deployments reinforce public trust.
- Reviewing progress against strategic objectives.

This governance structure reflects both the AI Landscape Assessment's recommendation for coordinated scaling and the Digital Transformation Strategy's principle of centralised policy with decentralised delivery.

14. AI Delivery Unit and Standards Enforcement

14.1. Cross-government AI delivery support

The AI Landscape Assessment highlights limited public-sector AI skills and heavy reliance on external vendors. Ministries lack internal capacity to design, evaluate, and monitor AI systems independently.

To address this constraint, a cross-government AI Delivery Unit will be established, operating in close coordination with the existing eGovernment structures defined in the Digital Transformation Strategy.

The AI Delivery Unit will:

- Provide technical guidance to ministries implementing flagship programmes.
- Reviewing AI project proposals for standards compliance
- Support preparation of AI impact assessments.
- Maintain the national AI systems registry.
- Supporting ministries with architecture alignment and integration
- Assist in procurement specification and vendor evaluation.
- Monitoring adherence to hosting and procurement standards

The Unit will not centralise all AI development. Ministries will remain responsible for sector implementation. The Unit's role is to ensure consistency, compliance, and reuse.

14.2. Technical assurance and registry management

The Responsible and Ethical AI Framework requires enforceable mechanisms. To address the lack of visibility identified in the AI Landscape Assessment, all government AI systems must be registered prior to operational deployment. The AI Delivery Unit will manage this registry.

The AI Delivery Unit will operationalise these mechanisms by:

- Reviewing system risk classifications.
- Verifying completion of mandatory impact assessments for high-risk applications.
- Ensuring documentation of model logic, performance metrics, and limitations.
- Maintaining a central registry of AI systems deployed within government.

- Monitoring lifecycle updates and reclassification needs.

Registry management addresses the fragmentation risk identified in the AI Landscape Assessment and strengthens transparency. This mechanism ensures that governance standards are enforceable rather than advisory.

14.3. Procurement oversight and compliance authority

Vendor dependency and weak procurement discipline are identified risks in the AI Landscape Assessment. To mitigate these risks, the AI Delivery Unit will:

- Review AI-related procurement specifications for alignment with national standards.
- Ensure portability and exit provisions are included in contracts.
- Verify compliance with hosting and security requirements defined in Part III.
- Require knowledge transfer provisions for high-risk systems.

Compliance authority will be exercised through standards review and reporting obligations to the Digital Transformation and AI Council. This model reinforces fiscal discipline and reduces long-term operational risk.

15. Regulatory and Oversight Alignment

15.1. Data protection and legal compliance

The Data Protection Act (2024) provides the legal foundation for lawful data processing in Malawi. AI systems that process personal data must comply fully with this Act.

The Data Protection Commissioner will:

- Provide oversight of data-sharing arrangements.
- Review compliance in high-risk AI systems involving personal data.
- Participate in consultation processes for sensitive deployments.

This alignment ensures that AI governance is anchored in existing legal frameworks rather than creating parallel regimes.

15.2. Sector regulators and professional oversight

In regulated sectors where AI systems are introduced, such as finance, health, or education, sector regulators will retain oversight authority within their mandates. AI governance mechanisms will complement, not replace, sector regulation.

Audit institutions will play a role in reviewing AI-enabled systems within public financial management and other sectors. The Strategy recognises that audit capacity for AI systems will require strengthening, as outlined in Part III.

Clear delineation of roles prevents duplication between governance bodies and preserves existing accountability structures.

AI systems supporting clinical decision-making or influencing regulated financial processes must comply with existing sector standards.

This approach avoids regulatory duplication and preserves institutional mandates.

15.3. Enforcement and accountability architecture

Public accountability mechanisms remain central to AI deployment.

The institutional architecture established in this Part ensures that:

- Strategic oversight resides at the apex level
- Technical standards are enforced through a central delivery unit
- Regulatory compliance remains within statutory authorities
- Sector ministries retain implementation responsibility

Internal audit institutions, parliamentary oversight structures, and relevant accountability bodies will retain authority to review AI-enabled processes. Embedding AI oversight within existing accountability structures strengthens institutional trust and avoids creating separate review silos.

This layered structure addresses the coordination and enforcement gaps identified in the AI Landscape Assessment. It ensures that Artificial Intelligence deployment is governed, monitored, and aligned with Malawi's economic stabilisation and service transformation agenda.

Part VI. Implementation, Monitoring and Adaptive Governance

16. Phased Implementation Roadmap (2026-2031)

The AI Landscape Assessment makes clear that Malawi's readiness gaps are structural and cannot be resolved through rapid or parallel scaling. Institutional coordination, data quality, infrastructure capacity, and skills constraints define the pace of adoption.

Implementation will therefore follow a phased, governance-led approach.

Phase 1: Governance and foundations (2026-2027)

The initial phase will prioritise institutional readiness and strengthening enabling conditions before expanding AI use cases.

