Ways Forward for Global AI Benefit Sharing

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Abstract

Advanced AI systems could generate substantial economic and social benefits, but these benefits may not be widely accessible by default. For this reason, a number of prominent actors and institutions have called for global AI benefit sharing: efforts to accelerate the spread of AI's benefits globally. Global AI benefit sharing could serve at least three purposes: supporting sustainable development, boosting opportunities for technological self-determination in low- and middle-income countries, and incentivising participation in international AI governance initiatives. We discuss three ways that benefit sharing could be implemented. Various actors could expand access to AI development resources like compute, data, technical talent or algorithms, subsidise access to advanced AI systems, or transfer a portion of the financial proceeds from AI commercialization or AI-driven economic growth. Each of these approaches offers distinct opportunities and implementation challenges. We highlight several cross-cutting challenges in particular, including the potential for some benefit sharing efforts to raise security concerns and global risks, and the fact that strategic geopolitical considerations might make states reluctant to engage in benefit sharing. Potential next steps are to implement low-risk forms of benefit sharing immediately while launching inclusive international discussions to develop more comprehensive, mutually-beneficial initiatives.

1   Introduction

Advanced AI could bring unprecedentedly large economic and other societal benefits [10, 12]. However, these benefits might not by default be distributed in a way that fosters globally shared prosperity [2]. This concern has prompted calls to ensure that the benefits of AI reach all of humanity. These calls have been made by the UK government, the International Monetary Fund, and the UN's AI Advisory Body, among others. "Broadly distributed benefits" is the first principle listed in OpenAI's charter, while a core part of Google DeepMind's mission is to "ensure AI benefits everyone and helps solve the biggest challenges facing humanity." Global AI benefit sharing, which we define as efforts to support and accelerate the global distribution of AI's economic and broader societal benefits, can help achieve these goals.

However, to date, very few practical proposals for benefit sharing have gained momentum. Their development has been hampered by persistent ambiguity regarding what people mean by AI's benefits and how benefit sharing should be implemented. This paper aims to move benefit sharing efforts

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forward by describing several potential approaches, analysing their strengths and limitations, and clarifying implementation challenges.[1]

In this paper, we review three motivations that different actors may have to engage in benefit sharing:

- **Inclusive Economic Growth:** Benefit sharing could help accelerate economic growth and achieve Sustainable Development Goals in low- and middle-income countries.[2]
- **Technological Self-Determination:** Benefit sharing could promote national sovereignty and self-determination in AI development.
- **International Cooperation:** Benefit sharing could foster stronger international cooperation on responsible AI development and incentivize participation in international AI governance initiatives with like-minded countries.

We then identify three broad approaches to benefit sharing:

- **Sharing AI development resources** such as data, computing power, technical talent, and information about training algorithms and procedures
- **Sharing access to advanced AI systems** through user applications, application programming interfaces (APIs), or open-source models
- **Sharing financial proceeds** such as a portion of AI company profits or tax revenue

We consider the advantages, limitations, and some specific implementation options for each approach. These options vary widely, and choosing among them will involve significant tradeoffs.

After discussing potential approaches, we consider the challenges associated with benefit sharing that cut across all three. We explore five challenges in particular:

- Benefit sharing **may be redundant** if AI benefits are likely to diffuse widely and quickly through market forces alone.
- It **may be intractable** due to competing interests and the incentives for key actors.
- It **may increase risks** by exacerbating AI race dynamics or broadening access to systems with dangerous capabilities.
- It **may be constrained by geopolitical and strategic goals of leading states**, which might make them reluctant to share valuable resources or AI access.
- It **may be leveraged for coercion**. For example, powerful actors could use benefit sharing as a tool to pressure less powerful actors into certain policy actions.

Finally, despite considerable uncertainty about the best path forward for global AI benefit sharing, we propose three steps that can be taken immediately:

- **Initiate low-risk, high-potential benefit sharing approaches** immediately
- **Establish dedicated forums to discuss benefit sharing options** and implementation strategies
- **Ensure representation of low- and middle-income countries** in AI governance decision-making processes

2 Motivations for Global AI Benefit Sharing

The motivations for global AI benefit sharing can be broadly categorized into three main areas:

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[1]We focus specifically on global AI benefit sharing approaches for two reasons: 1. Many of the risks and benefits from AI will cross international borders. 2. While countries have various tools to distribute AI benefits domestically, the mechanisms for international benefit sharing are less clear.

