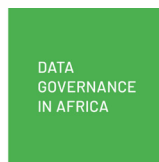


Gender Data Futures

A Handbook on Transformative Data Governance





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Executive Summary

Data is an essential asset for economic policy making and service delivery. Yet gender biases in data governance systems perpetuate inequality and exclusion. A gender,transformative approach confronts root causes, harmful norms, power imbalances, and structural barriers ensuring women, girls and gender diverse people benefit from the data ecosystem. This handbook offers eight strategic goals and specific actions to strengthen gender integration across the data governance cycle, aligned with the AU Agenda 2063, the AU data policy framework, the Maputo protocol and other continental gender mandates.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

Integration of gender in government programs and processes remains foundational for equitable development. Data is a valuable asset to all stakeholders including the government, private sector, and civil society. This data, whether generated by businesses, governments, or individuals, fuels innovation, enhances decision-making, and accelerates the digital transformation of economies and societies.¹ African governments generate vast amounts of data through internal administration, service delivery, and engagement with other stakeholders. Data gathered from these diversified sources, if well harnessed, could be used in the attainment of government goals and objectives as well as improve overall service delivery.²

Within this context, data governance frameworks which shape how data is collected, processed, stored, shared and used, play a pivotal role in managing data at a local, national and regional level. Effective data governance not only establishes and enforces regulations to protect individual rights but also actively addresses issues of social inequality and marginalization.³ Additionally, data governance exists to emphasize interoperability, standardization, and responsible development of data-related technologies as well as to support the harnessing of the potential of data as a driver of growth.⁴ For example, think of data governance like organizing an international airport. Standardized passports, security protocols, and air traffic rules make it possible for planes from all over the world to land and take off smoothly and safely. Similarly, data governance sets shared rules and systems so that data from different sources can be transported, connected seamlessly, and fuel innovation and growth.

Across the African continent, governments and regional bodies have made deliberate efforts to integrate gender into key policy areas such as health, agriculture, poverty reduction, education, and migration, among others.⁵ Examples of these deliberate efforts include Rwanda's Gender Monitoring Office to coordinate and advance approaches such as gender-responsive budgeting across sectors,⁶ South Africa's Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities that collaborates with other ministries to mainstream gender and harmonize data on issues such as

¹ ITU (2024), Navigating Data Governance: A guiding Tool for Regulators: <https://digitalregulation.org/navigating-data-governance-a-guiding-tool-for-regulators/>

² Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2024) The power of data for governance 2023 IIAG Series Report Closing data gaps to accelerate Africa's transformation;

³ United Nations, 2016 Integrating a Gender Perspective into Statistics; United Nations publication, ISBN: 978-92-1-161571-5

⁴ Bruno Miguel Vital Bernardo, Henrique São Mamede, João Manuel Pereira Barroso, Vítor Manuel Pereira Duarte dos Santos, (2024), Data governance & quality management—Innovation and breakthroughs across different fields, Journal of Innovation & Knowledge, Volume 9, Issue 4,,100598, ISSN2444-569X, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2024.100598>.

⁵ UN Women, (2023), Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality Results

⁶ UN Women (2023),Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. The Gender Snapshot 2023

gender-based violence.⁷ Uganda's institutionalization of gender equity by certifying budgets, monitoring national gender policies, and building integrated data systems through the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development, as well as the Equal Opportunities Commission, is another example.⁸ Similar multi-sectoral strategies are needed in data governance to ensure that data practices reflect the gender realities of African women and girls and promote inclusion. These gender integration efforts should extend across data systems, practices and institutions to make them inclusive, equitable and actively committed to eliminating any forms of discrimination and injustices.

The African Union Data Policy Framework provides a foundational reference point for integrating inclusivity into data governance. The framework emphasizes the integration of gender in data governance based on the inclusivity of all citizens in the data ecosystem.⁹ However, efforts should go beyond just inclusivity, which is simply adding women and men, girls and boys to existing structures, to focusing on underlying gender norms, and challenging power inequities between people of different genders.¹⁰ Given the growing adoption of data-driven initiatives across Africa, there is an urgent need for governments to recognize the value of embedding gender perspectives into these frameworks. This is particularly important in the light of the continent's increasing recognition of gender equality as a strong pillar for digital transformation.

African governments and regional bodies are advancing gender equality and digital transformation simultaneously through the development and implementation of policies and frameworks. However, these frameworks do not adequately address the ways in which data governance practices can reinforce inequality. For instance, the Uganda Data Protection Act 2019 contains no other gender-specific provisions beyond clauses related to children.¹¹ Zambia's Data Protection Act 2021, references vulnerable persons without defining them¹² and Cote d'Ivoire's Act 2013 is silent on gender considerations altogether. In this context, integrating intersectional gender considerations into data governance is essential to shaping equitable and inclusive data governance in Africa. By consolidating emerging evidence and documenting effective approaches to gender integration in data governance, this handbook seeks to equip African governments with the tools and insights needed to embed gender transformative approaches within their data policies and systems. Advancing these approaches is critical for achieving inclusive data governance and promoting gender equality across the continent.

⁷ The African Development Bank, (2022), The African Development Bank Group Gender Strategy 2021 – 2025 Investing in Africa's women to accelerate inclusive growth,

⁸ Ibid

⁹ African Union Data Policy Framework. 2022. Documents, <https://au.int/en/documents/20220728/au-data-policy-framework>

¹⁰ Self Help Africa (n.d), Gender and inclusion, Position paper 3

¹¹ The Data Protection and Privacy Regulations, 2021; Statutory Instrument No. 21 of 2021: https://pdpo.go.ug/media/2022/03/Data_Protection_and_Privacy_Regulations-2021.pdf

¹² Zambia Data Protection Act 2021 Quick Guide: Office of the data protection commissioner, August 2024: https://www.dataprotection.gov.zm/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Data-Protection-Quick-Guide_2.pdf

The Rationale and Purpose of the Handbook

This Handbook provides specific actions for embedding gender into data governance systems across the continent. It seeks to go beyond sex-disaggregated data by addressing the deeper structural and systemic issues that shape how data is collected, used, governed and who benefits from it. Additionally, the handbook offers practical guidance to policymakers and institutions to identify and challenge power imbalances within data ecosystems across Africa.

It emphasizes approaches that reflect the lived realities and diverse identities of all citizens, but most especially women, girls and other gender diverse people.

This handbook also serves as a strategic guide aligned with regional commitments such as the Agenda 2063, the AU Data Policy framework as well as national and continental gender mandates. It promotes inclusive, ethical and participatory approaches to data governance that uphold the rights of women, girls and advance gender equity and ensure accountability. The handbook calls on African governments to strengthen institutional capacity and foster regional collaboration, placing gender equality at the heart of Africa's data and digital futures.

It is intended to:

- Deepen understanding of gender-transformative data governance and its value in advancing equitable, inclusive development.
- Demonstrate the benefits of robust gender data practices in enhancing evidence-based policymaking, strengthening governance, accountability, and improving development outcomes.

Meaningfully integrating gender considerations beyond sex disaggregation into data systems enables governments and partners to design inclusive policies that address inequalities and reflect the diverse realities of all citizens particularly women and girls.

Who is the Handbook for?

This handbook is designed as a practical action-oriented resource for a wide spectrum of stakeholders committed to advancing gender-transformative data governance in Africa, including decision makers at the African Union, in governments and international institutions, national policymakers, technocrats, advocacy groups, and civil society organizations.

It is especially relevant to those involved in designing, implementing and overseeing data systems and policies at local, national, and regional levels, as well as those advocating for more inclusive and just data governance systems. The handbook seeks to foster collaboration across institutions and sectors, ensure that gender perspectives inform every stage of data governance, and drive collective accountability for meaningful change. Decision makers can use it to set agendas and allocate resources, technocrats and data professionals can consult it for technical guidance, while CSOs and advocacy organizations will find it valuable for holding institutions accountable and amplifying the voices of women, girls and gender diverse people in policy dialogues and reform

initiatives.

Structure and How to Use this Handbook

The handbook invites users to approach data governance not as a purely technical exercise but as a process grounded in social justice, aiming for citizen-centric and gender-equitable outcomes. It provides a structured pathway to support actors in making inclusivity a core feature of their data governance work, rather than a peripheral concern.

Step 1: Engage with the handbook sections most relevant to your goals and needs

Chapter One sets the foundation, clarifying the rationale for this handbook, its intended audience, and the participatory process behind its development. Begin here to anchor your understanding and align your objectives with the handbook's focus on gender equality and transformative frameworks.

Chapter Two introduces and unpacks pivotal concepts such as gender data, intersectionality, and feminist approaches to governance that underpin gender transformative data governance. Use this chapter to build shared language and conceptual clarity within your team or institution.

