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The United Nations Call to Enhance International Cooperation for Capacity-Building on Artificial Intelligence

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly evolved into a transformative technology that permeates various facets of modern life, ranging from healthcare and education to finance and national security. Recognizing the profound implications and global nature of AI, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted Resolution A/78/311 which aims at fostering international cooperation regarding capacity-building in AI and ensuring that its development and deployment are ethical, equitable, and beneficial to all.

L'intelligence artificielle (IA) est rapidement devenue une technologie transformatrice qui imprègne diverses facettes de la vie moderne, allant des soins de santé et de l'éducation à la finance et à la sécurité nationale. Reconnaissant les implications profondes et la nature mondiale de l'IA, l'Assemblée générale des Nations Unies (AGNU) a adopté la résolution A/78/311 qui vise à encourager la coopération internationale en matière de renforcement des capacités dans le domaine de l'IA et à faire en sorte que son développement et son déploiement soient éthiques, équitables et bénéfiques pour tous.

La Inteligencia Artificial (IA) se ha convertido rápidamente en una tecnología transformadora que impregna diversas facetas de la vida moderna, desde la sanidad y la educación hasta las finanzas y la seguridad nacional. Reconociendo las profundas implicaciones y la naturaleza global de la IA, la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas (AGNU) adoptó la Resolución A/78/311 que tiene como objetivo fomentar la cooperación internacional en relación con la creación de capacidad en IA y garantizar que su desarrollo y despliegue sean éticos, equitativos y beneficiosos para todos.

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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly evolved into a transformative technology that permeates various facets of modern life, ranging from healthcare and education to finance and national security. Recognizing the profound implications and global nature of AI, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted Resolution A/78/311, which focuses on fostering international cooperation in AI. This resolution highlights the importance of collaborative efforts to ensure that AI development and deployment are ethical, equitable, and beneficial to all humanity. It noted that most countries, especially developing ones, have yet to get access, use, and benefit from AI, and that the global digital divide continues to widen. The Resolution was co-sponsored by over 27 developing countries including China, one of the most advanced countries in AI which currently leads the patent race for generative AI.

Issues around the development and deployment of AI have prompted significant activity in the context of the United Nations (UN), including the adoption of the UNGA Resolution A/78/L.49, the first resolution on the subject, and proposals relating to AI in the drafts under consideration for the Pact for the Future (action 29) and for the Global Digital Compact (paragraphs 49-62), both expected to be adopted at the forthcoming Summit of the Future in September 2024.

This paper provides an analysis of Resolution A/78/311, examining its key elements, underlying principles, and the main actions called for to enhance international cooperation on capacity-building to bridge the AI and other digital divides between and within countries.

Background and Context

The rapid advancements in AI technology present both opportunities and challenges. While AI has the potential to drive economic growth, improve public services, and address complex global issues, it also raises significant ethical, social, and economic concerns. Issues such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, job displacement, and the potential misuse of AI for malicious purposes necessitate a coordinated international response. The United Nations General Assembly, through Resolution A/78/311, seeks to address these challenges by promoting international cooperation in AI.

Key Sections of Resolution A/78/311

Resolution A/78/311 outlines several key sections aimed at fostering international cooperation in AI. They include:

1. **Promoting Ethical AI Development:** The resolution emphasizes the need for AI technologies to be developed and used in ways that respect human rights, uphold ethical standards, and promote social good.

2. **Ensuring Inclusivity and Equity:** Recognizing the potential for AI to exacerbate existing inequalities, the resolution stresses the importance of ensuring that AI benefits all segments of society, particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups. It advocates for measures to bridge the digital divide and promote equitable access to AI technologies.

3. **Fostering International Collaboration:** The resolution underscores the importance of international collaboration in AI research, development, and deployment. It encourages Member States to share best practices, collaborate on AI projects, and participate in international forums to discuss AI governance.

4. **Building Capacity and Skills:** To ensure that all countries can benefit from AI, the resolution advocates for investment in education and capacity-building initiatives. This includes developing AI literacy, training AI professionals, and supporting research and innovation in AI.

5. **Addressing Security and Safety Concerns:** The resolution highlights the need to address security and safety concerns related to AI. It calls for the development of robust frameworks to prevent the misuse of AI and protect against risks such as cyberattacks.

