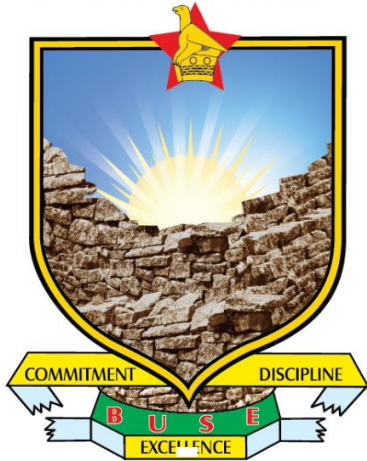SADC PF Symposium Theme: *Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Effective and Efficient Parliamentary Processes in the SADC Region: Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities*

Bindura University of Science Education

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EXCELLENCE

Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Parliaments in the SADC Region:
Insights from the Zimbabwean Context

Professor Ronald Manhibi,
Bindura University Science Education, Centre for AI Research – 2 June 2025

Purpose of the Presentation:

To Explore how AI can modernise parliamentary work through experiences, challenges, and opportunities

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Presentation Roadmap

Why AI	Data Realities	Grassroots Literacy	Collaboration Insights	Path Forward
The Imperative	The Challenge	Foundation	Projects	Recommendations

"If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses."

—Henry Ford

The Elephant in the Room: AI ≈ Data

AI Insights for SADC Parliaments
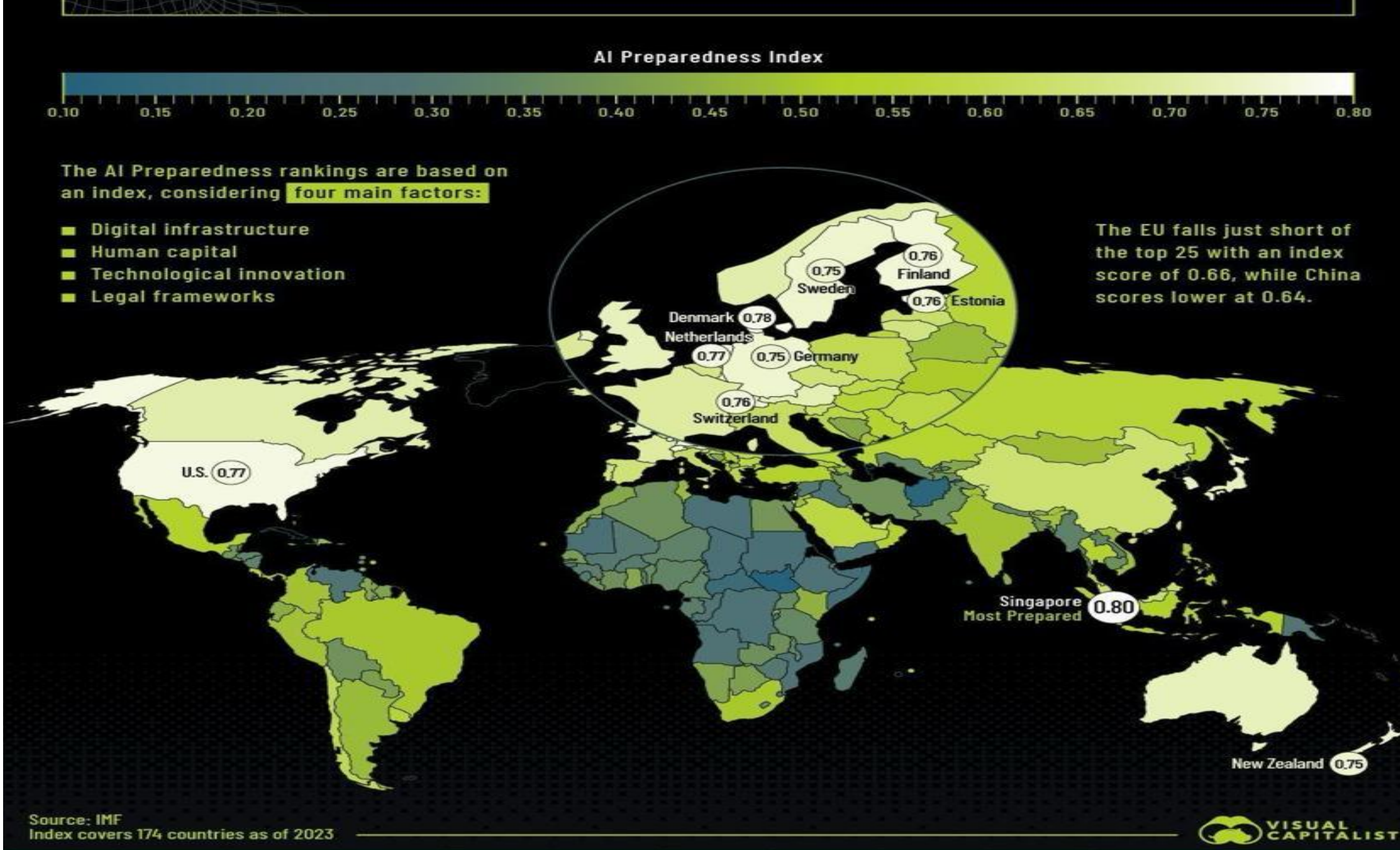
AI's Fundamental Truth

