Report of a conference planning (sandpit) event on indigenous approaches to the regulation of digital assets and Artificial Intelligence in Africa on 11th July 2023, held at Marriott Kampala Skyz Hotel

Background

Dr Édouard Kitio, the Director of the United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFRI) and Dr Maureen Mapp of the University of Birmingham Law School hosted a one-day sandpit event on 11th July 2023. The event which forms part of a research collaboration was attended by the African Centre of Cyberlaw and Crime Prevention (ACCP), some members of the Working Group on the regulation of digital assets and emerging technologies in Uganda (set up in 2018) and key policy makers, legal practitioners, academics, and industry partners.

The sandpit event was designed to generate innovative ideas about indigenous approaches to regulation of digital assets that include views from diverse and rural based groups. It aimed to draw on lessons learned from previous roundtables and workshops co-hosted by UNAFRI and Birmingham Law School between 2016-2019 and develop ideas for a funding bid to host an Africa wide conference on the regulation of distributed ledger technologies and Artificial Intelligence. Specifically, the Sandpit provided an opportunity to evaluate the progress of the UN 2017 Kampala Declaration of Fundamental Principles on the regulation of distributed ledger technologies, and the Fintech policy (2019) in engendering indigenous approaches to regulation.

About the Sandpit

In her opening remarks, Dr Maureen Mapp of the University of Birmingham Law School explained how sandpits create intensive discussion among multi or cross disciplinary teams which fosters lateral thinking for example through group work and brainswarming activities. The aim was to develop innovative solutions by working with available tools/resources. The process of a successful sandpit would be building connections, mapping the territory, generate ideas, create teams/networks, and ultimately develop ideas for a funding bid.

The objectives of the sandpit were to have discussions around the style of the proposed conference, its objectives (including purpose, goal, how to measure success) and identify the target audience, speakers, and prospective funders. This sandpit event was designed to develop ideas for a funding bid to host an Africa wide conference on localised approaches to the regulation of digital assets while drawing on lessons learned from hosting previous events by UNAFRI-Birmingham (2016-2019). The proposed conference theme and sub themes would feed into UNAFRI's operational objective on the initiation and promotion of indigenous and innovative approaches, drawing on African traditions and developments in the field of crime prevention and control.

Keynote address

In his Keynote address, Dr. Édouard Kitio, the Director of UNAFRI, thanked Dr. Maureen Mapp for continuing the partnership with Birmingham university in areas of finding indigenous solutions to crime prevention. Dr Kitio outlined the role of UNAFRI in implementing activities in research, training, and advisory services that are all aimed at crime prevention and criminal justice. He pointed out that although internet facilitated innovations were exciting at the beginning, they could later become a threat or a dangerous asset to the world if they were embraced by criminals engaging in activities like terrorism, illegal firearm possession, money laundering and cybercrime. There was a need for institutions working in these areas to collaborate to combat the vice.

Dr Kitio reiterated that indigenous approaches featured in previous work between UNAFRI and Birmingham Law School on the regulation of cryptocurrency and distributed ledger technologies, and that it was timely to reassess the outcomes.

Session 1 Mapping the Territory

In reviewing the previous roundtables and workshops held between 2016 – 2019, participants looked at lessons learned from the first round table that considered ways of creating awareness and drafting instructive guidance on regulation of Virtual currencies. The issue then was how to engage with pluralist communities. This question was revisited in the 2017 UN (Kampala) Declaration that set out principles to underpin the regulation of distributed ledger technologies like trust, legality, and socio-cultural acceptability. The theme of the 2018 policy makers workshop was “socio-cultural legitimacy drives economic and technological development” which was picked up by the Working group on the regulation of digital assets and emerging technologies in Uganda that was set up in 2018. The group presented its research brief and a Fintech policy to the Minister of State for Finance (Economic Development) in 2019.

Participants agreed that the problem was how to make regulatory frameworks more inclusive. If the planned conference was to align with UNAFRI objectives of achieving indigeneity in the regulation of digital assets and technologies that are powered by artificial intelligence, then there was a need to widen the range of stakeholders to include the public, and those stakeholders who had not previously been engaged with the UNAFRI-Birmingham events. Examples included the Capital Market Authority, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) office in Kampala, traditional leaders, and Kampala City Traders Association (Kacita). The inclusion of youth initiatives like Stanbic for youth groups, the Innovation village, and the national Youth Council (which has branches at the district and village level) was underscored.