[2]Following World Bank classifications, we define 'low- and middle-income countries' as those with a GNI per capita of $14,005 or less in 2023 (this includes economies classified by the World Bank as low-income, lower middle-income, and upper middle-income).

2.1 Inclusive Economic Growth

Some actors may support AI benefit sharing as a way to accelerate economic growth in low- and middle-income countries [2]. There are concerns that, without benefit sharing initiatives, the economic gains from AI may be extremely large but concentrated in high-income countries [10, 17]. Furthermore, as AI could eventually automate a significant portion of human labor [13, 18], there's a risk that advances in AI could shift opportunity and earnings away from workers to a smaller share of the population who own AI capital. Benefit sharing could help ensure that regions that might be slower to benefit from market-driven AI advances could benefit sooner, enabling the development of AI applications suited for local economies, cultural contexts, and use-cases that might otherwise be overlooked.

2.2 Technological Self-Determination

The second motivation relates to promoting opportunities for technological self-determination in AI development. AI development is largely concentrated in a few high-income countries and China [20]. This limits other countries' ability to shape AI progress and align it with their needs, while potentially increasing their technological dependence on a small number of states and corporations. Benefit sharing initiatives could in part address these concerns by enabling countries to build indigenous AI research capacity and develop locally-optimised AI applications. Deeper economic participation could give them both technical capabilities and greater influence on the development of the technology.

2.3 International Cooperation

Finally, a third set of motivations highlights the role benefit sharing could play in enabling international cooperation on AI issues. Unlike the previous two motivations, which focused on fostering broad economic growth and empowering less developed countries, this category views benefit sharing as a diplomatic lever for states to advance their national interests. For instance, access to AI benefits could be tied to participation in international AI safety agreements or other diplomatic objectives.

As AI capabilities advance, international arrangements may become necessary to manage risks and ensure responsible development [14]. These could include internationally agreed upon safety standards, commitments to ongoing risk monitoring, and information sharing for compliance verification. Global benefit sharing arrangements could help incentivize or compensate countries that comply with internationally agreed upon safety protocols. This approach mirrors "Grand Bargain" style agreements [9]. Engaging in benefit sharing could also be a way for leading states to foster stronger global partnerships around distinct visions for international AI governance.

Different actors will weigh these motivations differently. For instance, United Nations (UN)–led benefit sharing initiatives may focus on promoting self-determination to align with precedents set by, for example, the right to self-determination affirmed by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [1]. Similarly, global development actors may adopt the economic and societal benefits motivation as a way to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. On the other hand, frontier AI states like the US or China might be more motivated to engage in benefit sharing as a way to strengthen alliances around distinct approaches to responsible AI development and governance.

3 Options for AI Benefit Sharing

3.1 Sharing AI Development Resources

The first approach to AI benefit sharing involves ensuring broad access to key resources needed to develop, fine-tune, evaluate, and deploy advanced AI systems. These resources include computing power (compute), technical talent, data, and information about training algorithms and procedures.

Compute

Compute is arguably the most critical and costly input to advanced AI development [24]. Its significance stems from two key factors: the amount of compute used to train a model is a key determinant of its performance [16], and compute is essential for deploying AI systems and enabling

widespread use. However, the current market dynamics, characterized by soaring demand and limited supply of specialized AI chips, have driven up prices significantly [8].

To address these challenges, several strategies have been proposed. One approach involves states or multilateral organizations joining together to create a shared pool of compute resources, similar to how multiple states pooled resources to conduct particle physics research at CERN. Another strategy involves subsidizing access to compute for developers in low-income countries to foster entrepreneurship and innovation. However, these approaches face significant challenges, including high implementation costs, potential to slow progress at the frontier of AI development, and security and safety concerns associated with the wide proliferation of advanced AI chips.

Technical talent

Technical talent is another crucial, but scarce, resource for AI development [19, 21]. Low- and middle-income countries face particular challenges in this competitive landscape, often lacking the academic institutions and scale of investment needed to nurture a sufficient pool of AI experts [23]. To address this, international organizations or groups of states could fund global capacity-building programs to assist member states with education and training in AI-related fields. This has been to some extent for other critical technologies [15].

Data and information about training algorithms and procedures

Data and information about training algorithms and procedures are also key inputs for AI development. While several initiatives to make data more widely available already exist (e.g., LAION and CommonCrawl), the most advanced systems today are trained on larger, proprietary datasets as well. Sharing information about these datasets and training procedures could make it easier for more people to train advanced AI systems, potentially accelerating innovation globally.