Key priorities during this phase include:

- Establishment of the Digital Transformation and AI Council.
- Operationalisation of the AI Delivery Unit.
- Finalisation of national AI governance standards and risk-tier frameworks.
- Development of the AI systems registry and impact assessment templates.
- Identification and strengthening of priority datasets.
- Data quality assessments for flagship programme datasets.
- Capacity-building initiatives for priority ministries, and oversight institutions.

During this phase, limited pilot projects may be initiated in selected sectors, but scaling will not proceed until governance mechanisms are fully operational.

This sequencing directly reflects the AI Landscape Assessment's finding that policy ambition currently exceeds execution capacity.

Phase 2: Flagship pilots with controlled scaling (2027-2029)

Once foundational governance and data conditions are in place, controlled pilot deployments will expand within the four flagship programme areas.

This phase will focus on:

- Evaluating pilot AI applications in revenue, agriculture, health, and education.
- Implementing AI applications in defined datasets and districts.
- Conducting mandatory AI impact assessments for high-risk systems.
- Evaluating model performance, cost-effectiveness, and operational feasibility.
- Strengthening interoperability between relevant digital systems.
- Refining oversight procedures based on practical experience.
- Gathering performance metrics to assess efficiency gains and service improvements.

Scaling decisions will depend on measurable results. Expansion will occur only where systems demonstrate reliability, cost-effectiveness, and compliance with governance standards.

This phase emphasises controlled scale rather than rapid expansion.

Phase 3: Institutionalisation and reuse (2029-2031)

The final phase will focus on embedding validated AI tools into routine institutional processes.

Actions include:

- Integration of AI-supported analytics into standard operating procedures.
- Integration of validated AI models into standard workflows.
- Reuse of shared models and datasets across ministries where appropriate.
- Expansion of successful models to additional regions or datasets.
- Continuous model monitoring and updating.
- Strengthening cross-ministerial analytics capability where justified.
- Periodic reclassification of system risk levels as functionality evolves.
- Continued workforce training and institutional knowledge transfer.

Institutionalisation ensures that AI systems are embedded within government processes rather than remaining project-based pilots.

17. Monitoring, Evaluation and Risk Management

Monitoring and evaluation under this Strategy are designed to ensure that AI contributes to stabilisation, productivity, and service delivery improvement without introducing unmanaged risk.

The AI Landscape Assessment emphasises the importance of trust, enforcement capacity, and adaptive governance. Monitoring must therefore cover both development impact and responsible AI compliance.

17.1. Development impact indicators

Impact measurement will focus on outcomes linked directly to flagship programme objectives, including:

- Improvements in anomaly detection accuracy within revenue systems
- Reduction in procurement irregularities identified through analytics
- Improved targeting efficiency in agricultural advisory services
- Measurable improvements in agricultural productivity indicators in pilot districts.
- Enhanced monitoring of education performance data
- Evidence of improved teacher support or student engagement in education pilots.
- Reduced stock imbalances in health supply chains

Indicators will be defined during programme design but must remain measurable and attributable. Indicators will focus on system-level improvements rather than technology metrics. Annual progress reports will be submitted to the Digital Transformation and AI Council.

17.2. Responsible AI compliance monitoring

Monitoring will also include verification of compliance with governance requirements defined in Part III. Compliance monitoring will be proportionate to risk classification and track:

- Completion and review of AI Impact Assessments, especially for high-risk systems.
- Accuracy and performance metrics for high-risk systems.
- Periodic review of AI system registry entries.
- Incidents or complaints linked to AI-supported processes.
- Bias monitoring results, particularly where systems affect eligibility or prioritisation.
- Adherence to hosting, portability, and security standards.

The AI Delivery Unit will compile periodic compliance reports for the Digital Transformation and AI Council. Monitoring strengthens institutional discipline and reinforces public trust.

17.3. Periodic readiness reassessment

Given the pace of technological change, AI readiness conditions will evolve during the five-year period. A structured readiness reassessment will be conducted at mid-term to evaluate:

- Reassess infrastructure and compute capacity.
- Data maturity improvements
- Evaluate skills development progress.
- Review governance enforcement performance.
- Adjust sequencing where necessary.

This adaptive approach ensures that scaling remains aligned with institutional capacity. This also ensures that the Strategy remains adaptive rather than static.

17.4. Public transparency reporting

Transparency strengthens public trust. The Government will publish periodic summaries of:

- Summary of AI systems deployed in government.
- Overview of high-risk applications and safeguards.
- Description of prohibited or restricted uses.
- High-level performance outcomes linked to stabilisation and service delivery.

Transparency will not disclose operational thresholds or sensitive enforcement methodologies but will provide sufficient information to reinforce accountability. Risk management is embedded throughout this Strategy rather than in a standalone section. Governance, monitoring, and phased scaling operate together to manage operational, legal, fiscal, and reputational risk.

