



AI AND THE LAW
INSTITUTE

Our Future
Reimagined

CALL FOR PAPERS

08 - 10 July 2026 | Skukuza, Kruger National Park

Artificial Intelligence and the Law - Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals through Law, Governance and Practice

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The University of Johannesburg (UJ), through the AI and the Law Institute, continues to position African legal scholarship at the forefront of global debates on technology, justice, and societal transformation. As artificial intelligence (AI) increasingly shapes legal systems, governance structures, and access to justice, there is a growing need to interrogate these developments through the lens of sustainability and sustainable development.

Sustainability in law extends beyond environmental protection to encompass social justice, economic equity, institutional resilience, and intergenerational responsibility. These dimensions are reflected in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), many of which rely fundamentally on legal frameworks, regulatory capacity, constitutionalism, and the rule of law for their realization. In particular, SDGs such as **Goal 4** (Quality Education), **Goal 5** (Gender Equality), **Goal 8** (Decent Work and Economic Growth), **Goal 9** (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), **Goal 10** (Reduced Inequalities), **Goal 13** (Climate Action), **Goal 16** (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and **Goal 17** (Partnerships for the Goals) are deeply intertwined with law and legal governance.

Against this backdrop, this conference invites critical, interdisciplinary, and practice-oriented scholarships that examine how law, shaped by AI and other emerging technologies, can contribute to sustainable development in Africa and the Global South. The conference foregrounds the role of legal training, regulation, and professional practice in navigating the opportunities and risks of artificial intelligence, and in advancing sustainability-oriented legal systems that are ethical, inclusive, resilient, and responsive to societal needs.

THEME

This theme explores how AI-enabled legal systems, regulatory frameworks, and pedagogical practices can either advance or undermine sustainable development. It invites reflection on how the law must evolve to address the environmental, social, economic, and institutional implications of digital transformation, with particular attention to African contexts and decolonial perspectives.

The conference will feature keynote and distinguished addresses by leading figures in higher education, artificial intelligence, and global governance, including:

Professor Tshilidzi Marwala, Rector of the United Nations University (Keynote Speaker)

Professor Letlhokwa Mpedi, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Johannesburg (Keynote Speaker)

Their participation emphasises the conference's commitment to advancing globally relevant, Africa-centred scholarship on artificial intelligence, law, and sustainability.

SUB-THEMES (INDICATIVE)

Contributors are invited to engage with one or more of the following sub-themes, explicitly linking their analysis to sustainability and relevant SDGs:

1. Artificial Intelligence, Innovation and Sustainable Legal Systems

- AI, legal innovation, and sustainable institutions (SDGs 9 and 16)
- Regulating AI for socially and environmentally responsible innovation
- Sustainable digital governance and AI policy design in the Global South
- Comparative perspectives on AI regulation and sustainability

2. Law, Sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals

- The role of law in advancing the SDGs in Africa and the Global South
- Constitutionalism, the rule of law, and sustainable development (SDG 16)
- Legal indicators, accountability, and monitoring progress towards the SDGs
- Intergenerational justice and sustainability in legal reasoning

3. Legal Education for Sustainable Development

- Reimagining legal curricula to support sustainability and the SDGs (SDG 4)
- Integrating AI, sustainability, and ethics into legal pedagogy
- Clinical legal education, community engagement, and sustainable justice
- Building future-ready legal professionals for sustainable societies

4. Access to Justice, Equality and Inclusive Development

- AI, access to justice, and legal empowerment (SDGs 10 and 16)
- Algorithmic bias, discrimination, and substantive equality
- Gender justice, AI, and sustainable development (SDG 5)
- Indigenous knowledge systems, decoloniality, and inclusive legal innovation

5. Environmental Law, Climate Governance and Sustainability

- Climate change, environmental justice, and legal accountability (SDG 13)
- AI in environmental regulation, compliance, and enforcement
- Data governance, ecological sustainability, and energy ethics
- Corporate environmental responsibility and sustainable governance

6. Work, Professions and Sustainable Legal Practice

- The future of legal professions in the age of AI (SDG 8)
- Ethical, transparent, and sustainable legal practice models
- Regulation of legal technologies and professional responsibility
- Skills development and lifelong learning for sustainable legal careers

7. Governance, Public Law and Sustainable Institutions

- AI in public administration and sustainable decision-making
- Administrative justice, transparency, and accountability
- Procurement, infrastructure, and sustainability-oriented public law
- Partnerships between academia, the judiciary, government, and industry (SDG 17)

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:

- Abstracts should not exceed 300 words and must clearly outline the research, question, methodology, and relevance to the conference theme and sustainability/SDGs.
- Abstracts must include title, author(s), institutional affiliation, and contact details.
- Submissions must be original and previously unpublished.
- Full papers should be between 5 000 and 8 000 words, including references.
- Selected full papers from this conference will be published by the United Nations University (UNU), Macau, a United Nations–mandated research institution advancing policy-relevant scholarship on global challenges, including sustainability, governance, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence

IMPORTANT DATES

Abstract submission deadline: 2 April 2026

Notification of acceptance: 15 April 2026

Full paper submission: 30 June 2026

Conference date: 8 - 10 July 2026

REGISTRATION

Registration fees for the conference are R3,000. Authors with accepted abstracts will receive further details regarding registration and payment.

SUBMISSION & ENQUIRIES

Please submit abstracts and direct enquiries to: AlandtheLawInstitute@uj.ac.za

ABOUT THE AI AND THE LAW INSTITUTE

The AI and the Law Institute at the University of Johannesburg is a continental hub dedicated to advancing scholarship at the intersection of law, technology, and society. Its work focuses on developing ethical, regulatory, and pedagogical frameworks that support accountable AI governance, sustainable development, and socially responsive legal systems in Africa and beyond.