Chapter Three guides users through key African Union mandates and policies, explaining how these frameworks can and should inform national and institutional gender data strategies. This chapter helps you contextualize your efforts within the broader continental commitments and accountability mechanisms.

Step 2: Apply the Eight Strategic Goals Practically

Chapter Four details eight strategic goals essential to advancing gender-transformative data governance across Africa. Each goal is accompanied by specific actionable steps and a checklist of questions to help assess progress toward gender transformative data governance. Work through each strategic goal, leveraging the checklists and suggested activities to audit and improve your existing practices. All eight strategic goals may not be applied at once. Stakeholders are encouraged to review the goals and select the one(s) most relevant to their context and then adapt and apply them based on their specific needs and priorities.

Step 3: Foster Collaboration and Reflective Practice

While you may use this handbook individually, it is most powerful when engaged with collectively. Discuss the questions and exercises with colleagues from both civil society and government to cultivate a richer analysis and more robust solutions. Collaborative reflection will help uncover unseen barriers and foster buy-in for change at multiple levels.

Step 4: Close the Gaps between Policy and Reality

Use the handbook's guidance to systematically identify, analyze, and address the misalignments between citizen needs, specifically women and girls, and current state or institutional priorities. Apply gender data, inclusive public participation, and coordinated action to shrink these gaps and drive progress towards equitable, effective data governance that benefits everyone and leaves no one behind.

Chapter 2:

Gender Transformative Related Concepts

This chapter provides an overview of the core concepts that underpin the gender transformative approach to data governance. It introduces key terms such as gender data, gender inclusivity, gender norms, empowerment, feminist approach and intersectionality. Understanding these concepts is essential for effectively applying the gender transformative approach in practice and for helping stakeholders recognize the importance of integrating gender perspectives in data governance across all policy areas and sectors.

The chapter also emphasizes that adopting this approach is a shared responsibility and part of the work of all stakeholders involved in shaping and using data across the African continent. Furthermore, it serves as a foundation for building a shared commitment to addressing the root causes of gender inequality and barriers within data governance systems. When these core concepts are misunderstood or poorly applied it becomes difficult to implement the strategic goals and their related actions, thereby limiting the potential to influence policy and achieve meaningful progress towards gender equality.

Feminist Approach

Feminist approaches aim to transform entrenched patriarchal power structures and empower those disadvantaged by them, most often women and girls, whose realities are marginalized by dominant systems. They provide a critical conceptual foundation upon which gender transformative strategies are built

Contemporary feminist frameworks, particularly those informed by African feminists, emphasize the need to confront colonial legacies and their enduring influence on governance, knowledge production, and power dynamics. As Sylvia Tamale¹³ argues, any effort towards gender justice in Africa must decolonize both mindsets and systems by interrogating how global and local structures perpetuate inequalities, often privileging Western epistemologies while silencing African voices and realities.

In this context, feminist data governance requires moving beyond surface-level representation and single-axis analyses. It must recognize and respond to intersecting oppressions shaped by race, gender, class, disability, geography, sexual orientation, and other identities. This involves reclaiming data practices so that they reflect African lived realities, resist extractive models, and centre the agency of those historically excluded from decision making.¹⁴

¹³ Tamale, S. (2020). Decolonization and afro-feminism.

¹⁴ Iyer, N., Chair, C., & Achieng, G. (2023). Afrofeminist data futures. In *Feminist AI: Critical Perspectives on Algorithms, Data, and Intelligent Machines* (pp. 0). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192889898.003.0020>

Through this lens, gender transformative data governance must aim not only to collect better data but also to reshape the systems, policies, and institutions that determine whose knowledge counts and whose voices are heard. It calls for approaches that dismantle rather than reinforce systemic inequalities, ensuring that data ecosystems are inclusive, participatory, and rooted in equity and justice.

Gender Data

Around the world, women and girls continue to face unequal treatment, discrimination and exclusion simply because of their gender. Gender data forms the foundation for informed decisions, effective policies and targeted actions. Having accurate and accessible gender data is essential for understanding lived experiences and accelerating progress toward a more equitable and just world.¹⁵

Gender data refers to the collection, analysis, and use of information that reveals where and how gender differences, inequalities, and power imbalances exist¹⁶ across all dimensions of life, from education and employment to health, political participation, and digital access.¹⁷ This means data should intentionally capture nuanced perspectives especially for women, girls and other marginalized groups whose identities and needs are too often overlooked.¹⁸ Importantly, gender data goes beyond sex disaggregation to include data that specifically addresses gender issues, acknowledges the diverse experiences of people of all gender identities and reflects structural inequalities.¹⁹ Missing or incomplete data on these groups has real consequences leading to policies and decisions that fail to address their needs and access to services.²⁰ For example, in many African countries, agricultural datasets often fail to capture gender-specific roles in farming, land ownership, and climate adaptation. As a result, predictive models used to design subsidy programs or distribute climate-resilient seeds may prioritize male landowners while overlooking women smallholder farmers, who make up the majority of the agricultural workforce. Without gender-responsive data, policies risk deepening inequalities in food security and climate resilience.

Collecting such data requires methods that avoid stereotypes and take into account how cultural and social norms may introduce bias.²¹ For instance, data on women's access to mobile phones across African countries often counts the number of women who own a device but fails to capture who controls its use, digital literacy, and safety, or whether social norms restrict access. Without collecting data on these deeper gendered dynamics, policies that aim to close the 'digital gender divide' risk being ineffective or even reinforcing inequalities. The examples below illustrate gender data use cases

¹⁵ Open Data Watch (2023), Gender Data Compass 2023 Report

¹⁶ Data2X (2017) Gender Data: Sources, gaps, and measurement opportunities

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Development Initiatives, (2023), Improving Gender Data to Leave no one Behind

¹⁹ Data2X (2017), Gender Data: Sources, gaps, and measurement opportunities

²⁰ Annie Kilroy (2020), What Do We Mean by "Gender Data?" Global Data Policy

²¹ Ibid

Gender data is used to inform policies that promote women's economic empowerment. For example:

Uganda's surveys conducted by Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) such as the National Population and Housing Census (undertaken every ten years), and the National Service Delivery Survey (NSDS), have provided critical gender disaggregated data that has informed policy actions including the adoption of energy-efficient cooking technologies such as improved cook stoves, Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) as well as offering gas cylinders at subsidized prices and flexible payment plans in selected districts. These interventions have significantly reduced the time spent by women on cooking-related tasks. Research shows that Ugandan women spend an average of four hours per day on cooking-related activities; however, with access to clean and efficient cooking technologies, this time can be reduced by up to 70%. The resulting time savings enable women to pursue education, income-generating activities, and active participation in community affairs and decision making, thereby enhancing their economic independence and opportunities to start or expand a business. Increased economic autonomy empowers women to make informed financial decisions, contribute more meaningfully to household welfare, and break the cycle of poverty. Moreover, as women's participation in community decision making grows, it fosters greater gender equality, social inclusion and a strong sense of self-worth among women.

Source: UNACC; Women Empowerment through Clean Cooking

Gender Transformative Approach

Gender transformative approaches seek to change societal norms and structures to achieve gender equality. It focuses on systemic change, challenges cultural norms and stereotypes and empowers marginalized genders.²² These structural inequalities are rooted in African cultural beliefs and social constructions but were further reinforced by colonization, where colonized women were either diminished or erased from important areas of social and public life.²³ This introduced structural drivers of inequity that continue to reverberate today. These are further reinforced through digital technologies and data governance regimes that often replicate colonial logics of exclusion from decision making in the data and digital sphere and unequal access to resources.²⁴

A gender-transformative approach seeks to change the structural and power dynamics that underlie gender-based inequalities, discrimination, and exclusion and empower disadvantaged

²² FAO, IFAD and WFP (2020), Overview of gender transformative approaches: Gender transformative approaches for food security, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture – A compendium of fifteen good practices.

²³ Sylvia Tamale, (2022), Decolonization and Afro-feminism

²⁴ Ngwinui, Belinda, Azenui, (2022), Leveraging Digital and New Technologies for Development in Africa's Emerging Economies with Significant Structural Constraints

populations.²⁵ This requires building the individual and collective agency of women and girls, strengthening their skills, knowledge, confidence and decision-making power so that they can meaningfully participate in, influence and even lead program implementation in data governance in ways that are relevant to their context.²⁶

A gender transformative approach must also be intersectional, addressing how gender inequalities overlap with other factors such as race, religion, disability, and sexual orientation. Overlooking these intersections risks undermining progress or making results short-lived. Fully sustained gender transformative approach entails building partnerships and collaborations, including working with social movements, feminist, women's rights and youth-led movements, the private sector and with institutions that have a large-scale reach.²⁷

Examples of gender transformative approaches include implementing policies that mandate equal representation of women and marginalized groups in data governance bodies, adopting gender-responsive budgeting to ensure resources are allocated equitably, building national gender data frameworks that collect and analyze gender-disaggregated data, and engaging community leaders, civil society, and private-sector stakeholders to challenge stereotypes and shift perceptions about women's roles in shaping data policies and systems.

