

# LIA PROJECT: MY 6 WEEKS AT ODI GLOBAL

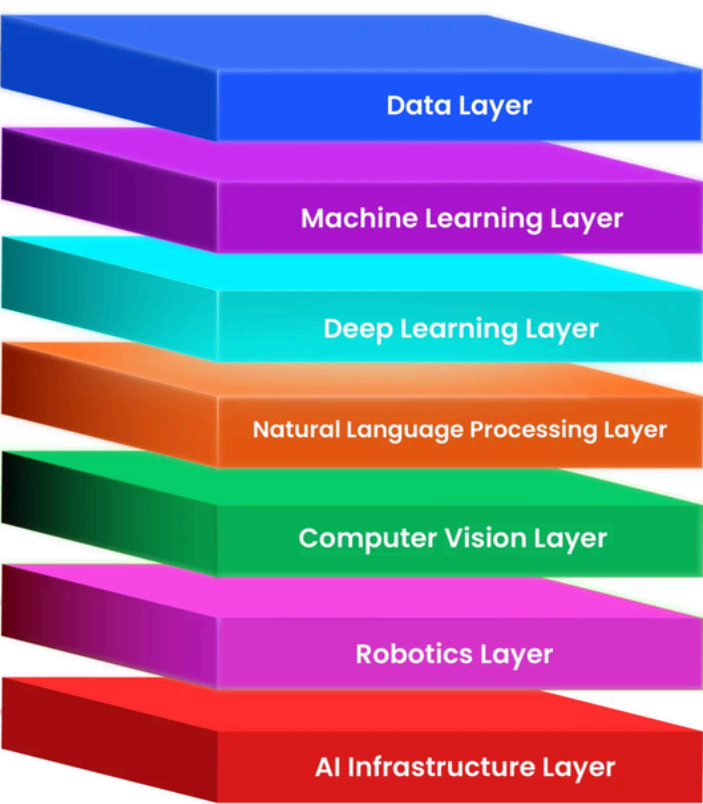
## TRAJAN MAJOMI - COHORT 5



My Leadership-in-Action (LiA) project was a six-week research placement at ODI Global, a development think tank. Working across two research teams, I contributed to work on econometric modelling, AI compute in the Global South and environmental catastrophe in Nigeria.

**My goals:** 1) to meet and exceed the research excellence standard set at ODI Global 2) to walk away knowing I'd contributed to important work that had lasting influence for my team 3) to develop my skills as a leader specifically in the context of researching.

**The outcomes:** I now have more trust in myself as a leader in research/academic contexts. I learned valuable lessons in thinking as well as more general lessons in how to lead on a solitary task. I was also exposed to new areas of academia and learned how they translate to real world issues. I even got to humbly contribute to the field.

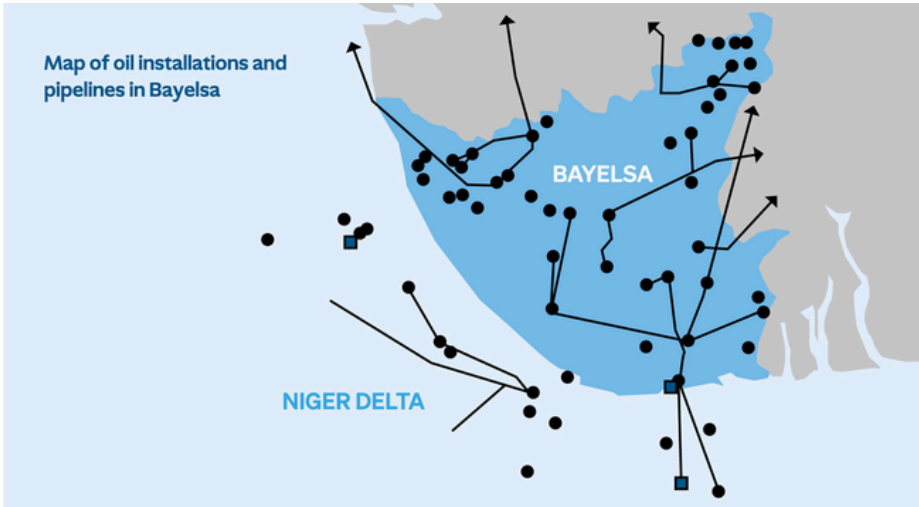


The AI Stack

**Who I worked with:** Senior researchers, line managers and external audiences such as government agencies, charities and NGOs.

**My experience:** I was often the least versed person in the room. On one of my teams, I was the only junior researcher. On the other, my research counterparts were Master's and PhD students, and our teams were led by senior researchers who expected thorough and fast work. Meeting this bar was difficult and meant that I had to bury myself in the work in order to make valuable contributions.

**What I learned about leading:** *Managing myself* - juggling two teams with clashing deadlines taught me to plan, set boundaries, and take action early. *Depth over speed* - I stopped cutting corners, eliminating a bad habit that initially undermined my work. *Diligence* - I learned to break down difficult concepts, build from solid foundations and to always ask clarificatory questions.



Oil infrastructure in Bayelsa State

### Impact & legacy (how it's sustained)

1) A thesis I developed on the laundering of political economy assumptions in energy transition modelling was accepted by my supervisor, and is now being turned into a full research paper 2) A definition I built (for the misleadingly simple term 'democracy movement') fed directly into a paper written for Swedish government use 3) I conducted research and formatting work for a paper on the implications of the AI stack on the Global South (see image - research primarily concerned effects of the data, language and infrastructure layers of the AI stack).

### Lessons from a new & challenging environment

The high standards pushed me. Surrounded by experienced researchers, I found I could handle more than I expected, and where I fell short (communication, speed at which I could deliver deep work), I saw exactly what to work on. I also questioned the efficacy of discussions conducted in the development space. Throughout the period, *I wondered whether research and academic dialogue are the most suitable routes to addressing prescient questions in development.* I found confidence to share my sometimes critical views and was encouraged to do so.

## A LESSON LEARNED:

### Laundering Wicked Problems as Tame Ones, and Why That Is Itself Wicked

Thesis: certain energy transition models do not directly solve the problem; they merely re-describe it. Contested framings — discount rates, baselines, what counts as a sector or a stakeholder — are frozen into parameters and returned as neutral, mathematical outputs. In short: *the wicked problem is laundered into a tame one.* Lesson learned: the avoidance of a problem is a problem in itself. This extends beyond the context of the thesis that I worked on. *Perhaps the most valuable lesson I learned in my LiA is that difficult problems are best addressed at face value and with actual pragmatic steps and execution.* Often, in trying to create sophisticated solutions, the true depth of the problem is glossed over and wrongfully characterised. I understand that my leadership approach should be to think about direct, tangible and lasting solutions to hard problems.

Some of the work I contributed to...



If you're interested in reading...



**Level 1** — The problem is wicked. Net-zero has no definitive formulation, no stopping rule, no reset, and no true/false answer. It is a better-or-worse judgement call.

**Level 2** — Frozen parameters, convergent runs, and definitive numbers give the problem the surface marks of tameness. Wicked choices are "laundered" as technical inputs and therefore are perceived as objective outputs.

**Level 3** — This "laundering" is itself the wicked problem. In other words, laundering an obviously wicked problem is itself a less obvious (and perhaps more dangerous) wicked problem.