Part VII. Youth Employment and Innovation Linkages

Artificial Intelligence deployment must contribute to national development beyond public sector efficiency. Malawi's demographic profile is characterised by a young population and a growing cohort entering the labour market each year. While this Strategy is not an industrial AI policy, it recognises that structured AI deployment within government can create demand for skills, support enterprise participation, and strengthen the innovation ecosystem.

Youth employment and innovation linkages under this Strategy are therefore aligned with service transformation rather than speculative AI market development. They reinforce institutional reform and provide structured entry points for skill development and enterprise participation.

18. AI and Youth Employment

18.1. Strategic linkage between AI adoption and youth skills

Malawi has a youthful population and growing demand for employment opportunities in digital and technology-related fields. However, the AI Landscape Assessment identifies limited structured pathways linking university education, technical training, and practical AI deployment within government or productive sectors.

This Strategy creates practical entry points for youth engagement by linking AI deployment to structured internship and placement mechanisms. These will include:

- Skills aligned to applied AI deployment in priority sectors.
- Practical training integrated into flagship programmes.
- Internships and secondments within ministries implementing AI systems.
- Data stewardship, analytics support, and AI system monitoring roles.
- Graduate trainee positions linked to data quality improvement and system integration projects.
- Short-term technical assignments supporting model adaptation and monitoring under supervision.

These pathways are not designed to create large numbers of AI research specialists. They are designed to support applied service delivery functions and strengthen institutional competence.

Wherever feasible, collaboration with universities will allow final-year students to contribute to defined applied analytics projects using anonymised public datasets. This supports experiential learning while contributing to public sector capacity.

18.2. Skills-to-service pathways

Structured pathways will be developed in collaboration with universities, technical colleges, and civil service training institutions to support:

- Short-course certification in data analytics and AI oversight.
- Internship placements within ministries deploying AI tools.
- Participation of young professionals in pilot evaluation and monitoring exercises.

- Applied research linked to agriculture, health, revenue, and education use cases.

These pathways will be coordinated with the AI Delivery Unit and relevant sector ministries to ensure relevance and supervision.

Youth engagement strengthens domestic capacity and reduces long-term dependence on external expertise.

18.3. Workforce transition and adaptation

AI deployment may alter workflows within government institutions. While AI tools are positioned as augmentation mechanisms, structured communication and change management are required to prevent workforce resistance or misunderstanding.

Institutions introducing AI-supported systems will:

- Provide orientation to staff on system capabilities and limitations.
- Clarify that AI tools support decision-making rather than replace professional roles.
- Define oversight and accountability responsibilities clearly.

The Strategy does not anticipate large-scale job displacement within the public sector during the 5 year period. The focus is on productivity enhancement and analytical support rather than automation of core professional roles.

Youth employment impacts are therefore expected to be positive through new technical roles, internships, and service integration pathways rather than through workforce displacement.

19. Innovation Ecosystem Strengthening

19.1. Targeted incubation aligned to public service demand

The AI Landscape Assessment highlights that Malawi's AI innovation ecosystem is nascent, with limited access to compute resources, financing, and structured procurement opportunities.

The Strategy does not propose broad AI incubation schemes detached from national priorities. Instead, innovation support will be targeted and linked directly to the four flagship programme clusters.

Sector ministries may identify specific technical needs, such as localisation of language tools, mobile advisory applications, or data visualisation dashboards. Based on these structured opportunities may be created for local firms to contribute through competitive procurement.

Targeted incubation may thus include:

- Support for SMEs developing small-model tools relevant to agriculture advisory, health analytics, or education support.
- Structured collaboration between startups and ministries under controlled pilot environments.
- Access to defined datasets under lawful and secure sharing arrangements.

Incubation efforts should therefore be problem-driven. Innovation challenges, hackathons, or pilot opportunities must be directly linked to public service needs rather than general AI experimentation.

Innovation activity will thus remain anchored to clearly defined service challenges rather than speculative frontier AI development.

19.2. Startup procurement access and pilot pathways

Public procurement remains a barrier for small firms. To address this, procurement processes for defined AI pilot projects may incorporate:

- Transparent pilot procurement windows.
- Modular contracting arrangements allowing smaller firms to bid for specific components.
- Clear documentation of technical requirements and governance standards to reduce integration risk.
- Transparent evaluation criteria aligned with Responsible AI requirements.

Sandbox or pilot mechanisms will be linked to real programme needs, particularly within agriculture and service delivery analytics. Participation does not exempt compliance. All vendors, regardless of size, must meet hosting, documentation, and defined governance standards.

Pilot pathways will be structured and time bound. Scaling beyond pilot stage will depend on measurable performance and compliance with national standards.

Innovation support will thus remain fiscally disciplined and aligned with measurable public value.

19.3. Regional and continental cooperation

Malawi will engage with regional and continental initiatives under the African Union and SADC digital cooperation frameworks to:

- Share lessons on responsible AI governance.
- Explore shared language resources and datasets where appropriate.
- Participate in peer learning related to applied AI in agriculture and public administration.

Regional cooperation will focus on knowledge exchange rather than capital-intensive shared compute ambitions.