3.2 Sharing Access to Advanced AI Systems

The second approach focuses on sharing access to advanced AI systems, either through application-level access, API access, or by open-sourcing models. While advanced AI systems are currently freely available to some extent around much of the globe, users still face costs to access and use the most capable AI systems at scale.

One way to reduce these costs is through research and development investments to make inference more efficient. Another approach involves fostering a vibrant open-source development ecosystem, which could drive down the cost of using advanced AI relatively more than privately developed models.

Government subsidies could also play a role in broadening access. For example, governments could use public funds to subsidize access to advanced AI applications or APIs. While subsidies may be easier to implement domestically, there are historical precedents for international subsidies in other industries as well [5].

Differential pricing is another strategy that could make AI interfaces more accessible globally. Many digital services, including cloud providers and streaming platforms, already employ region- or country-based pricing strategies. However, implementing such pricing strategies for AI services presents several challenges, including the potential for users to exploit regional price differences and the risk of direct financial losses for AI companies.

While these strategies could help broaden access to advanced AI systems, it's important to note that access alone may not be sufficient to derive meaningful benefits, particularly for the most disadvantaged populations globally. Lack of broadband access, affordable devices, digital literacy, and consistent electricity supply in many parts of the world may limit the benefits users in these countries can gain simply by gaining access to AI systems.

3.3 Sharing Financial Proceeds

The third approach to AI benefit sharing involves creating mechanisms to widely distribute the financial proceeds generated by AI systems. This could take the form of cash transfers that distribute

AI-driven profits directly to individual recipients, or distributing assets such as company shares or stock options.

One notable proposal in this vein is the Windfall Clause [22]. This proposal would have leading AI companies commit to distribute a percentage of profits earned above pre-established thresholds. The thresholds could be relatively high, such as a tangible fraction of all global economic output. Profits could potentially be distributed through a trust (see, [11]), or through a global oversight body.

Alternatively, public institutions could distribute AI's financial benefits. Governments might benefit from existing public infrastructure, such as institutions that are experienced in collecting taxes and distributing money. One simple way national governments, especially in frontier AI countries, could distribute benefits is by taxing AI-driven profits and increasing their foreign aid budgets.

Another option could be the creation of a global fund or a multilateral version of an AI Growth Bond [7]. Such a fund could distribute AI-driven financial gains internationally in the form of grants, potentially as assistance towards causes like the UN Sustainable Development Goals or towards AI-complementing infrastructure investments in low-resource settings [4, 28].

Sharing financial proceeds offers flexibility for recipients but comes with significant uncertainties and complexities, including legal and fiduciary constraints that may conflict with companies' obligations to maximize shareholder value. Implementation hurdles include determining the mechanics, timing, and channels for distribution—whether proceeds should go directly to individuals globally, through governments, or via intermediaries.

4   Challenges Associated with Benefit Sharing

AI benefit sharing offers significant opportunities but faces challenges that complicate its implementation. Five cross-cutting issues are especially salient:

Benefit sharing may be redundant: Benefit sharing may be unnecessary if AI benefits diffuse widely without intervention. Evidence, such as the proliferation of freely accessible advanced AI models, suggests that market forces could adequately distribute benefits. However, accessibility gaps still do persist, especially in lower-income regions, though falling costs and widespread access to advanced models may mitigate these barriers over time.

Benefit sharing may be intractable: Effective benefit sharing may require substantial political and financial investment, such as international resource transfers or corporate concessions, which often conflict with the incentives of leading actors. Historical failures in foreign aid commitments and high costs of AI development underscore skepticism about such initiatives. Moreover, effective sharing often requires access to interdependent resources (e.g., compute, data, and digital infrastructure), which adds logistical complexity.

Benefit sharing may increase risks: Sharing advanced AI resources could heighten risks of misuse (e.g., aiding surveillance, cyber attacks, or biological weapons development) and exacerbate competition among developers, potentially undermining safety protocols [6] [3] [29]. Governance approaches, such as structured access [25] or compute governance measures [24], could mitigate these risks, but they require significant research and careful implementation.

Benefit sharing may be constrained by other geopolitical goals: Strategic interests may limit benefit sharing. Export controls and AI resource nationalism reflect concerns countries have about preserving competitive advantages. Geopolitical rivalries, particularly between major powers, may hinder genuine cooperation, and reallocating resources could slow AI innovation, delaying its global benefits.

Benefit sharing may be leveraged for coercion: Benefit sharing could be exploited as a tool for coercion, creating dependencies or imposing conditions that undermine autonomy of recipients . For instance, access to shared resources could come with restrictive terms, echoing concerns about inequities in other global treaties.

