

# Gender Data Futures

## A Handbook on Inclusive Data Governance

### Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1 The Rationale and Purpose of the Handbook	4
1.2 Who is the Handbook for	4
1.3 Structure and How to use this Handbook	5
<b>Chapter 2: Gender Transformative Related Concepts</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Gender data	6
Use cases of Gender Data	7
2.2 Gender Transformative approach	8
Gender transformative Approach Use Case	9
2.3 Intersectionality	10
Intersectionality Use case	10
2.4 Feminist approach	11
2.5 Gender equality and equity	11
2.6 Gender Norms	12
2.7 Empowerment	13
Empowerment Use Case	13
<b>Chapter 3: Key African Union Mandates on Gender Transformation</b>	<b>14</b>
3.1 The African Union Agenda 2063	14
3.2 The African Union Data Policy Framework	15
3.3 The African Union Gender Policy	15
3.4 The Maputo Protocol	16
<b>Chapter 4: Key Strategic Goals for a Gender Transformative Data Governance</b>	<b>16</b>
4.1 Strategic Goal 1: Citizen Engagement in Data Governance Practices	17
Check list for Citizen Engagement in Data Governance Practices	19
4.2 Strategic Goal 2: Ethical Gender Data Governance	20
Check list for Ethical Gender Data Governance	22
4.3 Strategic Goal 3: Strengthening Production and use of Gender Data	22
Check list for Strengthening Production and use of Gender Data	25
4.4 Strategic Goal 4: Public-Private-CSO Collaboration and Partnerships	25
Check list for Public-Private-CSO Collaboration and Partnerships	27
4.5: Strategic Goal 5: Strengthen women leadership in data governance	27
Check list for strengthening women leadership in data governance.	29
4.6 Strategic Goal 6: Capacity building	29
Check list for Capacity building	30

4.7 Strategic Goal 7: Research and Development	30
Check list for Research and Development	31
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>31</b>

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This handbook was developed through participatory engagements with women policy makers, technocrats, civil society and private sector across Africa, specifically Uganda, Zambia and Côte d'Ivoire. It consolidates their insights and learns global practices to equip African governments and partners with practical guidance to embed gender-transformative principles into data governance frameworks.

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## Executive Summary

Data is a critical asset for economic policy making and service delivery. Yet gender biases in data 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 shape benefit from the data ecosystem. This handbook offers 8 straight 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 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 government, NGOs, 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<sup>1</sup>. Effective data governance establishes rules for the collection, use and sharing of data ensuring interoperability, transparency and accountability much like standardized airport procedures enable and trusted global travel. 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 attainment of government goals and objectives as well as enhance overall service delivery<sup>2</sup>.

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

<sup>2</sup> MO IBRAHIM FOUNDATION (2024) The power of data for governance 2023 IAG SERIES REPORT Closing data gaps to accelerate Africa's transformation; ,

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 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<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, data governance exists to emphasize interoperability, standardization, and responsible development of data-related technologies as well as to ensure or to support the harnessing of the potential of data as a driver of growth<sup>4</sup>. For example, think of data governance like organising an international airport. Standardised 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 data from different sources can be transported, connected seamlessly, and fuel innovation and growth.

Across the continent many governments and regional bodies have taken steps to integrate gender into key policy areas such as health, agriculture, poverty reduction, education migration among others<sup>5</sup>. However it is important that these gender integration efforts extend into data governance ensuring that data systems and practices and institutions are inclusive, equitable and actively work to end any forms of discrimination and injustices. Examples of institutional approaches include Rwanda's Gender Monitoring Office to coordinate across sectors and advance approaches such as gender-responsive budgeting<sup>6</sup>, South Africa's Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities that collaborates with other ministries to mainstream gender and harmonise data on issues such as gender-based violence, and Uganda's institutionalisation of gender equity by certifying budgets, monitoring national gender policies, and building integrated data systems through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development as well the Equal Opportunities Commission<sup>7</sup>. Similar multi-sectoral strategies are needed in data governance to ensure that data practices reflect gender realities of African women and other marginalized groups to promote inclusion.

The African Union Data Policy Framework<sup>8</sup> provides a foundational reference point for integrating inclusivity into data governance. The framework predates the integration of gender in data governance based on the inclusivity of all citizens in the data ecosystem. 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.

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

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

<sup>5</sup> Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality Results; UN Women, 2023

<sup>6</sup> Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. The Gender Snapshot 2023; UN Women

<sup>7</sup> The African Development Bank Group Gender Strategy 2021 – 2025 Investing in Africa's women to accelerate inclusive growth, The African Development Bank, 2022

<sup>8</sup> African Union Data Policy Framework. 2022. Documents, <https://au.int/en/documents/20220728/au-data-policy-framework>.