The example below illustrates a gender transformative use case.

Tanzania's household data, drawn from national surveys conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics, was instrumental in revising the Productive Social Safety Net Program (PSSNP) and the Tanzania Social Action Fund. These revisions were part of the broader government's commitment to human capital development and poverty reduction to deliver quality interventions that change the lives of the poor and vulnerable women, girls, men, and boys.

Gender was considered a core aspect of this program. Drawing on gender-disaggregated data gathered from household surveys, women were included among the "vulnerable groups" to be targeted by the program. At least 40% of temporary employment in public works such as cleaning activities, community infrastructure, and agriculture and livestock activities were reserved for women beneficiaries of the program.

²⁵ Jess MacArthur, Naomi Carrard, Federico Davila, Melita Grant, Tamara Megaw, Juliet Willetts, Keren Winterford (2022), Gender-transformative approaches in international development: A brief history and five unifying principles, Women's Studies International Forum, Volume 95, 102635, ISSN 0277-5395, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2022.102635>.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Rachel Marcus, Fiona Samuels, Shoubo Jalal, and Helen Belachew (2022), Background Paper Series UNICEF Gender Policy and Action Plan 2022-2025 Gender-Transformative Programming

The program also identified measures to enhance women's participation. These included flexible working hours, and differentiated tasks that accommodated women's domestic responsibilities. Provisions were also made for women with special needs, such as pregnant and lactating mothers, allowing them to undertake lighter work. Health check-ups for pregnant mothers were promoted in health centres and in some project areas, child care arrangements were put in place, with elderly women taking care of children while mothers participated in the public works programs.

The program achieved gender equitable results and impacts. Women's participation in public works increased, exceeding the minimum target of 40%, with women making up approximately 70% of those engaged in public works. Women also played active roles in public works design and selection of sub-projects, ensuring that these responded to their needs, such as advocating for initiatives that ease their routine domestic tasks, allocation of light work to pregnant and lactating women, and child care initiatives helped to advance women's participation in the program.

At the beneficiary level, the program contributed to the expansion of women's livelihood options and an improved asset base. It also generated positive social impacts, including increased women's bargaining power and participation in decision-making, reduced marital conflicts and divorce, and improved access to and uptake of health and educational services for women, men, girls and boys.

Source: Employment Intensive Investment Programme International Labour Office; Tanzania: Gender-responsive public works as a key building block of social protection for all

Intersectionality

Intersectionality recognizes that gender is deeply intertwined with other sources of inequality and exclusion, creating overlapping forms of discrimination, vulnerability, and marginalization for many women, men, and gender diverse people.²⁸ These overlapping inequalities are rooted in social identities such as race, ethnicity, class, age, geography, religion, ability status, and are reinforced by broader systems of power, including laws, policies, and institutions shaped by colonialism and patriarchy.²⁹ In data governance, intersectionality pushes us to ask who is left behind, under what circumstances.

By identifying and addressing hidden structural barriers and recognizing differences within marginalized groups, intersectionality enables more inclusive and effective change.³⁰ Taking an

²⁸ Adaptation Fund (2022), Study on intersectional approaches to gender mainstreaming in adaptation-relevant interventions

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Humbert, A. L., Strid, S., Tanwar, J., Lipinsky, A., & Schredl, C. (2024). The Role of Intersectionality and Context in Measuring Gender-Based Violence in Universities and Research-Performing Organizations in Europe for the Development of Inclusive Structural Interventions. *Violence Against Women*, 31(6-7), 1688-1711. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012241231773> (Original work published 2025)

intersectional approach in data governance means addressing overlapping barriers, centering the voices of the most affected, and fostering cross-sector collaboration. This allows those who are affected by policies to play a substantial role in building their own story. Policymakers should consult and involve diverse stakeholders before making data governance policies. The following example highlights an intersectionality use case.

Gender disparity exists globally in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) careers. In Kenya, only 21.4 percent of STEM professionals are women. Addressing this issue, the Ajira Digital Program, led by Kenya's Ministry of Information, Communication & Digital Economy in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation and other stakeholders, set out to empower over one million young people annually and close the gender gap in STEM. It equips them with skills and creates pathways to digitally enabled employment in the gig and freelancing economy.

The program seeks to position Kenya as a choice labor destination for multinational companies and encourage local companies and the public sector to create digital work.

The initiative adopts a gender transformative approach by ensuring that young women are not only included in the program but are also empowered to actively participate and thrive within the digital ecosystem. Its gender transformative strategies focus on addressing structural barriers that limit women's participation in digital spaces. They include targeted outreach and recruitment of young women through community networks, universities, so as to increase women and girls' enrolment in digital skills training. For example at the Swahili Port Hub, one of the 100-plus Ajira Youth Empowerment Centres countrywide, girls undergo transformative training in digital skills such as transcription, virtual assistance, data entry, and digital marketing, learning how to use different platforms to find online job opportunities, discovering resources for upskilling, and becoming proficient in using various tools, software, and workspaces that are in high demand in the job market, particularly for freelancers. Another training centre is Madrasa-Tul-Falaah hub in Kibera, an Islamic learning centre with a rich history that serves as a cultural cornerstone for the Nubian and Muslim communities. Through this centre the initiative recognizes and accommodates the diversity and intersectional identities of women and girls, ensuring that cultural and contextual needs are respected.

Recognizing that many women and girls in Kenya face financial constraints that limit access to education and training, the program provides free walk-in centres where participants receive training and mentorship on digital skills (mainly basic skills) and get connected to gig and freelancing work on online platforms.

The program has achieved measurable success in transforming women's participation in Kenya's digital economy. Many women trainees have transitioned into freelance digital work in areas such as transcription, virtual assistance, content creation gaining financial independence in the process. Beneficiaries of this program have also reported improved living standards, with multiple income streams contributing to greater financial stability and enabling them to enhance various certain aspects of their personal life and career.

As digital skills become the cornerstone of modern economies, initiatives like Ajira are vital for closing the gender gap in technology and empowering more women to become leaders in technology.

Source: Mastercard Foundation: Transforming Lives Through Digital Empowerment, 13 December 2024

Gender Equality and Equity

Gender equality refers to equal outcomes for women, men, girls, and boys.³¹ Gender equity refers to fairness: the process of levelling the playing field to achieve gender equality. Gender transformative approaches are a way to operationalize gender equity, with the goal of achieving gender equality through intentional and additional measures.³²

In the context of data governance, gender equality would mean that all genders have equal representation and participation across data governance processes. This includes occupying leadership and technical roles, such as data protection officers, data stewards, members of data protection authorities, and gender inclusion specialists. An example is Rwanda's gender responsive statistics strategy that ensures that women policy makers are included in national data governance structures.³³

Conversely, gender equity in data governance focuses on ensuring that women and girls have fair access to opportunities, power and resources to participate in, influence, and benefit from how data is collected, governed, shared and used. This would require introducing corrective measures that specifically address the unique barriers in data governance faced by women and girls.³⁴

For example, Uganda's Ministry of ICT and the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) have worked with women's rights groups to highlight risks of online gender-based violence, leading to greater awareness of online safety and security measures by women and girls. The use case below illustrates an additional example of gender equity.

³¹ Rachel Marcus, Fiona Samuels, Shoubo Jalal, and Helen Belachew (2022), Background Paper Series UNICEF Gender Policy and Action Plan 2022-2025 Gender-Transformative Programming

³² Ibid

³³ Data Policy (2023): Breaking Barriers: Reinforcing Gender Data Analysis and Use with the Gender Data Lab Initiative: <https://www.datatopolicy.org/use-case/gender#:~:text=Implementation-,Strategic%20Collaboration%20in%20Action,the%20implementation%20of%20its%20activities>.

³⁴ WOUGNET (2024); Fostering Gender Inclusive Online Spaces in Uganda: [https://wougn.net.org/fostering-gender-inclusive-online-spaces-in-uganda-insights-from-the-our-voices-our-futures-consultative-meeting/#:~:text=Project%20Context%20and%20Progress,%2Dbased%20violence%20\(OGBV\)](https://wougn.net.org/fostering-gender-inclusive-online-spaces-in-uganda-insights-from-the-our-voices-our-futures-consultative-meeting/#:~:text=Project%20Context%20and%20Progress,%2Dbased%20violence%20(OGBV)).