5   Next Steps for Benefit Sharing

Implementing global AI benefit sharing will require coordinated efforts by public and private actors to address significant challenges. Progress has been slow, with existing initiatives falling short of comprehensive global schemes. To advance benefit sharing, three practical steps can be taken:

5.1   Initiate low-risk, high-potential benefit sharing approaches

Early efforts with clear benefits and minimal risks can be pursued immediately. For example:

- **Digital Infrastructure Development:** Increasing funding for digital infrastructure in low- and middle-income countries would enable participation in future benefit sharing initiatives and support broader development goals. This funding should supplement, not replace, existing development aid.
- **AI for Development Goals:** Supporting narrow AI applications for public services, healthcare, and agriculture in low- and middle-income countries presents fewer security concerns than general-purpose systems. Public-private partnerships, prizes, and advanced market commitments could accelerate impactful innovations. Complementary technical assistance programs can help governments and organizations in low and middle-income countries adopt and implement these solutions effectively, maximizing their public benefits and fostering long-term capacity.

5.2   Establish forums for benefit sharing discussions

Dedicated, inclusive forums are essential to address critical questions about implementing benefit sharing strategies, such as how to tailor efforts to diverse needs like AI access and capacity building, what safeguards can mitigate risks like dual-use concerns and AI race dynamics, and how to ensure commitments from frontier AI leaders are credible. Platforms like the UN's planned "Global Dialogue on AI Governance" or the Global AI Summit Series could host these discussions but must prioritize representation from low- and middle-income countries and adapt to the fast pace of AI development.

5.3   Ensure global representation in AI governance decision-making processes

To complement these international dialogues focused on benefit sharing, actors could also establish inclusive AI governance processes to support global decision-making about the development of advanced AI systems more broadly. Such processes should include low- and middle-income countries to address ethical concerns, regulatory blind spots, and global risks from AI. Current governance frameworks often exclude these countries, limiting their ability to influence AI's trajectory [27]. Including low- and middle-income countries in governance mechanisms—such as through shared decision-making structures—could ensure their needs and perspectives are considered, promoting equity and reducing systemic inequalities in AI development and deployment[26].

6   Conclusion

As advanced AI systems reshape economies, ensuring their benefits are shared equitably is critical. Practical strategies remain underdeveloped, but effective benefit sharing mechanisms could address global challenges and foster improved international governance.

This paper outlines three approaches: sharing AI resources, access to advanced systems, and financial proceeds. Each has distinct advantages while also presenting significant implementation challenges.

Thoughtfully implemented, global benefit sharing could help ensure AI fosters widely shared prosperity while supporting international cooperation. Achieving this will require balancing diverse interests, addressing safety concerns, and navigating AI's uncertain trajectory.

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A Appendix

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. Motivations for AI benefit sharing

MOTIVATION	MOTIVATION	MOTIVATION
Economic and Societal Motivation	**International Cooperation Motivation**	**Technological Self-Determination**
• Accelerate economic growth and prosperity in low and middle income countries • Distribute the gains from labour automation	• Encourage adherence with international safety standards • Reduce the odds of zero-sum racing • Enhance collective security • Strengthen alliances among like-minded countries	• Promote national sovereignty and self-determination in AI development.

II. Approaches to AI benefit sharing

AI VALUE CHAIN	BENEFIT SHARING APPROACH	BENEFIT SHARING OUTCOME
AI Inputs	**Share Resources** (compute, data, algorithms, human capital)	**Inclusive Economic Growth**
AI Systems	**Share Access** (APIs, pricing, compute, open-source, applications) **Develop Applications** for SDGs and Public Goods	**Technological Self-Determination**
AI Profits	**Share Financial Proceeds** (cash transfers, equity in AI companies, global AI development fund)	**International Cooperation**

FUNDAMENTAL DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

III. Challenges associated with AI benefit sharing

Challenge 1:	Challenge 2:	Challenge 3:	Challenge 4:	Challenge 5:
Benefit sharing may be redundant.	Benefit sharing may be intractable.	Benefit sharing may increase risks.	Benefit sharing may be constrained by other geopolitical goals.	Benefit sharing may be leveraged for coercion.

IV. Next Steps for Benefit Sharing

Initiate low-risk, high-potential benefit sharing approaches	Establish dedicated forums to discuss benefit sharing options and implementation strategies	Ensure global representation in AI governance decision-making processes

Figure 1: Executive Summary Figure