African governments and regional bodies are advancing gender transformation and digital transformation at the same time through 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 gender specific provisions beyond clauses related to children<sup>9</sup>; Zambia's Data Protection Act 2021, references vulnerable persons without defining them<sup>10</sup> and Ivory Coast'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 ecosystems 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-responsive frameworks within their data policies and systems. Advancing this integration is critical for achieving inclusive digital transformation and promoting gender equality across the continent.

## 1.1 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 policy makers and institutions to identify and challenge power imbalances within data ecosystems across Africa. It emphasises approaches that reflect the lived realities and diverse identities of all citizens but most especially women, girls and other marginalized 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 women's rights, 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.

## 1.2 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 responsive and equitable data governance in Africa including high level decision makers at the African Union, in governments and international institutions, national policy makers, and the technocrats, advocacy groups and civil society organisations working on gender equality and digital transformation.

It is especially relevant to those involved in designing, implementing and overseeing data

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<sup>9</sup> 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](https://pdpo.go.ug/media/2022/03/Data_Protection_and_Privacy_Regulations-2021.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> 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](https://www.dataprotection.gov.zm/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/DATA-PROTECTION-QUICK-GUIDE_2.pdf)

systems and policies at local, national, regional levels, as well as those advocating for more inclusive and just digital ecosystems. By equipping these diverse actors with tested tools, strategic frameworks, and context rich examples, 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. Decisionmakers 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 marginalized voices in policy dialogues and reform initiatives.

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.

When gender considerations, moving beyond simple sex disaggregation, are meaningfully integrated into data systems, governments and their partners are better equipped to design inclusive policies, address structural inequalities, and ensure that development outcomes genuinely reflect the diverse realities of all citizens, particularly women, girls, and marginalized communities.

## **1.3 Structure and How to use this Handbook**

The handbook invites users to approach digital and 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 Each Chapter Sequentially**

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 the 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 such as methods for citizen engagement, ethical data management, inclusive data collection, and strengthening women's leadership. Work through each strategic goal, leveraging the checklists and suggested activities to audit and improve your existing practices.

### 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 surface 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 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 digital governance that benefits everyone and leaves no one behind.

## Chapter 2: Gender Transformative Related Concepts

This chapter gives an overview of the core concepts underpinning the gender transformative approach to data governance. It covers key terms such as gender data, gender inclusivity and intersectionality. Understanding these concepts is essential for effectively applying the gender transformative approach into practice. It also serves as a starting point to understand the need for building a shared commitment to addressing the root causes of barriers in data governance. When these concepts are poorly understood or misinterpreted, it becomes difficult to implement the strategic goals and their corresponding actions, limiting the strategies' ability to influence policy and achieve meaningful progress in gender equality.

Strengthening understanding of these concepts helps stakeholders to appreciate the value of integrating the gender transformative approach in data governance across all sectors in policy areas. It also reinforces that this approach should be a shared responsibility and part of the work of everyone involved in shaping and using data across the African continent.

### 2.1 Gender data

Around the world people 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 is essential for understanding lived experiences and accelerating progress toward a more equitable and just world<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Gender Data Compass 2023 Report; Open Data Watch

Gender data refers to the collection, analysis, and use of information that reveals where and how gender differences, inequalities, and power imbalances exist.<sup>12</sup> across all dimensions of life, from education and employment to health, political participation, and digital access, people's opportunities and priorities are shaped by their gender.<sup>13</sup> This means intentionally capturing nuanced perspectives especially for women, girls and other marginalized groups whose identities and needs are too often overlooked<sup>14</sup>. 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<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup>. Collecting such data requires methods that avoid stereotypes and take into account how cultural and social norms may introduce bias<sup>17</sup>. 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.

## Use cases of Gender Data

Gender data are used to inform policies that promote women's economic empowerment. Uganda's surveys conducted by Uganda Bureau of Statistics contributed to the adoption of energy-efficient cooking technologies in certain districts, and sparked discussions with Parliament to revise the Employment Act, as well as with the Ministry of Water and Environment to extend clean water to underserved communities. Tanzania's household data were used to revise the minimum salary of government employees and to better target poor women for coverage under the Tanzania Social Action Fund. Meanwhile in Kenya, County gender data were used to inform the Kitui County government's gender policy and data provided in the County Data Sheets triggered three concrete legislative actions: a County Gender Policy and an Empowerment Bill and Mainstreaming Bill. Morocco's first-ever costing of violence against women and girls, based on data from its 2019 VAW survey, put the cost at 2.85 billion Moroccan Dirham (USD 313 million). Subsequently, Morocco's 2020 National Integrated Plan for Women's Economic Empowerment identified VAW as a critical obstacle (objective 3.2) and the New Development Model launched in 2021 called for a zero-tolerance policy. Similarly, in Rwanda, gender data from Demographic and Health Survey data was used to develop a National Violence against Women Policy.