The African Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics and Data-Intensive Sciences (ACE-Uganda) launched the She-Data Science Program, an initiative aimed at equipping young Ugandan women with practical, high-demand skills in data science, artificial intelligence, and bioinformatics. The initiative aims to close the gender gap in data science and technology by empowering young women with skills to actively thrive and participate in shaping the future of work and innovation in the digital age. The program has supported two women at doctoral level, five at master's level, and several others in internships, positioning them as pioneers in a field where women remain underrepresented. The Government of Uganda, through the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, is committed to expanding such opportunities under the Digital Transformation Roadmap (2023–2027), which prioritizes skills development, innovation, and women's participation in ICT.

By providing targeted support and resources to women who are historically underrepresented in data science and technology, the She Data Science program demonstrates gender equity in action. Additionally, the program ensures that women are not only included but also equipped with the necessary skills to meaningfully participate in emerging data and digital fields. In doing so, it contributes to inclusive growth, innovation, and sustainable development, while positioning women at the forefront of the digital revolution.

Source: The African Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics and Data-Intensive Sciences (ACE-Uganda) and Ministry of ICT & National Guidance, Uganda (2024)

Across various African countries, ICT policy consultations through platforms like webinars, conferences, and stakeholder workshops provide invaluable opportunities for both men and women leaders in technology to share their perspectives to ensure that decisions on data protection reflect everyone's concerns.³⁵ Achieving gender equality and equity is not only about equal representation but also about fairness in access, participation and influence. It requires deliberate policies, gender responsive practices and collaboration between governments and other stakeholders such as civil society, academia, and the private sector to ensure that all people, regardless of gender, can benefit from data governance.

Gender Norms

These are informal social rules defining the expected behavior, roles and responsibilities of people based on their perceived gender.³⁶ Gender norms form part of structures that underpin gender inequality and are a key target of change in gender transformative approaches.³⁷ In the context of data governance, gender norms influence whose decisions are prioritized, whose data is collected,

³⁵ UN WOMEN (2024), Bridging the digital gender divide through mentorship and collaboration

³⁶ Rachel Marcus, Fiona Samuels, Shoubo Jalal, and Helen Belachew

(2022), Background Paper Series UNICEF Gender Policy and Action Plan 2022-2025 Gender-Transformative Programming

³⁷ Ibid

how it is categorized, and how it is used in decision making processes. Transforming gender norms requires change at all levels, including individual, community, systems, services, and policy.³⁸ This transformation ensures that governance processes not only reflect gender equity in principle but actively eliminate system barriers in the collection, analysis and application of data. The example below demonstrates a use case of breaking gender norms in digital technology.

The Government of Rwanda is committed to breaking gender norms through various initiatives. One of these is the Women Empowerment Through Digital Technologies strategy (WEM-TECH) to ensure women's empowerment and their full participation based on equality in all spheres of society and digital technology. The strategy positions women as innovators, designers, contributors to data processes, developers moving beyond merely accessing or simply using or accessing technology to actively shaping and improving their daily lives. One of the objectives of this strategy is to address barriers arising from social norms and stereotypes and to enhance digital safety for women's inclusion.

Other initiatives like "Inkubito z'Icyeza" (awarding the best performing girls and scholarship schemes for girls) under Imbutu Foundation support girls from vulnerable families to access education, pursue their dreams and participate in traditionally male-dominated fields such as Science, Technology, Mathematics and Information Communication Technology, thereby enhancing their employability and economic empowerment.

We Code: Initiated by the ICT chamber of Rwanda Private Sector Federation and the University of Rwanda. "250 Startup" is an incubation program that has graduated about 30 startups so far. The startups include girlfounded and led startups. To date, 108 women graduated with software and soft skills development in the first two cohorts, and as a result, 91.5% of all graduates from the first and second cohorts are employed.

Source: Rwanda (EN), UN Women (2022), Women Empowerment Through Digital Technologies (Wem-Tech) Strategy

Empowerment

Empowerment is defined in various ways. One comprehensive definition describes it as a personal journey during which individuals, through increased access and critical awareness, develop a clear and evolving understanding of themselves, their rights, and opportunities in the world around them.³⁹ This process involves gaining increased agency, voice, and involvement, enabling them to make informed personal and public choices that improve their lives and communities.⁴⁰ Supporting

³⁸ Generation Equality Forum (2021) Transforming Gender Norms to Achieve Equality Now Curated Discussion Report #3

³⁹ A.Cornwall, (2016), Women empowerment: What works? Journal of International DevelopmentJ. Int. Dev. 28, 342–359 (2016)Published online 28 March 2016 in Wiley Online Library(wileyonlinelibrary.com) DOI: 10.1002/jid.3210T

⁴⁰ Ibid

women's empowerment requires concerted efforts to transform the structures, institutions and dynamics which reinforce and perpetuate inequity and barriers.⁴¹ Promoting the empowerment of women, girls is a core aspect of gender-transformative programming.⁴² For data governance, this would involve equipping women and other stakeholders with skills to understand, analyze and use data to advocate for women's rights as well as holding governments accountable. The example below illustrates an empowerment use case.

In Nigeria, the Women's Technology Empowerment Centre (W.TEC), has become a leading force for empowering women and girls in data and digital technology. Through its programs focused on digital skills, mentoring and leadership, W.TEC has trained a good number of women in digital entrepreneurship skills.

Women and girls who are historically underrepresented in tech and data received targeted resources and support so they can participate meaningfully as innovators, coders, data users, and digital entrepreneurs, not just consumers of technology.

Such efforts contribute to closing the gender gap in the digital economy and thus advancing women's empowerment in Nigeria's data and digital governance.

Source: The women's Technology Empowerment Centre (W.Tec) 2024 Impact Report

⁴¹ Naguib, R. (2024). Grounded Approach to Women's Empowerment: Understanding the Complexities. In: Naguib, R. (eds) Women's Empowerment and Public Policy in the Arab Gulf States. Gulf Studies, vol 11. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-6006-4_2

⁴² Ibid

Chapter 3:

Key African Union Mandates on Gender Transformation

Gender transformative data governance is grounded in global, regional and national mandates that commit governments and institutions to advancing gender equality and inclusion through data systems. The African Union and its member states have endorsed a range of commitments from the African Union Agenda 2063 and the AU-Data Policy framework to the Maputo protocol and the African Charter on Human and People's rights that emphasize inclusive, equitable and rights-based approaches to gender equality.

Understanding these mandates is essential because they form the foundation for holding governments and institutions accountable, ensuring that data practices not only recognize gender differences but also actively dismantle structural barriers that perpetuate inequality. This chapter provides a synopsis of the key mandates on gender inclusion.

The African Union Agenda 2063

At the 24th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union, held in January 2015 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the Heads of State and Government reaffirmed that Agenda 2063 places gender equality and youth empowerment as central pillars in Africa's transformation, to build caring, inclusive societies.⁴³ The assembly further emphasized that no society can reach its full potential, unless it empowers women and youth and removes all obstacles to women's full participation in all spheres of human endeavors.⁴⁴

This key mandate envisions a continent where all citizens are actively engaged in decision making at every level and where no child, woman or man will be left behind or excluded, on the basis of gender, political affiliation, religion, ethnic affiliation, locality, age or other factors.⁴⁵

For example, since the implementation of the AU Agenda 2063 in 2014, countries continue to demonstrate notable progress in advancing women's rights, particularly in political participation, education and socio-economic opportunities and integration into the labor force. Steady progress towards more inclusive governance at different levels has been observed in countries such as Rwanda, Namibia, Ethiopia.⁴⁶ The ultimate goal of this key mandate is involvement of women in all sectors at all levels, as well as creating an enabling environment for them to thrive. The commitments

of the Agenda 2063 serve as a benchmark for integrating gender into data systems that shape

⁴³ Africa Union Agenda 2063,

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid, Aspiration 6, Goal 47-52

⁴⁶ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), 2024, Women's Political Participation ~ Africa Barometer 2024

policy and decision making across sectors. It serves as a point of reference for Africa's concerted efforts to advance gender transformative data governance. African countries must therefore provide an enabling environment for women and young people to flourish and achieve their full potential.

The African Union Data Policy Framework

From a gender transformative perspective, the AU Data Policy framework stresses that the growing reliance on data, particularly for decision making, must not reinforce historical injustices or deepen structural gender inequalities. Ensuring gender responsive and inclusive data governance is key to removing systemic barriers that women and girls face. For example, predictive models used to design subsidy programs or distribute climate-resilient seeds may prioritize male landowners while overlooking women smallholder farmers, who make up the majority of the agricultural workforce. Without gender-responsive data, policies risk deepening inequalities in agricultural productivity and food security in Africa.⁴⁷ The framework calls for data systems to be designed in such a way that women and girls and other underrepresented groups are visible, fairly represented and actively included in shaping Africa's data future.

