Responsible use of artificial intelligence in environmental management ecosystems: A relational ethics of care

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Artificial intelligence (AI) tools reflect myriad affordances for environmental management, but the risks of deploying them pivot around accelerated mining, chemical pollution, electronic waste proliferation, excessive water consumption, and the like. To leverage the potential of AI while mitigating its risks within environmental management spaces – whether ecological or physical in nature – careful regulation is required. Several countries in Africa, notably, Egypt, Kenya, and Mauritius, have invested in policies that guide the responsible and ethical use of AI, but others, such as Nigeria and South Africa, are lagging behind. Fortunately, the draft AI policy of the African Union (AU) published in February of this year offers guidelines and speaks to a number of concerns around issues related to safety, trustworthiness, and inclusivity. A call is made here that, in addition to being guided by such a draft policy, a humanistic approach to environmental management is critical. Specifically, a relational ethics of care may offer some guidance with respect to ensuring the use of responsible AI in this context. Such an ethics of care underscores the need for indigenous environmental projects as well as care for the natural environment.