*Source: UN Women(2022), Final Annual Report: Moving the Needle on Gender Data*

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<sup>12</sup> Gender Data: Sources, gaps, and measurement opportunities Data2X March 2017

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup>Improving Gender Data to Leave no one Behind; Development Initiatives, 2023

<sup>15</sup> What Do We Mean by "Gender Data?" March 6, 2020Global Data Policy Annie Kilroy

<sup>16</sup> Gender Data: Sources, gaps, and measurement opportunities Data2X March 2017

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

Without timely and robust gender data that is effectively used and leveraged, it is challenging to make well-informed decisions about how to most effectively reduce inequalities and improve outcomes for people left behind<sup>18</sup>.

## 2.2 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<sup>19</sup>. These structural inequalities are rooted 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<sup>20</sup>. This introduced structural drivers of inequity that continue to reverberate today and 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<sup>21</sup>. Examples include implementing policies that mandate equal representation of women and marginalised groups in data governance bodies, adopting gender-responsive budgeting to ensure resources are allocated equitably, building national gender data frameworks that collect and analyse 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.

A gender-transformative approach seeks to change the structural and power dynamics that underlie gender-based inequalities, discrimination, and exclusion and empower disadvantaged populations<sup>22</sup>. This requires building the individual and collective agency of women and girls and people of diverse gender identities, strengthening their skills, knowledge, confidence, decision making power so that they can meaningfully participate in, influence and even lead program implementation, monitoring and evaluation in ways that are relevant to their context<sup>23</sup>. A gender transformative approach must also be intersectional addressing how gender inequalities overlap with other factors such as race, religion, disability, sexual orientation. Overlooking these intersections risks under-mining progress or making results short lived. Fully sustained gender transformative approach entails building partnerships and collaborations, including working

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<sup>18</sup> Improving Gender Data to Leave no one Behind; Development Initiatives, 2023

<sup>19</sup> Overview of gender transformative approaches: FAO, IFAD and WFP. 2020. Gender transformative approaches for food security, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture – A compendium of fifteen good practices. Rome.

<sup>20</sup> Decolonization and Afro-feminism: Sylvia Tamale, 2022

<sup>21</sup> Leveraging Digital and New Technologies for Development in Africa's Emerging Economies with Significant Structural Constraints, Ngwinui, Belinda, Azenui, 2022

<sup>22</sup> Jess MacArthur, Naomi Carrard, Federico Davila, Melita Grant, Tamara Megaw, Juliet Willetts, Keren Winterford, Gender-transformative approaches in international development: A brief history and five unifying principles, Women's Studies International Forum, Volume 95, 2022, 102635, ISSN 0277-5395, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2022.102635>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid



with social movements, feminist, women's rights and youth-led movements, the private sector and with institutions that have a large-scale reach<sup>24</sup>.

## Gender transformative Approach Use Case

As a child growing up in Morogoro, Tanzania, Annagrace Malamsha was always drawn to the sciences. While many young girls in her primary school seemed to steer away from science subjects, she found them fascinating, driven by a deep curiosity to understand how things work. It was there that she also started to develop a love for ICT. She eventually pursued a university degree in Pharmacy, then in 2023, she applied and joined the African Girls Can Code Initiative (AGCCI) coding camp in Dar es Salaam, an initiative implemented by UN Women in collaboration with the Ministries of Gender, ICT, and Education in Mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar, African Union Commission, and the International Telecommunication Union, and Government of Belgium targets girls and young women aged 17 to 25, providing them with training in coding and digital literacy. The AGCCI Coding Camp was a life changer," says Mamlasha, adding that it formed a core part of shaping her decision to pursue a career within the tech space. The initiative has benefited over 1,000 girls through intensive coding camps that covered foundational programming and hands-on digital training. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is emerging as a powerful tool for economic empowerment, creating opportunities in employment, entrepreneurship, and innovation. Yet, despite rapid digital advancements, women remain underrepresented in the tech sector. By empowering them with the skills they need, we can help bridge this gap and create a more inclusive digital economy, where women and girls can contribute towards driving innovation and economic growth.