The AU Data Policy framework further urges member states to reduce risks and mitigate harm in data governance by developing and upholding ethical codes that are responsive to the African context and explicitly take into account the voices of citizens, marginalized and underrepresented people, such as women and girls.

These codes of ethics must go beyond generic standards, embedding safeguards within data systems and algorithms that reflect the lived realities and voices of women and other marginalized groups often excluded from the decision-making process. For example, existing governance frameworks, often imported from the Global North, are typically designed for contexts with different legal traditions, infrastructural capacities, and cultural dynamics, making them misaligned with African realities. This disconnect has led to issues of bias, mistrust, and underrepresentation in data-driven decision making.⁴⁸

The framework further notes that certain categories of data and specific sectors may require tailored data governance approaches that address their unique challenges. However, such measures should not create silos that may render them less usable but should be in harmony with general data governance principles and this policy framework as a whole. An inclusive Africa-specific approach is urgently needed to ensure that data governance reflects women and girls' values, realities and aspirations while protecting their rights.

⁴⁷ Nchanji, E.B., Ageyo, O.C., Puskur, R. et al. (2024), Towards gender-transformative metrics in seed system performance measurement: insights for policy and practice in Sub-Sahara Africa. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43170-024-00291-6>

⁴⁸ George, Patrick. (2023). Inclusive, Trustworthy Data Governance in Africa - Designing governance frameworks tailored for underrepresented regions.

The African Union Gender Policy

The gender policy seeks to close the inequality gap between men and women with a particular focus on addressing persistent gender inequalities and enhancing the understanding and recognition of women's contributions to development. For example, the vision of the policy is to achieve an African society founded on democracy, gender equality, human rights and dignity where the equal status of women and men, girls and boys, is recognized with both sexes thriving together harmoniously, in a peaceful and secure environment characterized by equal partnership in decision-making in the development of the continent. In fact, the goal of the AU gender policy is to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa through a rights-based and evidence-driven approach that uses gender disaggregated data and performance indicators to foster gender responsive environments and practices at all levels.

While notable progress has been made in many African countries, women's concerns often remain secondary in development agendas, with limited representation of gender equality and women's rights initiatives across the continent.⁴⁹ Persistent barriers include limited institutional capacity and insufficient political will to mainstream gender, which exclude women from decision making processes and prevent them from fully benefitting from economic growth, human rights and social development.

The Maputo Protocol

The Maputo protocol obliges African Union Member states to take concrete measures to promote and protect the rights of women ensuring their full participation in all spheres of life, including governance and decision making processes. It calls for the elimination of discrimination against women and integration of gender perspectives into all stages of development planning.

The protocol affirms that development is unattainable without women's voices and leadership at the heart of governance structures. It urges the integration of gender considerations into government processes to ensure that women's needs and priorities are reflected. In doing so, the protocol positions gender integration not as a peripheral issue but as a fundamental pillar of democratic governance and social justice in Africa.

⁴⁹ Africa Union Gender Policy 2009

Chapter 4:

Key Strategic Goals for a Gender Transformative Data Governance

A gender transformative approach aims to uncover and address the underlying causes of gender-based inequalities, discrimination, constraints and exclusion. These causes often include entrenched gender norms, stereotypes, sociocultural attitudes and behavior, and power relations at multiple levels, all of which create, reinforce, and sustain gender inequalities.⁵⁰

Gender inequality and harmful gender norms fuel discrimination and unfairness in the data governance systems and processes as well as limiting access to information and participation for women and other marginalized groups. Interventions which are gender blind risk being exploitative or harmful, as well as ineffective. An effective data governance system must have gender at its centre.

Gender transformative approaches address norms and practices that underlie gender inequality, challenge and ultimately transform the unequal distribution of power in society, benefitting people of all genders. Taking these approaches will help to end discrimination and exclusion in the data governance systems and processes.

In the context of data governance, adopting a gender transformative approach involves working to transform harmful gender norms that promote exclusion of women in data governance processes; remove gender barriers to services and advocate for gender equality.

For example, several African countries have rolled out national digital identification programs. While intended to streamline access to services, civil society has frequently raised concerns that women, especially those in rural areas, were being excluded because of entrenched gender inequalities. Many women lacked the documentation (such as birth certificates or property titles) needed to register; a barrier tied to historic gender discrimination in inheritance and land rights. In response, human rights organizations advanced a gender transformative approach by advocating for reforming policies on identity proof, challenging discriminatory norms, expanding practical access through targeted outreach and mobile registration, and linking digital ID advocacy to broader structural reforms in land and inheritance rights.

A transformative approach therefore promotes gender equality, critically examining inequalities and gender, strengthening positive practices and reshaping social structures, policies and systems that sustain gender inequality.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Open Data Watch & Data 2X, (2019), Bridging the Gap: Mapping Gender Data Availability in Africa Technical Report

⁵¹ Maina, S., & Rooney, L. (2024). Gender data is not just valuable; it is essential in preventing and responding to gender-based violence. But there are gaps; UN Women and Lauren Rooney, iMMAP Inc.

The following strategic goals stand out as key considerations raised from the participatory workshops in the three countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Uganda and Zambia that should not be overlooked during a gender transformative data governance. Each of the components is explained and has respective specific actions that users of this handbook can leverage on to improve their gender integration into data governance.

Additionally, each strategic goal includes a checklist with questions to help users assess compliance with data governance processes and ensure their actions align with this handbook's strategic goals for gender transformative data governance. Furthermore, the checklists will enable users to compare existing data governance practices with the standards highlighted in this handbook, identify gaps, biases across the data value chain and guide the development of gender sensitive policies and programs. The checklists will also serve as a reflective and collaborative tool, encouraging dialogue during consultations, training and stakeholder meetings to promote shared understanding, exchange good practices and co-create solutions.

Strategic Goal 1: Citizen Engagement in Data Governance Practices

Citizen contributions to data, throughout the data value chain, from design, collection to dissemination and use, is vital to ensure that data reflects the lived realities and needs of all people, particularly marginalized groups. Such participation empowers communities to engage meaningfully with public institutions, amplifies marginalized voices, expands citizen ownership of data production and enhances accountability. Citizen contributions to data also help overcome the data challenges, such as invisibility of some categories of people in official statistics, lack of trust in institutions, and the disconnect between local issues and national policymaking, fostering a more inclusive decision-making process.⁵²

In many contexts, women and other marginalized groups are insufficiently engaged in data governance at different levels and they remain unaware of their rights, responsibilities and potential influence over how data is collected, managed and used.⁵³ In practice, their participation is often limited to giving consent during data collection, and only when they are directly involved.⁵⁴ Broader participation is frequently dominated by international organizations, government ministries and probably a few civil society organizations, leaving these groups of people excluded from deeper involvement in decision making.⁵⁵

Across Africa, women have participated in activities such as analysing budgets and service delivery data, and co-designing transparency initiatives such as community scorecards and open data dashboards, giving them a direct role in data governance while ensuring gender-specific barriers are identified and addressed.⁵⁶

⁵² UNSD (2024), The Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data

⁵³ Chowdhury, R. Misrepresentation of Marginalized Groups: A Critique of Epistemic Neocolonialism. *J Bus Ethics* 186, 553–570 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05229-4>

⁵⁴ Data2X, (2022), Transforming the Data Landscape. Solutions to Close Gender Data Gaps. <https://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Solutions-to-Close-Gender-Data-Gaps-FINAL.pdf>

⁵⁵ Focus Group Zambia

⁵⁶ Albert Meijer, Suzanne Potjer, (2018) Citizen-generated open data: An explorative analysis of 25 cases, *Government Information Quarterly*, Volume 35, Issue 4, Pages 613–621, ISSN 0740-624X, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2018.10.004>.

Collaborating with women and integrating their ideas improves their visibility in data, highlighting voices often ‘left furthest behind’ and revealing experiences traditional sources miss. Women’s involvement in the data chain enhances decision-making evidence and bridges the trust gap between citizens and governments.⁵⁷ Women and girls’ contributions to data, such as leading data productions or participating in official statistics production, can be initiated by different stakeholders, whether state (national statistical offices or other government institutions) or non-state actors, including individuals, civil society organizations (CSOs) or academia. This can take place at different stages of the data value chain, from the design of data collection tool, through data production and analysis, until dissemination and uptake.⁵⁸

Specific Action 1: Partner with women and girls’ movements for participatory data governance.