AI without data is nothing — Its power is **100% data-dependent**

Production Data
Manufacturing processes, electronics, vehicles

🚩 **Concentrated in China**

Consumption Data
Digital footprints, behaviors, preferences

🚩 **Captured by US Tech Giants**

SADC's Data Sovereignty Challenge

❌ **Limited Production Data**

🔗 **External Data Control**

❓ **No Context-Specific AI**

The Critical Question

"What data will power an African AI renaissance?"

This data deficit represents the most significant hurdle for SADC

African Context

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Anticipated Key Challenges during AI Implementation

- **Upgrading Legislative Workflows**
  Shifting from paper-heavy, manual processes to AI-enabled drafting, research, and oversight tools without disrupting parliamentary protocols.

- **Human–AI Collaboration Skills**
  Equipping MPs, committee clerks, and support staff with the digital fluency to interpret, question, and co-create with AI systems—so technology augments, does not confuse them during decision-making.

- **Trusted Data Foundations**
  Curating secure, standard-ised, machine-readable datasets (Hansard, bills, budgets, committee evidence) while safeguarding confidentiality and data-protection mandates.

- **Data Stewardship & Governance**
  Defining clear ownership, access controls, quality assurance, and ethical guidelines to prevent bias and misuse of legislative data and AI outputs.

- **Change-Management & Culture Shift**
  Building leadership buy-in, aligning incentives, and fostering a culture that rewards experimentation—*ensuring staff adaptation is proactive rather than reactive.*

Zimbabwe Parliamentary AI Survey: The Skills Gap

Metric	Finding (n = 59)
Want further AI training	100 % of respondents
Self-rated "Good" or "Advanced" understanding	9 people (15 %)
Basic / Moderate / No knowledge	50 people (85 %)

- **This 85 % skills-gap is the single biggest barrier—and opportunity—for SADC legislatures:** building structured, hands-on AI capacity for Members, committee staff, and support services must move from 'nice-to-have' to 'first order business' if we want credible oversight and policy-making in the AI era."

Why this matters

- AI adoption will stall unless MPs, committee clerks & support staff can confidently **interpret, question, and oversee** AI tools.

- A unified **Parliamentary AI Capacity-Building Programme** is the quickest, highest-impact win for SADC legislatures.

Where Do We Start? Digital Transformation & AI Literacy

Build Digital Foundations First

Connectivity

Devices

Process Digitisation

Invest in AI Literacy: Kindergarten to Tertiary

1. Train Teachers
2. Embed Robotics in Curricula
3. Integrate Data Science
4. Electronics Education

Our Goal

We need to urgently cultivate and develop an African Expression of AI
Reflecting local cultures, values & addressing regional challenges

African Context

Early Wins for Parliaments: Partner with the industry and Academia

Hackathons and Coding Clubs

Maker-Spaces

Low-Cost Devices (Affordable for all)

Support for locally-driven solutions

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There is a need for a synergistic approach when dealing with AI

AI is revolving and impacting on how we have traditionally done things in a way that seems like it doesn't care about whether you are interested in it or not!

Practical Pathways: The BUSE–Parliament Collaboration

Academia-Legislature Partnership

BUSE Centre for AI × Parliament of Zimbabwe driving real-world AI pilots and digital transformation

🚀 Active AI Projects & Solutions

Shuttle Buddie
Fleet Management

MP Attendance
Digital Tracking

Document Control
Digital Archive

Workflow Automation
Jobs, Leave, Procurement

Titus Platform
Hansard Translation

Bill-Tracker
Legislative Monitoring

Chiringa M&E
Dashboard Analytics

AI-powered Chatbots
Citizen Engagement

Key Lessons from the Collaboration

▶▶ **Rapid Prototyping is critical**

👥 **Shared Governance produces fast results**

⇄ **Continuous Skills Transfer is fundamental**

8+
Active Projects

Collaboration Opportunities for SADC Parliaments

SADC-wide AI Forums

Parliamentary-Academic AI Forum (hosted periodically).s

Legislative AI Accelerator

Fund a SADC Legislative AI Accelerator (grants for localized AI projects promoting SADC languages and datasets).