Following the coding camp, Malamsha was able to use the skills she gained to pivot from her career as a pharmacist with a stronger focus on digital marketing. She was able to use what she learned from the coding camp to work as a freelance graphics designer, brand and social media manager. Since participating in the camp, Malamsha has consistently sought opportunities to give back to her community with initiatives ranging from engaging in international campaigns that empower women to training others on digital marketing. She also co-founded a non-governmental organization, SHEWORKS in Tech, dedicated to establishing digital clubs in secondary schools and equipping the next generation of innovators with essential tech skills.

As digital skills become the cornerstone of modern economies, initiatives like AGCCI are vital for closing the gender gap in technology and empowering more women to become leaders in technology. The program, currently in its third phase, will host additional coding camps in 2025 to expand opportunities, empower more young women, and drive inclusive growth and innovation across Tanzania.

**Source: UN Women: Bridging the Digital Gender Gap: Digital Literacy Skills Open Doors for Young Women in Tanzania**

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<sup>24</sup> Background Paper Series UNICEF Gender Policy and Action Plan 2022-2025 Gender-Transformative Programming Rachel Marcus, Fiona Samuels, Shoubo Jalal, and Helen Belachew

## 2.3 Intersectionality

Intersectionality recognizes that gender is deeply intertwined with other sources of inequality and exclusion, creating overlapping forms of discrimination, vulnerability, marginalization for many women, men and gender diverse people<sup>25</sup>. 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, institutions, shaped by colonialism and patriarchy<sup>26</sup>. 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<sup>27</sup>. Taking an 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.

### Intersectionality Use case

The benefits to using digital technology for maternal healthcare tasks ranging from text messaging as a notification system, or as a form of health education, to tools for accessing maternal health information. From a Sub-Saharan Africa context, a major criterion for participation or inclusion in digital maternal health programs is mobile ownership and independent control of a mobile device; often mobile phone. This criterion inevitably excludes women who may not own mobile phones but have access to shared devices. Another restrictive participation criterion is a focus on internet access. For instance, a digital maternal health intervention study in South Africa required participants to have access to a smartphone and internet. There was no indication of gender-specific considerations in mobile ownership or access to the internet. This criterion is often further complicated by the requirement to be connected to specific internet providers. These criteria dictate who reaps the intended benefits of digital health programs and who is left behind. Such initiatives across Sub-Saharan Africa indicate that compared to women with access to mobile devices, women with no mobile access have limited health knowledge and are significantly less likely to receive skilled maternal care services including antenatal care, delivery care, and postpartum care. This suggests that the digitally excluded women have a greater need of services offered by digital health technologies yet are being left behind. This consideration brings under scrutiny the elusive participation criteria in digital maternal health programs. Gender-specific constraints to women's active engagement with digital technology are largely ignored. In fact, a widely pervasive assumption is that digital technology is gender-neutral, therefore men and women use and benefit from it equally. Arguably, digital maternal health programs demanding mobile ownership as a criterion for inclusion and participation are assuming gender neutrality in access to

<sup>25</sup> Study on intersectional approaches to gender mainstreaming in adaptation-relevant interventions February 2022, Adaptation Fund

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> 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)

and use of mobile devices. Not only is this approach engendering gender inequality, but it also risks leaving behind the most vulnerable women.

*Source: Leaving no woman or girl behind? Inclusion and participation in digital maternal health programs in sub-Saharan Africa*<sup>28</sup>.

## 2.4 Feminist approach

Feminist approaches aim to transform entrenched patriarchal power structures and empower those disadvantaged by them — most often women and girls, but also men, boys, and people of diverse gender identities whose realities are marginalised 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, emphasise the need to confront colonial legacies and their enduring influence on governance, knowledge production, and power dynamics. As Sylvia Tamale<sup>29</sup> argues, any effort towards gender justice in Africa must decolonise 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 recognise 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<sup>30</sup>.

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.

## 2.5 Gender equality and equity

Gender equality refers to equal outcomes for women, men, girls, boys and gender-diverse people<sup>31</sup>. Gender equity refers to fairness: the process of levelling the playing field to achieve

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<sup>28</sup> Udenigwe, O., Yaya, S. Leaving no woman or girl behind? Inclusion and participation in digital maternal health programs in sub-Saharan Africa. *Reprod Health* 19, 54 (2022).  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-022-01358-1>

<sup>29</sup> Tamale, S. (2020). *Decolonization and afro-feminism*.