Sessions 2 and 3 – Goal setting

The session discussed what SMART conference goals might look like.

Participants proposed a specific conference goal namely to host an Africa wide conference on indigenous approaches to the regulation of digital assets (including their underlying

technologies). The purpose was to consider the role of cultural approaches to deliver a meaningful new chapter in digital asset regulation, while drawing on lessons from previous attempts at regulation in order to assess what this might mean for the future regulation, including of Artificial Intelligence in Africa. It was agreed that the conference goal was relevant to the overall operational objective of UNAFRI. To this end, a conference theme was proposed along the lines of 'Embracing Indigeneity: Indigenous Approaches to the Regulation of Digital Assets and lessons for Artificial Intelligence regulation in Africa.'

The conference objectives included publicity via websites, newsletter, media, magazines, and various platforms. The output was a conference report and papers to be published in a special edition of a prestigious journal. It was agreed that a conference planning team would further define what success would look like and choose the methods and tools for measuring the success of the conference.

The group considered the complexity of arranging a conference and decided to set realistic goals. The conference would be hybrid. One hundred (100) delegates would be invited to the in-person event in Kampala where UNAFRI has its head office, and there would be a provision for online participation (like live streaming/Zoom). Given that UNAFRI has three official languages of English, French and Arabic, there was need for official translation service. In addition, the Police and Ministry for Foreign affairs would need to be included in preparations for security and protocol provision.

A large enough venue was required to accommodate the delegates and provide break out rooms for group activities. Depending on availability of funding, it was anticipated that at least 20% of the delegates would come from the regions outside of East Africa.

In terms of a timeframe, it was agreed that one calendar year gave sufficient time to organise the conference, submit funding bids, invite speakers and delegates, and publicise the conference. A Gantt chart would be developed by the organisers to help plan for the event.

Closing remarks

Mr Andrew Munanura, the head of Legal and Training at UNAFRI thanked the participants for getting involved in the sandpit and planning for the conference. He set out the various projects that UNAFRI is working on for the year 2024 and highlighted their attempts to build a data base of experts that mainly targets African academia, law practitioners and enforcers working in the field of crime prevention and control, and related fields. He pledged UNAFRI's support with sourcing for funds for the conference.

Next steps

Following the sandpit event, a conference planning group is to be established to plan the conference and put forward a funding bid. The planning group will finalise the concept note and the schedule of conference sessions, topic selection, key speakers, chairs of sessions and other matters, which were developed by the subgroups during the sandpit event.

List of participants (UNAFRI and the Working group)

Dr Édouard Kitio, The Director, UNAFRI

Mr Andrew Munanura, Legal and Training, UNAFRI

Mr Patrick Mwaita, Programme officer, UNAFRI

Ms Grace Kobusinge, Bilingual Secretary UNAFRI

Professor Eric P Kibuka Research Fellow, UNAFRI

Professor Sizwe L. Snail ka Mtuze, African Centre for Cyberlaw and Cybercrime Prevention

Associate Professor Anthony Kakooza, Makerere University Law School

Associate Professor Maureen Mapp, University of Birmingham Law School

Ms Dorothy Nakyambadde, Uganda Revenue Authority (Research Division)

Mr Cyrus Barigye, Director ICT Systems & Security, Financia Intelligence Authority

Mr Ivan Bwire, Financial Intelligence Authority

Mr Baker Birikujja, Manager Licensing & Legal Affairs, Personal Data Protection Office

Mr Badru Mulindwa, Senior Assistant Director of Public Prosecutions (Research and Training)

Mr Kenneth Muhangi, KTA Advocates & Solicitors

Mr Blair Ntambi, KTA Advocates & Solicitors

Ms Monica Nakanwagi Muwonge, Legal practitioner

Mrs Margaret Musoke Kibuuka, UNAFRI

Mr Charles Mutyaba, Registry UNAFRI

Mr Stephen Jumba, IT services, UNAFRI

Report prepared by Grace Kobusinge UNAFRI and Dr Maureen Mapp (Convenor).
If you have any queries, please contact the convenor at M.O.Mapp@bham.ac.uk.

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