AI in Africa to be advanced at Deep Learning Indaba

From 9 -14 September 2018, more than 500 participants from 30 African and 19 international countries will converge at Stellenbosch University for one of the largest Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning teaching events in the world.

The Deep Learning Indaba is an annual gathering of the African Artificial Intelligence community and will be hosted by Stellenbosch University, South Africa, from 9 to 14 September 2018.

Over six days, the Deep Learning Indaba will expose more than 500 African students, researchers and entrepreneurs to several of the world leaders in the fields of machine learning and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

These include Dr Katja Hofmann, a researcher in the Machine Intelligence and Perception group at Microsoft Research Cambridge University, and Dr Kyunghyun Cho from New York University and research scientist at Facebook AI Research. From Google the speakers are Prof Jeff Dean, head of Google's Research and Machine Intelligence Division, and Dr David Silver, head of the Reinforcement Learning research group at DeepMind.

The Deep Learning Indaba is a volunteer-driven grassroots organisation whose aim is to build pan-African capacity and ownership in AI by creating communities, building leadership and recognising excellence in AI across the continent.

One of the local organisers, Dr Willie Brink from Stellenbosch University (SU), says they were overwhelmed by more than

1300 applications this year.

"There is a sustained growth in interest and skills in AI across the continent. The Indaba has grown from 300 participants in 2017 to 550 in 2018, with the number of female participants increasing from 23% to 30% this year."

Dr Nyalleng Moorosi, a scientist at Google AI Lab in Ghana and one of the organisers, believes AI holds the promise of empowering Africans and creating pan-African unity and advancement through exchange of values and expertise: "This is why pan-Africa gatherings such as the Indaba are so important, because they ensure that we develop and identify continent-wide skills and talent to address the challenges that face our continent and people," she says.

Africa is ready to use the power of AI

Dr Shakir Mohamed, a research scientist at DeepMind in the United Kingdom and one of the lead organisers, says the 2018 Deep Learning Indaba clearly demonstrates that there is already excellence and capacity in modern machine learning and AI on the continent, "Despite what many may think, Africans are ready to use the power of AI to advance our communities and continent. It is of critical importance to strengthen the field of machine learning in Africa. We need diversity and there are unique problems that are specific to Africa. Africans must be contributors, shapers and owners of the coming advances in Artificial Intelligence, and how these will impact on our communities."

Professor Wim de Villiers, Rector of Stellenbosch University, said the Deep Learning Indaba has the full support of Stellenbosch University. Conference participants will have access to 550 computers in five computer labs on the campus, as well as several of the largest lecture halls on the campus, including technical and IT support.

"To stay abreast of the latest developments in this field is of the utmost importance to universities – for both their research and teaching functions. Big data and AI will fundamentally influence not only the world of work, but also the generation and transfer of knowledge – across academic disciplines. That is why we aim to establish an interfaculty school for data science and computational thinking at Stellenbosch University," De Villiers said.

For more, go to www.deeplearningindaba.com