<sup>30</sup> 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>

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

gender equality. Gender-transformative approaches are a way to operationalize gender equity, with the goal of achieving gender equality through intentional and additional measures<sup>32</sup>. Gender equality and equity in data governance would mean that all genders have equal say in how data is collected, governed, shared and used. 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<sup>33</sup>. Gender equality and equity in data governance would also mean that there is fairness in introducing corrective measures for marginalized groups such as women and girls who face unique barriers in data and digital transformation. For example Uganda's ministry of ICT and the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) has 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<sup>34</sup>. Gender equality and equity in data governance would require that women and gender diverse groups are represented in decision making places in data governance for example in national statistics offices, Data commissions, AI ethics boards among others. For example, Rwanda's gender responsive statistics strategy ensures that women policy makers are included in national data governance structures<sup>35</sup>.

## 2.6 Gender Norms

These are informal social rules defining the expected behaviour, roles and responsibilities of people based on their perceived gender<sup>36</sup>. Gender norms form part of structures that underpin gender inequality and are a key target of change in gender-transformative approaches<sup>37</sup>. In the context of data governance, gender norms influence who decisions are prioritised, whose data is collected, how it is categorised and how it is used in decision making processes. Transforming gender norms requires change at all levels including individual, community, systems and services, and policy<sup>38</sup>. This transformation ensures that governance frameworks not only reflect gender equity in principle but actively eliminate system barriers in collection, analysis and application of data. For example the Government of Rwanda is committed through the Women Empowerment Through Digital Technologies strategy (WEM-TECH) to ensuring women's empowerment and their full participation based on equality in all spheres of society and the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> UN WOMEN(2024), Bridging the digital gender divide through mentorship and collaboration

<sup>34</sup> 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).)

<sup>35</sup> 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.>

<sup>36</sup> Background Paper Series UNICEF Gender Policy and Action Plan 2022-2025 Gender-Transformative Programming Rachel Marcus, Fiona Samuels, Shoubo Jalal, and Helen Belachew

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> TRANSFORMING GENDER NORMS TO ACHIEVE EQUALITY NOW Curated Discussion Report #3, March 2021, Generation Equality Forum

digital ecosystem as innovators, designers, contributors to data processes, developers beyond simply using or accessing technology to improve their daily lives. One of the specific objectives of this strategy is to combat barriers stemming from social norms, stereotypes, and enhance digital safety for women's digital inclusion through collaborating with the public and private sectors to implement proactive policies and innovative solutions aimed at breaking down entrenched norms, fostering gender equality, and ensuring women's safety in the digital realm, while making digital technologies more gender-responsive to address specific barriers faced by women and align with their aspirations and objectives, thus fostering a more inclusive and secure digital environment for all<sup>39</sup>. By combating barriers stemming from social norms, stereotypes there is anticipated increase in uptake of data governance practices.

## 2.7 Empowerment

Empowerment is defined in various ways. One comprehensive definition describes it as a personal journey during which individuals through increased assets and critical awareness develop a clear and evolving understanding of themselves, their rights and opportunities in the world around them<sup>40</sup>. This process involves gaining increased agency, and voice and participation, enabling them to make informed personal and public choices that improve their lives and communities<sup>41</sup>. Supporting empowerment requires concerted efforts to transform the structures, institutions and dynamics which reinforce and perpetuate inequity and barriers<sup>42</sup>. Promoting the empowerment of women, girls and people of diverse gender identities is a core aspect of gender-transformative programming<sup>43</sup> and for data governance it would involve equipping women and other stakeholders with skills to understand, analyse and use data to advocate for women's rights as well as holding governments accountable

### Empowerment Use Case

UN Women through its efforts to promote the uptake and use of gender data and statistics in West and Central Africa tailored and delivered a training curriculum on communicating gender data and statistics. For statisticians from the national statistics offices of Malawi and Liberia respectively, training on communicating gender data and statistics led to an increased awareness of appropriate use of data visualization tools and audience-centered messaging, with the result of statistical products that resonate more with the target audiences.

In Malawi for example, repurposing data into infographics and user-friendly communication materials improved reach on issues of GBV and women's empowerment in rural areas where literacy may pose a challenge. There is increased demand for these materials from CSOs in Malawi who now feel better equipped to lobby policymakers on these issues.

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<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion(2021), WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES (WEM-TECH) STRATEGY

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> 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](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-6006-4_2)

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

In Liberia, participation in the training directly led to the Ministry of Gender, Children & Social Protection developing statistical products that resonate more with the target audiences through repurposing data into infographics and user-friendly communication materials. Data storytelling increased how much data is being communicated on social media to reach the youth target group, while making it easier for partner NGOs and CSOs to share messages on these issues to advocate in their constituencies.

*Source: UNWomen; Uptake and Use of Gender Data<sup>44</sup>*

## 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 actively dismantle structural barriers that perpetuate inequality. This chapter highlights the position of the key mandates on gender inclusion.