Ethical AI Development

One of the central themes of Resolution A/78/311 is the promotion of ethical AI development. The resolution acknowledges the need for AI technologies to be designed and used in ways that respect human dignity, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. This involves addressing issues such as bias and discrimination in AI systems, ensuring data privacy and protection, and promoting transparency in AI decision-making processes.

The establishment of international guidelines and standards could contribute to ensure ethical AI development. This includes creating frameworks for the ethical design, development, and deployment of AI technologies. Such frameworks should be based on principles of fairness, accountability, and transparency, ensuring that AI systems are designed to mitigate biases, provide explanations for their decisions, and be held accountable for their actions.

Inclusivity and Equity

The resolution emphasizes the importance of ensuring that AI benefits all segments of society, particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups. It acknowledges the risk that AI could exacerbate existing inequalities and calls for measures to promote inclusivity and equity in AI development and deployment.

To achieve this, the resolution advocates for policies and initiatives that bridge the digital divide and promote equitable access to AI technologies. This includes investing in digital infrastructure, providing education and training in AI, and ensuring that AI applications are accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, or geographic location.

Resolution A/78/311 "*calls upon* the international community to provide and promote a fair, open, inclusive and non-discriminatory business environment" and emphasized the "positive benefits of open-source software, open models andopen data, among other methods and business models, in spreading the benefits of artificial intelligence, as well as the potential risks". This is a crucial element in the Resolution, as open models can be essential to promote the deployment and development of as well as capacity-building for AI, particularly in developing countries.

International Collaboration

International collaboration is essential for addressing the global challenges posed by AI. Resolution A/78/311underscores the importance of fostering international cooperation in AI research, development, and deployment. It encourages Member States to share best practices, collaborate on AI projects, and participate in international forums to discuss AI governance.

The resolution also calls for the establishment of international frameworks and agreements to facilitate cooperation on AI governance. This includes developing common standards and guidelines for ethical AI development, promoting interoperability of AI systems, and ensuring that AI technologies are used in ways that benefit all humanity.

Capacity-Building and Skills Development

To ensure that all countries can benefit from AI, Resolution A/78/311 advocates for investment in education and capacity-building initiatives. This includes developing AI literacy among the general public, providing training and education for AI professionals, and supporting research and innovation in AI.

The resolution recognizes that building capacity and skills in AI is crucial for ensuring that countries can develop and implement AI technologies effectively. This involves creating opportunities for individuals to gain the knowledge and skills needed to participate in the AI economy and fostering innovation and research in AI.

Security and Safety

The resolution highlights the importance of addressing security and safety concerns related to AI. This includes preventing the misuse of AI for malicious purposes, such as cyberattacks, and ensuring that AI systems are secure, reliable, and resilient.

The resolution calls for the development of robust frameworks to address security and safety risks associated with AI. This includes creating standards and protocols for the safe and secure development and deployment of AI technologies and promoting international cooperation to address global security challenges posed by AI.

Implementation

While Resolution A/78/311 sets forth a comprehensive framework for international cooperation in AI, several challenges remain in its implementation. These challenges include:

1. **Divergent National Interests:** Different countries have varying interests and priorities regarding AI, which can lead to conflicting approaches to AI governance. Balancing these interests while maintaining a cohesive international framework is a significant challenge.

2. **Resource Disparities:** There are significant disparities in resources and capabilities among countries, particularly between developed and developing nations. Ensuring that all countries can participate in and benefit from international AI cooperation requires substantial investment and support.

3. **Rapid Technological Change:** The fast pace of AI development poses challenges for regulation and policy-making. Keeping international frameworks and guidelines up to date with technological advancements requires ongoing adaptation and flexibility.

4. **Ethical and Cultural Differences:** Different cultures and societies have varying perspectives on the ethical implications of AI. Developing universally accepted ethical standards requires careful consideration of these differences and inclusive dialogue.

These challenges can be addressed if UN members effectively engage in international cooperation pursuant to the Resolution, with a focus on AI capacity-building through practical measures with a human-centered approach and the recognition of the disparities existing among countries at different levels of development.

Conclusion

Resolution A/78/311 represents a significant step towards fostering international cooperation in AI. By promoting ethical AI development, ensuring inclusivity and equity, and addressing security and safety concerns, the resolution sets forth a comprehensive framework for responsible AI governance.

Realizing the vision of international cooperation in AI requires addressing the challenges of divergent national interests, resource disparities, rapid technological change, and ethical and cultural differences. Through international collaboration and investment in capacity-building, the global community can work towards a future where AI contributes positively to sustainable development and the well-being of all humanity.

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