Look to women and girls’ movements and advocates, who have long been at the forefront of driving real change in the data governance ecosystem and collaborate with them/ask for their participation in data governance-related initiatives. These movements and advocates are often experts in the kinds of social mobilization and coalition-building that provide the fertile ground in which the use of data and other transparency and accountability approaches can take root. Engage them in data monitoring approaches such as citizen scorecards, open data platforms, and dashboards, to drive accountability in data governance processes.

Specific Action 2: Build the capacity of women and girls to shape how data is governed.

Provide dedicated capacity building and technical support for women and girls’ movements to help them use data and better engage with data governance processes and practices. Meaningful engagement with women and girls should become a routine standard, not an afterthought. Promoting data governance literacy among women and marginalized groups enhances their ability to contribute meaningfully. Tailored programs, considering literacy levels and cultural nuances, that equip women with skills for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting gender data. Workshops and educational campaigns foster ownership and confidence in gender data generation.

Checklist for Citizen Engagement in Data Governance Practices

Governments and partners can use the following checklist questions to assess whether data governance initiatives centre the voices, expertise, and agency of women and girls.

1. Are women and girls’ movements actively involved in designing and implementing data governance initiatives across the data value chain?
2. Are there any dedicated training or programs, resources and technical support to ensure women and girls can meaningfully engage with open data, citizen scorecards, and accountability mechanisms?
3. Are there mechanisms for women and girls to provide feedback on the value and willingness to continue to participate in data governance processes?

⁵⁷ UNESCO (2024), Empowering Voices: Citizen-Generated Gender Data for Inclusive Governance

⁵⁸ Ibid

Strategic Goal 2: Ethical Gender Data Governance

As governments modernize their data systems, ethical data governance has emerged as a cornerstone for ensuring fairness, integrity, and inclusion in the use of data. It is increasingly vital for governing data processes across the value chain and driving development and innovation in African governments. However, many existing governance approaches across Africa are adapted from global frameworks that inadequately address the continent's cultural diversity, infrastructural realities, and socio-political contexts. Current approaches often lack inclusivity and fail to establish sufficient trust between stakeholders, resulting in persistent bias, inequitable access, and limited community engagement.⁵⁹

Ethical data governance involves establishing appropriate standards to maintain data quality and safeguard the rights of women and girls while ensuring that data is collected and used responsibly.⁶⁰ It emphasizes standards that the minimum amount of data necessary to accomplish the intended purpose is collected and used responsibly.⁶¹ It also involves standards that ensure that data is accurate and of good quality, and that robust security measures are implemented to protect women and girls' data from unauthorized access, processing or damage.⁶² Ethical guidelines are vital to ensure the rights and well-being of women and girls are respected, contributing to the credibility and sustainability of generated data.⁶³

However, as data systems evolve and become interconnected, especially through cross-border data flows, there is a need for clearer guidance to manage ethical challenges in data sharing, access and use. Such guidance becomes essential to ensure there are ethical, equitable, and rights-based governance practices that will help to prevent unintentional violations of privacy and community rights.⁶⁴ For example, there have been cases of health data exploitation, political surveillance, and digital exclusion, which disproportionately affect rural women and marginalized communities across various African countries.⁶⁵

Ethical data governance for African countries means creating systems and policies that ensure that data on women, girls and marginalized groups is collected, managed and used in ways that promote

⁵⁹ George, Patrick. (2023). Inclusive, Trustworthy Data Governance in Africa - Designing governance frameworks tailored for underrepresented regions.

⁶⁰ Teanna Barrett, Chinasa T. Okolo, B. Biira, Eman Sherif, Amy Zhang, and Leilani Battle. 2025. African Data Ethics: A Discursive Framework for Black Decolonial AI. In The 2025 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency (FAccT'25), June 23–26, 2025, Athens, Greece. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 16 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3715275.3732023>

⁶¹ WHO (2016), Putting women first: ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women: Ethical and safety recommendations for intervention research on violence against women. Building on lessons from the WHO publication

⁶² Adele V. (2022), A study on information privacy concerns and expectations of demographic groups in South Africa

⁶³ Appiah R, Raviola G, Weobong B. (2024), Balancing Ethics and Culture: A Scoping Review of Ethico-Cultural and Implementation Challenges of the Individual-Based Consent Model in African Research. Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics;19(3):143-172

⁶⁴ OECD, (2021), Good Practice Principles for Data Ethics in the Public Sector,

⁶⁵ AFIC (2024), Data is power but who controls it? <https://www.africafoicentre.org/data-is-power-but-who-controls-it-dialogue-on-data-governance/>

gender equality, protect rights and avoid harm as well as aligning with international standards.⁶⁶

Specific Action 1: Integrate gender responsive provisions into data governance. Ensure that data governance processes ensure context specific gender responsive mechanisms. For example, integrate gender responsive provisions into national data governance processes, maintain privacy and security standards, and safeguard data against misuse and discrimination.

Specific Action 2: Have clear ethical guidelines. Ensure there are clear ethical data guidelines and protocols for transparent data governance processes. Additionally, establish data-sharing protocols for which gender data can be shared and with which institutions, as well as how it should be gathered.

Guidelines should also include monitoring systems to track positive impacts and potential risks against women, girls and other marginalized groups that may arise in data governance processes.

Checklist for Ethical Gender Data Governance

Stakeholders can use this checklist to evaluate whether data governance processes are gender responsive and inclusive. They emphasize safeguarding against discrimination, addressing biases, establishing clear guidelines, monitoring risks and benefits and fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration to ensure accountability and equity in data governance.

1. Do national data governance protocols include gender responsive provisions that safeguard against discrimination and misuse of gender data?
2. Do governments have mechanisms in place to address particular ethical challenges and biases that affect women, girls and other marginalized groups in data governance?
3. Have ethical guidelines and protocols for data governance across the data value chain to ensure gender inclusivity been developed?
4. Are monitoring systems in place to track both positive impacts and potential risks to implementing intersectional and gender data practices?
5. Is there an established multi-stakeholder platform or mechanism for ongoing collaboration, review and adaptation of gender responsive practices in data governance?

⁶⁶ Ibid

Strategic Goal 3: Strengthening Production and Use of Gender Data

The state of gender data systems in African countries is extremely poor. In most countries, gender data are not readily available, and where they are available, they are often not fully open.⁶⁷ Furthermore, there is a lack of support throughout the gender data system for the production and use of gender data. Data collection methods take into account stereotypes and social and cultural factors that may induce gender bias in the data.⁶⁸

Gender data is largely lacking for many African countries, leading to significant gaps in understanding the lived realities of women, girls and gender-diverse groups.⁶⁹ Women's productive work and contributions to development are therefore often underreported by official statistics across countries.⁷⁰ Data on these are not well covered by surveys, and consistent guidelines on gender disaggregated data collection for these topics are also not available.⁷¹

Even when data are collected, quality issues arise in the absence of consistent standards for data collection.⁷² A major concern is the reliance of survey methods on using proxy respondents to report on outcomes for other household members, particularly women.⁷³ This approach frequently introduces measurement errors issues of women, as they remain unreported by the proxy respondent, who is usually the household head/member.⁷⁴

This absence reinforces gender-blind policymaking and undermines inclusive development. Without reliable data, national governments, development agencies and actors cannot accurately identify or address issues, or evaluate the impact of decisions on the population.⁷⁵

The way surveys are administered also affects the accuracy of the data collected. Factors such as wording, question framing, presence of others during the interview, and the choice of the interviewer can significantly affect responses, particularly for sensitive questions.⁷⁶ For instance, in mixed-gender focus groups, women may speak less or refrain from sharing their opinions openly, especially on sensitive topics, due to prevailing social norms and power dynamics. For this reason, data collection exercises, whether through census, specialized population surveys or administrative records, must not create or reinforce existing discrimination, bias or stereotypes exercised against population groups.⁷⁷ Proper data collection is an essential starting point in realizing gender transformative data governance. It has the potential to reveal how gender-based inequality, discrimination and exclusion are socially constructed by identifying underlying root causes and highlighting the ways by which transformative change and results can be promoted.⁷⁸ Greater investment in qualitative

⁶⁷ UNFPA (2014), Guide on the Gender Analysis of Census Data

⁶⁸ Beegle, K., Serajuddin, U., Stacy, B., & Wadhwa, D. (2023). Missing SDG Gender Indicators.

⁶⁹ Participant Uganda workshop

⁷⁰ UNFPA (2024), Guide on the Gender Analysis of Census Data

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Kabir, Sajjad. (2016). Methods of Data Collection.