### 3.1 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 reflects both continental and global contexts and trends shaping Africa's transformation. The framework underscores gender equality and youth empowerment as central pillars, placing women at the heart of all continental efforts to ensure their full participation in Africa's transformation and to build caring, inclusive societies.<sup>45</sup> The assembly further emphasised 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 endeavours. African countries must therefore provide an enabling environment for women, and young people to flourish and achieve their full potential<sup>46</sup>.

Agenda 2063, Africa Union's long term development blueprint envisions a continent of free citizens and expanded horizons, where the full potential of women and youth, boys and girls are realized. It aspires to a universal culture of good governance, democratic values, gender equality, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law. This key mandate aspires that Africa's development is people-driven, harnessing the potential of Africans, especially women and

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<sup>44</sup> UN Women(2021): Uptake and Use;[https://africa.unwomen.org/en/uptake-and-use?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://africa.unwomen.org/en/uptake-and-use?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>45</sup> Africa Union Agenda 2063,

<sup>46</sup> Africa Union Agenda 2063,

youth. It 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<sup>47</sup>.

The ultimate goal of this key mandate is involvement of women in all sectors at all levels as well 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 policy and decision making across sectors. It serves as a point of reference for Africa's concerted efforts for advancing gender transformative data governance.

## **3.2 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 automated 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 and gender diverse communities face in the digital ecosystem. 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 programmes or distribute climate-resilient seeds may prioritise 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.

The framework calls for data systems to be designed in such a way that women and girls and other underrepresented and discriminated against groups are visible, fairly represented and actively included in shaping Africa's digital 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 in data governance that are responsive to 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. 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.

## **3.3 The African Union Gender Policy**

The gender policy seeks to close the equality gap between men and women with a particular focus on addressing persistent gender inequalities and enhancing the understanding and recognition of women's contribution to development. The policy provides a framework to accelerate the realization of gender equality, non-discrimination and fairness for all people.

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<sup>47</sup> Africa Union Agenda 2063, Aspiration 6, Goal 47-52

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. 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.

### **3.4 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.

## **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 behaviour, and power relations at multiple levels, all of which create, reinforce, and sustain gender inequalities<sup>48</sup>.

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

Gender transformative approaches address, 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 ecosystem.

A gender transformative approach requires changing policies, norms and practices which underlie gender inequality. This means addressing unequal gender relations, issues of power and violence, and discrimination faced by girls, women, and gender diverse people at all levels. It

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<sup>48</sup> Bridging the Gap: Mapping Gender Data Availability in Africa Technical Report March, 2019, Open Data Watch & Data 2X, 2019.



also aims at addressing the structural and social root causes of gender inequality and thereby promote more equitable outcomes for all people through their diversity. In the context of data governance, adopting a gender transformative approach involves working to transform harmful gender norms; prevent 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 programmes. 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 organisations, advanced a gender transformative approach by 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<sup>49</sup>. The following strategic goals stand out as key considerations raised from the participatory workshops in the three countries 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.

## **4.1 Strategic Goal 1: Citizen Engagement in Data Governance Practices**

Citizen contributions to data, which encompasses citizens participation in different processes throughout the data value chain, from design, collection to dissemination and use, is increasingly recognized as critical to the wellbeing of all members of society, especially marginalized groups, and to ensure that data remain relevant and impactful. The impacts include empowering communities in their dialogue with public institutions, respecting marginalized voices, expanding data production power to citizens, addressing intersectional marginalisation, and holding institutions accountable.

Citizen contributions to data also help overcome the data challenges we face today, such as invisibility of marginalisation in official statistics, lack of trust in institutions and the disconnect between local issues and national policymaking, fostering a more inclusive decision-making process<sup>50</sup>.

In many contexts, women and other marginalized groups are insufficiently engaged in data governance at different levels. Many remain unaware of their rights, responsibilities and potential influence over how data is collected, managed and used<sup>51</sup>. In practice, their

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<sup>49</sup> 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.

<sup>50</sup> UNSD (2024), The Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data

<sup>51</sup> 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>

participation is often limited to giving consent during data collection, and only when they are directly involved. Broader engagement efforts tend to focus on international organizations, line ministries and probably a few civil society organizations, leaving these groups of people excluded from deeper involvement in decision making<sup>52</sup>.