AI Knowledge Portal

Launch an AI Knowledge Portal for cross-country learning.

AI Insights for SADC Parliaments

◎ Strategic Roadmap for AI-Powered Parliamentary Excellence

Aligned with Vision 2030 & Agenda 2063

Close the Data Gap
- Foster local production networks
- Regain consumption data control
- Build sovereign datasets

Prioritise Strategic Niches
- AI in legislation innovations
- Renewable energy components
- Public-sector robotics

Enable SMEs & Innovators
- Open financial systems
- Accessible procurement pathways
- Innovation incubators

Publish AI Strategies
- National AI roadmaps
- Regional coordination
- Readiness assessments

Triple-Helix Collaboration
- Government • Industry • Academia
- Knowledge sharing platforms
- Joint innovation projects

Scale AI Literacy
- Society-wide education
- MP micro-credentials
- Civil servant training

Embed Ethics & Governance from Day One

🛡 **Build Public Trust**   👁 **Ensure Transparency**   👥 **Promote Accountability**   ♥ **Serve Public Good**

🕐 Implementation Phases

2024-2025
Foundation Building
Digital infrastructure, literacy programs

2026-2027
Pilot Implementation
Strategic partnerships, niche projects

**2028-2030**
Scale & Integration
Regional coordination, full deployment

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Summary and Conclusion

The key idea of this presentation was to highlight that due to the pace at which AI is impacting all industries and business sectors (The SADC region is not an exception):

- It can no longer be ignored and avoided.

- Everyone needs to understand it (especially policymakers) since it is now part of our daily lives.

- As leaders, it is crucial to understand AI to harness opportunities and address challenges.

AI Insights for SADC Parliaments
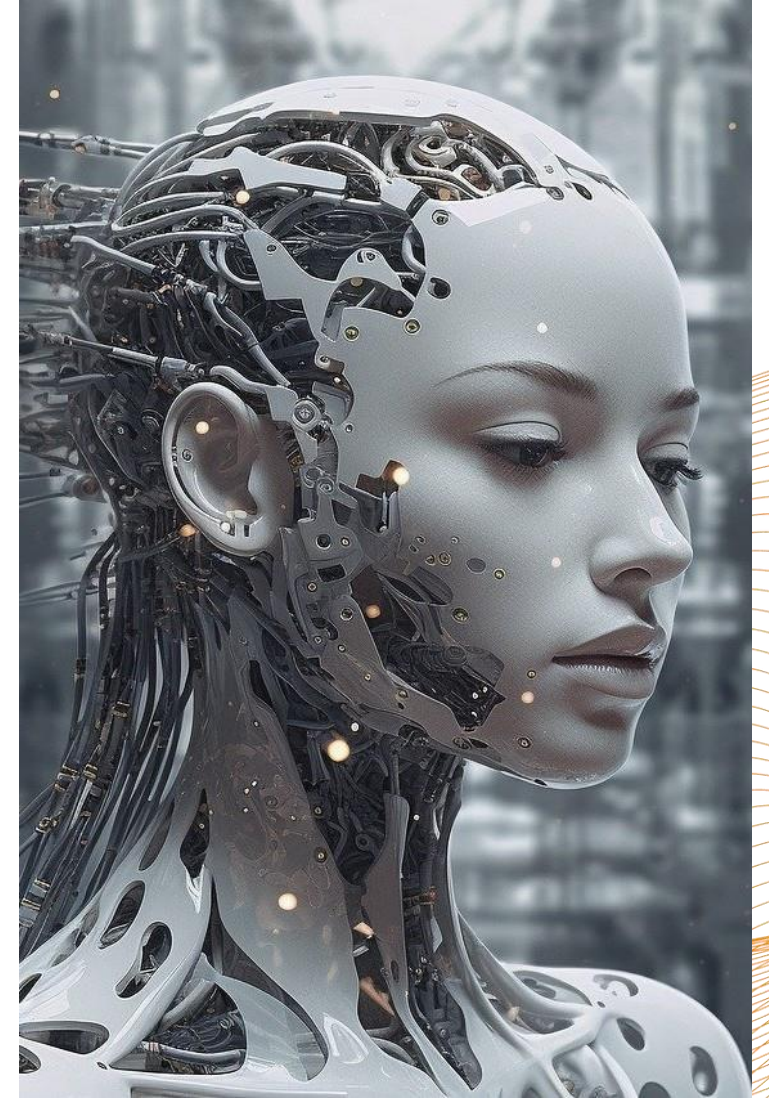
Thank you,
Merci
Obrigado

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