⁷³ Cobb, Curtiss. (2017). Answering for Someone Else: Proxy Reports in Survey Research

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Africa Development Bank (2016), Using data to close gender gaps and accelerate women's empowerment in Africa

⁷⁶ Open Data Watch and Data2x (n.d), Integrating Intersectionality in Data Systems: Prepared by Open Data Watch and Data2X A Practical Guide Across the Data Value Chain,

⁷⁷ UNITED NATIONS (2024), Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses,

⁷⁸ UN Women (2022), Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality Results,

studies is also critical to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the lived realities of men and women, especially those from marginalized groups ⁷⁹

Specific Action 1: Co-create and engage women, girls and other marginalized groups in the data production processes, such as designing surveys and other data collection tools to ensure their voices and concerns are accurately represented.

Specific Action 2: Integrate intersectionality right from data collection by ensuring that data goes beyond the binary categories and captures the multiple overlapping identities that shape women's experiences, such as age, education level, gender, race, socio-economic status, geographic location, among others.

Specific Action 3: Develop and refine research methodologies that capture the full spectrum of gendered experiences, including those from marginalized groups. Research methodologies should be designed in such a way that they have questions and methods that dig deep into gender nuances that reflect the lived realities of women. By adopting this approach, unique barriers faced by women and girls can be uncovered, thereby informing more equitable gender transformative policies and interventions.

Specific Action 4: Train researchers/data collectors on gender sensitive and ethical data collection techniques. This will help sustain inclusive data collection practices.

Checklist for Strengthening Production and Use of Gender Data

These checklist questions are designed to guide stakeholders in assessing whether data production systems are gender responsive, inclusive, and aligned with international standards.

1. Are survey data collection tools designed, standardized and adapted to reflect the diverse realities of women and other marginalized populations?
2. Are women, girls and other marginalized groups actively engaged in the design of surveys and data collection tools?
3. Is there intersectional representation in data processes?
4. Are women, girls and other marginalized communities engaged to validate data to ensure that their experiences are accurately represented in the data?
5. Are data collectors and researchers trained in gender sensitive and ethical data collection techniques?

⁷⁹ Ibid

Strategic Goal 4: Multi-stakeholder Partnerships for Gender Transformative Data Governance

Gender transformative data governance cannot be achieved by one entity alone. It requires a collaborative effort that brings together diverse expertise, sectors, experience and influence. Multi-stakeholder partnerships leverage the unique expertise, resources and capacities of each partner to achieve change.⁸⁰ Establishing and strengthening such partnerships with a diverse range of stakeholders, especially with civil society and women's movements, is key for sustainable impact. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can also help shift the balance of power from international organizations to national and, in particular, local and grassroots organizations.

Collaboration between stakeholders including individuals, groups and institutions that collect, manage, regulate, use or are affected by the data is vital for effective data governance with public sector setting frameworks, private sector offering technical expertise and CSOs championing advocacy for privacy, trust and rights ensuring that data governance is inclusive and equitable.⁸¹ Such collaborations and partnerships with diverse actors are necessary to address gender-specific needs and integrate gender-transformative approaches into data governance. Key mandates such as the African Union Data Policy Framework promote such multi-stakeholder collaborations to foster exchange and interoperability of data systems.⁸² All efforts must be made to ensure all stakeholders, including and especially those that are most vulnerable, such as women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, have genuine ownership and control over data governance processes at all levels, and in all phases of the data value chain.

Stakeholders' active involvement can help facilitate understanding of the local context by identifying challenges and constraints as well as potentials and opportunities. It can also strengthen ownership of, and support for, development interventions and the identified transformative changes and results.⁸³ For example, in Rwanda the UN Women, collaborates with key partners under the National Gender Machinery comprised of Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, National Women's Council, Gender Monitoring Office and Rwanda Women MPs (FFRP) to ensure that all women and girls can fully and equally participate in decision-making, and can benefit from gender-responsive laws, policies, budgets, services, and accountable institutions.⁸⁴

Specific Action 1: Expand collaborative efforts to champion gender data collection, analysis, use and dissemination. Governments and non-government actors should work together to pool their capacities and expertise.

Specific Action 2: Establish multi-stakeholder gender data task forces at national and regional levels that bring together all stakeholders to co-create and oversee the development of gender transformative data governance

Specific Action 3: Foster multi-stakeholder partnerships to co-fund gender data initiatives and

⁸⁰ Spotlight Initiative (2022), Global Annual Progress Report 202

⁸¹ Digital Impact Alliance (2024), Effective Data Governance in Africa Demands Collaborative Growth.ADLI Helps Pave the Way.

⁸² African Union (2022), African Union Data Policy Framework

⁸³ Participant _Senegal Workshop

⁸⁴ Ibid

share resources efficiently.

Checklist for Multi-stakeholder Partnerships

These checklist questions guide stakeholders on establishing collaboration and cross-sector partnerships between various stakeholders to ensure innovation, accountability and oversight.

1. Are national statistics offices and governments collaborating with women organizations and CSOs to design inclusive data governance processes?
2. Has a national or regional multi-stakeholder gender data task force been established to oversee gender transformative data governance processes?

Strategic Goal 5: Women's Networks for Data Governance Leadership

Women's meaningful participation in the decision-making process in data governance is essential for creating inclusive, equitable and effective policies. A limited number of women contribute to data production, analysis and use across sectors, but most importantly, they are equally underrepresented in leadership positions and excluded from high-level decision-making.⁸⁵ This underrepresentation is driven by barriers such as unequal access to information, limited opportunities for leadership development, lack of women-centered public policies, patriarchal dominance in the operations of governments and persistent gender stereotypes that undermine women's authority and influence.⁸⁶ Addressing these challenges requires targeted efforts to create pathways for women not only to participate but also lead in shaping data governance frameworks, standards and priorities.⁸⁷ Strengthening women's leadership in data governance demands more than token representation, it involves equipping them with skills, networks and institutional support necessary to influence policy and decision making demands more than token representation, it involves equipping them with skills, networks and institutional support necessary to influence policy and decision making.⁸⁸

Women's networks are essential and influence promotion, retention and progression into leadership. Additionally, they create benefits and opportunities not just for individuals, but also for organizations and governments. For example, the Graça Machel Trust (GMT) a South African-based women's network, supports women's networks across 20 African countries, enabling women entrepreneurs

⁸⁵ Susan Etlinger, Nanjala Nyabola, Teresa Scassa, (2021), How Women Are Shaping Technology and Data Governance: <https://www.cigionline.org/articles/how-women-are-shaping-technology-and-data-governance/>

⁸⁶ Baba Musami, Hauwa & Abdullahi, Muhammad. (2023). Women Participation In Governance: Prospects And Challenges.

⁸⁷ Participant_Uganda Workshop

⁸⁸ Participant_Zambia Workshop

to succeed from grassroots to international levels.⁸⁹ Others such as New Faces New Voices (NFNV) operating in Uganda, Nigeria, Cameroon, Kenya, Tanzania, Egypt, Rwanda, Zambia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), promotes women's financial inclusion, Women in Clean Energy and Climate Action ensures women's active participation in Africa's clean energy transition while The African Women in Agribusiness Network supports women in agriculture and agro-processing, and the Network for African Businesswomen (NABW) supports women across broader business sectors.⁹⁰ These networks have inspired remarkable entrepreneurial innovations, helped women grow their businesses, access new markets locally and internationally, and benefit from training programs to enhance their skills.⁹¹ Additionally, networks enable women from diverse backgrounds to connect through summits, workshops, mentorship programs, and digital forums. This collective effort amplifies their impact, providing better access to opportunities, and business innovations.⁹²

In Kenya, the NFNV network introduced exclusive insurance packages tailored to support women entrepreneurs in mitigating business risks. In Uganda, the networks collaborating with the Ministry of Finance led to the establishment of the Citizen's Financial Reference Bureau (CFRB) to provide financial arbitration and advisory services for women groups.⁹³ The transformative power of women's networks and collaboration is undeniable. As more women unite to share knowledge, overcome challenges, and seize opportunities, they are collectively shaping a future that is equitable, prosperous, and resilient, a future where the power of collaboration truly transforms the world.⁹⁴

As such, it is interesting to consider the role women's networks can play in subverting, dynamics that contribute to gender inequality in data governance. Governments and other stakeholders should intentionally identify and nurture women leaders to ensure their voices are heard in national, regional and global data governance processes. By fostering an environment in data governance where women's leadership is valued and sustained, data governance can become inclusive for all.

Specific Action 1: Foster strong networks. Establish a women's network in data science, data governance and digital technology to amplify women's leadership, build technical capacity, foster mentorship and create a platform for collective advocacy on gender transformative data practices across Africa. This network would work to influence policy, promote research and ensure that women's perspectives and experiences shape data governance agendas, at local, national and continental levels.