The meaningful participation of women and other marginalized groups in the formulation of data governance strategies introduces diversity in thought, lived experience, and social perspective<sup>53</sup>. This diversity is essential for creating inclusive and comprehensive data policies that respond to a wider range of societal needs and concerns<sup>54</sup>. For instance, women can engage in data governance capacity building, designing transparency initiatives with gender in mind and ensure data is used to drive accountability<sup>55</sup>. Their participation in data governance empowers them to enhance inclusive policies, making them active co-creators in the gender data ecosystem. Beyond the need for inclusive gender data governance, an inclusive data value chain is also required where citizens participate in developing ideas to address gaps in conventional data and amplify diverse voices, enhancing public governance and challenging power dynamics<sup>56</sup>.

In several African countries, women's groups have engaged in data governance capacity building, learning to analyse budgets and service delivery data, and co-designing transparency initiatives such as community scorecards and open data dashboards. One such example is community scorecards for health and education services, whereby the participatory process not only gives women a direct role in data governance through shaping what information is collected and how it is presented, but also ensures that gender-specific barriers such as lack of girls' school facilities are tracked and addressed. Their participation has ensured that gender perspectives are integrated into decision-making, strengthened accountability for public resources, and created a more inclusive data value chain where citizens generate evidence to address gaps and amplify diverse voices.

Collaborating with women and integrating their ideas improves gender data, highlighting voices often 'left furthest behind' and revealing experiences traditional sources miss. Women involvement in the data chain enhances decision-making evidence and bridges the trust gap between citizens and governments<sup>57</sup>. Transparent and inclusive women data generated initiatives foster trust and responsive interventions aligned with community needs, boosting civic engagement<sup>58</sup>. Empowering individuals as gender data co-creators balances power dynamics. Building their engagement and improving flows of information, should be highly gendered. Gender roles and relations affect how women consume information, access technology and how

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<sup>52</sup> Focus Group Zambia

<sup>53</sup> Adaption Fund, (2022), A study on intersectional approaches to gender mainstreaming in adaptation-relevant interventions,

<sup>54</sup> 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>

<sup>55</sup> 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>.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

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

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

they can freely participate in the data governance ecosystem<sup>59</sup>. Additionally, individuals' contributions to data also help overcome the data challenges faced today, such as invisibility of, marginalisation in official statistics, lack of trust in institutions and the disconnect between local issues and national policymaking, fostering a more inclusive decision-making process<sup>60</sup>. 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 organisations (CSOs) or academia; and 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<sup>61</sup>.

**Specific Action 1:** Look to girls' and women's 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 related data governance initiatives. These movements and advocates are often experts in the kinds of social mobilisation and coalition-building that provide the fertile ground in which the use of data and other transparency and accountability approaches can take root. Engage girls' and women's movements and advocates in data monitoring approaches such as citizen scorecards, open data platforms, dashboards, to drive accountability in data governance processes. When women and girls are recognized not only as data contributors but also as users and monitors their willingness to participate in future data governance efforts increases.

**Specific Action 2:** Provide dedicated capacity building and technical support for girls' and women's movements to help them to use data and better engage with transparency and accountability approaches. Additionally build capacity for them to understand what it means designing transparency and accountability initiatives with gender in mind from the beginning. Meaningful engagement with women and girls should become a routine standard, not an afterthought. By making intersectional data a priority at every level, we can move beyond tokenistic efforts and build equitable, impactful data systems that truly serve all people. Promoting data governance literacy among women and marginalized groups enhances their ability to contribute meaningfully. Tailored programs, considering literacy levels and cultural nuances, equips them with skills for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting gender data. Workshops and educational campaigns foster ownership and confidence in gender data generation.

## Check list for Citizen Engagement in Data Governance Practices

Governments and partners can use the following checklist questions to guide citizen engagement in data governance ensuring that it covers areas of inclusion, capacity building, gender responsive design and promoting sustainability.

1. Are women and girls movements actively involved in designing and implementing data governance initiatives across the data value chain?
2. Is there any dedicated training, resources and technical support to ensure women and

<sup>59</sup> <https://opendatabarometer.org/4thedition/report/#finding5>

<sup>60</sup> UNSD (2024), The Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

girls can meaningfully engage with open data, citizen scorecards, and accountability mechanisms?

3. Have transparency and accountability mechanisms been designed with gender considerations from the start (not as add-ons)?
4. Are there mechanisms for women and girls to provide feedback on the value of data use and their continued willingness to participate in future data collection efforts?

## 4.2 Strategic Goal 2: Ethical Gender Data Governance

As governments modernize their data systems, the emerging role of ethical data governance has become increasingly relevant. It involves setting appropriate standards to maintain data quality and integrity, ensuring that the control and use of data assets is fair, and respecting interests and concerns of marginalized groups and ensuring that minimum amount of data necessary to accomplish the task at hand is collected from individuals<sup>62</sup>. By championing these principles, ethical data governance can help ensure that data production results in meaningful impact. 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<sup>63</sup>. The AU supports efforts to make ethical guidelines more inclusive through processes that take into account the voices of citizens, consumers, marginalized and underrepresented people<sup>64</sup>.

