

Countries in the Global South risk becoming mainly consumers of artificial intelligence if they are excluded from its development and from decisions on the rules governing the technology, Rwanda's Justice Minister Emmanuel Ugirashebuja said on Thursday.

Ugirashebuja said developing countries need not only access to AI but also opportunities to participate in its development and a voice in setting the rules and standards that govern it.

He made the remarks in Geneva, Switzerland, while addressing the first Harvard High-Level Forum on AI & the Future of Development, which brought together ministers, ambassadors, policymakers, researchers and representatives of international organisations.



Ugirashebuja said the AI debate in many countries in the Global South goes beyond the technology's capabilities, speed of development and safety to include questions of access, participation and governance.

"For many countries in the Global South, the conversation about AI is not only about the speed of technological development, its capabilities and its safety. It is also about access, participation in its development and having a voice in setting the rules and standards that govern it," he said.

He warned against a development model in which innovation takes place elsewhere, standards are established elsewhere and intellectual property remains concentrated in the hands of others, leaving developing countries largely as technology consumers.

The minister also urged policymakers to avoid extremes in adopting and regulating AI.

He said rushing to deploy AI without adequately understanding its potential effects could create problems, while excessively strict regulations could prevent developing countries from benefiting from opportunities created by the technology.

Ugirashebuja said countries should instead work to expand the development and use of AI while ensuring that its governance is clear, enforceable and accountable to the public.

The Geneva forum focused on AI's role in development and how governments, researchers, policymakers and international organisations can contribute to shaping the technology's use and governance.