Specific Action 2: Appoint women to decision making bodies. Promote women's participation in decision-making and management bodies in data governance and technology. Identify obstacles to women's presence on data governance and tech bodies, including stereotypes and other negative and exclusionary attitudes and practices, and address them. Steps must be taken to ensure that women not only occupy positions on decision making bodies, but that they have a real possibility to participate effectively and influence decisions

⁸⁹ Temitope Ogunlela (2025), The Transformative Power of Networks: Advancing women Entrepreneurs in Africa

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ UNDP (2025), The power of networks: building connections, building a sisterhood

Specific Action 3: Establish robust mentorship programs. Create structured and sponsored mentorship programs for women in data governance leadership and decision making. Through these programs pair aspiring women with experienced professionals and leaders in STEM and data governance across the continent who can provide guidance, support and advocacy.

Specific Action 5: Increase visibility of role models. Highlight successful African women in STEM, data governance through various platforms to inspire the next generation and challenge societal norms.

Checklist for strengthening women's leadership in data governance.

To assess progress in advancing women's leadership and meaningful participation in data governance, and technology, the following checklist questions can help evaluate representation, mentorship and the strength of supportive networks.

1. Are women represented on national and regional data governance decision making bodies?
2. Are there transparent mechanisms in place to monitor and track women's inclusion in leadership positions on these bodies in data governance?
3. Has a formal network in data governance, science and technology been established?
4. Does the network provide mentorship and capacity strengthening opportunities for women in data governance?
5. Are women perspectives from diverse regions across the continent represented within the network?
6. Are there targeted interventions in place to support women's roles in decision making and leadership as well as increasing women's own awareness of their rights and strengthening their self-esteem and confidence?

Strategic Goal 6: Capacity Building

Building the capacity of diverse actors is central to achieving gender transformative data governance. Capacity building should be a key national and regional priority, and resources will need to be allocated in this regard in the areas of data, skills and an understanding of gender transformative data governance. Meaningful participation of women, girls and marginalized groups in data governance requires more than inclusion; it demands skills, confidence, and institutional support to engage, question and influence how data is collected, managed and used. Strengthening capacities at individual, institutional and systemic levels ensures that gender perspectives are not merely added on but embedded throughout the data processes. From promoting data literacy to ethical awareness, data analysis, reporting and use, capacity building empowers stakeholders to co-create equitable, inclusive and accountable data systems that serve everyone. For example, there have been capacity building efforts by various African governments on enforcing data protection laws and managing cross-border data flows by UNECA,⁹⁵ and capacity building for youth and local academic institutions to improve data demand and supply at all levels by the African Population and Health Research Center.⁹⁶ Equipping both policymakers and community members with the skills they need not only empowers them but also bridges the gap between ambition and reality, driving tangible progress.

Specific Action 1: Build capacity for intersectional data use. Without adequate skills and resources, even the best-intentioned efforts to apply intersectional data will fall short. Investments in user training and data literacy are essential to turn data into actionable insights.

Specific Action 2: Invest in gender responsive capacity building. Governments should invest in building capacity and strengthening national statistical systems and harmonizing data collection tools to eliminate bias and gaps, particularly for women and other marginalized populations. This includes enhancing skills in data analysis, production of gender responsive reports and integrating gender data into national and regional statistics to improve data availability and inform inclusive decision making.

Specific Action 3: Support the development of feminist and gender data curricula and training toolkits tailored for public institutions, civil society organizations, and academia, to build a critical mass of gender data champions equipped to drive inclusive, ethical and rights-based data governance practices.

Checklist for Capacity Building

To strengthen gender transformative data governance, it is essential to assess whether training systems and resources adequately integrate gender and intersectionality. The following questions help to evaluate the extent to which capacity programs are designed, updated and applied across institutions.

⁹⁵ UNECA (2025), Mozambique hosts data governance workshop to strengthen national digital capacity

⁹⁶ APHRC (2023), Strengthening Sub-National Data Value Chains in Sub-Saharan Africa

1. Are there national and regional training programs in place that include gender and intersectionality modules?
2. Have curricula and toolkits been developed specifically to train gender transformative and intersectional data governance?
3. Is the training content updated regularly to reflect emerging best practices in gender responsive and intersectional data governance?
4. Are public institutions, CSOs, and academia using these training materials to strengthen inclusive, ethical and rights-based data governance practices?

Strategic Goal 7: Budgetary Allocation for Gender Transformative Processes

While over 90% of countries globally examined by a recent UN Women report have policies and programs to address gender equality, only 53% of them go ahead to report having sufficient resources allocated for that purpose.⁹⁷ What is more surprising is that only a minority of countries present government expenditures by gender, obscuring potential cues to how the bulk of government spending can address gender gaps.

Adequate and sustained budgetary allocation is essential for advancing gender transformative data governance.⁹⁸ Without dedicated funding, initiatives promoting gender equality in data collection and use often remain under-prioritized or unsustainable. Gender transformative processes require investment in human and technical capacity, development of inclusive tools, continuous stakeholder engagement and monitoring mechanisms that ensure that women and girls experiences are reflected in data systems and policy outcomes.⁹⁹ The budget should therefore consider such investments to enable equitable allocation of resources.

Specific Action 1: Institutionalize gender transformative budgeting within national and institutional data governance processes to ensure consistent budget allocation for gender transformative initiatives.

Specific Action 2: Designate budget lines specifically for gender data production, analysis, and dissemination within various institutions and relevant government agencies.

Specific Action 3: Conduct regular audits and reporting on expenditure related to gender equality and data governance.

⁹⁷ World Economic Forum (2024) Global Gender Report 2024

⁹⁸ Femnet (2019), Gender Transformative Budgeting: A guide for Pan African Parliamentarians

⁹⁹ Participant_Uganda

Specific Action 4: Build capacity of stakeholder on gender transformative planning, budgeting and monitoring so as to integrate gender considerations into planning, budgeting and resource allocation.

Checklist for Budgetary allocation for Gender Transformative processes

Ensuring that sufficient resources are allocated to gender transformative data governance is critical for translating commitments into action. These checklist questions help stakeholders assess whether financial planning, budgeting and resource allocation processes meaningfully support gender transformative processes in data governance.

1. Is there a dedicated budget line for gender transformative data governance processes? Are gender considerations integrated into financial planning and resource allocation processes?
2. Are statistical systems adequately funded and strengthened to systematically collect gender disaggregated data across all sectors?
3. Are there transparent mechanisms to track and report spending on gender transformative data governance initiatives?
4. Have financial personnel received training on gender transformative budgeting?

Strategic Goal 8: Research and Development

Strengthen research and innovation ecosystems that prioritize gender transformative data governance by promoting feminist and intersectional knowledge production, evidence generation and technological advancement. Investments in data-related innovation and research and development as well as in capabilities to harmonize standards, skills and infrastructures, can enable stakeholders to develop better data related policies across the board. Additionally, invest in research that exposes gender biases and innovations that address gender data gaps across sectors.

Specific Action 1: Establish national and regional hubs focused on gender data governance to facilitate cross-sectoral knowledge exchange, peer learning and collaboration between researchers, CSOs and policy makers.

Specific Action 2: Fund participatory research on gender data gaps to generate evidence that informs policy and program design, particularly those in under-researched categories.

Checklist for Research and Development

The following checklist questions help assess whether participatory research initiatives are in place to strengthen collaboration and evidence-based policymaking in data governance.

1. Have national and regional hubs on gender data been established?
2. Do these hubs facilitate cross-sector learning and knowledge exchange between researchers, CSOs, policy makers, and other stakeholders?
3. Are women's rights organizations and marginalized communities meaningfully represented in these hubs?
4. Is there a funding mechanism dedicated to participatory research on gender data gaps?
5. Are research findings disseminated in accessible formats for policy makers, CSOs, and communities?

Conclusion

A gender transformative approach in data governance goes beyond addressing inequality gaps, it confronts the systemic and structural causes of gender-based discrimination, exclusion, and power disparities. This means challenging the entrenched norms, practices, and institutional arrangements perpetuating inequality. Importantly, gender transformative change must occur in the design of data governance interventions by governments, private sector actors, civil society, and international development partners. By strengthening the gender responsiveness of policies, strategies, processes, and procedures whilst ensuring accountability for equitable outcomes, data governance systems that are fair, transparent, and inclusive can be built.

Ultimately, gender transformative approaches are a foundational requirement for sustainable and equitable development in the digital age. When women and other underrepresented voices have equal voice, agency and leadership, in shaping how data is collected, governed and used, societies are better positioned to harness data for public good, safeguard rights and drive inclusive agendas. This handbook calls stakeholders to commit to this vision as an ongoing collective responsibility that shapes the future of data governance.