The complexity of defining and agreeing upon meta-governance structures for data such as cross-border data governance arrangements underscores the need for more granular policy guidance on the ethical implications of accessing, sharing and using data. As data environments grow increasingly intricate, such guidance becomes essential to ensure ethical equitable and rights-based governance practices<sup>65</sup>. The movement or transfer of data across environments presents new challenges such as data integration or analytics may erode privacy protections as data users may unknowingly violate community controls. Therefore having common guidance on data ethics can help ensure that relevant rules and procedures “move with the data” and prevent inadvertent breaches of ethical principles in practice<sup>66</sup>.

Societal demand for ethical practices that complement data protection and privacy is growing reflecting a heightened public interest in ensuring that data use serves the public good and delivers trustworthy outcomes<sup>67</sup>. The wide range-nature and diversity of data typologies, taxonomies and formats such as research data, administrative data, national statistics, health data, non-personal vs. personal data, aggregated vs. granular data, structured vs. unstructured data, add significant complexity to the policies and data governance arrangements needed for their responsible

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<sup>62</sup> 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

<sup>63</sup> 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

<sup>64</sup> African Union (2022), Africa Data Policy Framework

<sup>65</sup> OECD,(2021), Good Practice Principles for Data Ethics in the Public Sector,

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

<sup>67</sup> Yu Jiang, Xiaolan Yu & Youjia Qin, (2025), Unraveling the balance between personal data protection and public interest: a theoretical framework and its empirical application in personal data processing,

management across the entire data value cycle<sup>68</sup>. For instance, governments and other stakeholders must be equipped to address challenges such as biases in data generation or extraction as well as the quality of data inputs used to train Artificial Intelligence (AI) models.

Additional risks include misuse or abuse of data by individuals and organisations and the delivery of negative outcomes through data use, including within AI systems<sup>69</sup>. For example, AI systems trained primarily on health data from high-income countries often perform poorly in low- and middle-income contexts, as their assumptions may not match local realities. For instance, WHO warns that algorithms designed on such datasets risk producing biased or even harmful outcomes when applied in Africa, where women and marginalised groups are underrepresented in digital and health data<sup>70</sup>. These gaps in representation mean that AI tools can misdiagnose, misallocate resources, or reinforce inequities unless adapted to local contexts and governed with inclusive, ethical frameworks

Ethical data governance involves responsible and ethical management of data throughout its life cycle ensuring it is used for public benefit while mitigating harm. It involves managing related data with a focus on fairness, equity and inclusion. It helps to minimize bias, discrimination in data driven decision making leading to fairer outcomes for all people<sup>71</sup>. Ethical considerations in data governance require attention across the data value chain, fronting the potential to improve outcomes for women and girls with minimising challenges like privacy and women's rights infringements is essential<sup>72</sup>. Ethical guidelines ensure the rights and well-being of women and girls, are credible and sustainable. There is a need to promote ethics that promote data governance practices that do not harm or discriminate against women and men for example those that might promote surveillance, if any, or that might even promote an unethical use of people's data<sup>73</sup>. Ethical data governance for African countries means creating systems and policies that ensure that data on women, men and marginalized groups is collected, managed and used in ways that promote gender equality, protect rights and avoid harm as well as aligning with international standards<sup>74</sup>.

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

**Specific Action 2:** 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.

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<sup>68</sup> OECD,(2021),Good Practice Principles for Data Ethics in the Public Sector,

<sup>69</sup> Benneh Mensah, George. (2023). Artificial Intelligence and Ethics: A Comprehensive Review of Bias Mitigation, Transparency, and Accountability in AI Systems. 10.13140/RG.2.2.23381.19685/1.

<sup>70</sup> World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa. (2021). *Ethics and governance of artificial intelligence for health in Africa*

<sup>71</sup> Schubert, Karl & Barrett, David. (2024). Data Governance, Privacy, and Ethics. 10.1007/978-3-031-51063-2\_5.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> Participant\_Zambia Workshop

<sup>74</sup> Ibid

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.

## Check list for Ethical Gender Data Governance

Governments can use this checklist to evaluate whether data protection and governance frameworks 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 protection frameworks and policies 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?

## 4.3 Strategic Goal 3: Strengthening Production and use of Gender Data

To achieve gender equality and women's empowerment across the continent AU member states must strengthen the integration of gender perspectives throughout the data production chain. This requires systematic incorporation of gender concepts, definitions and methodologies in the planning and implementation of data production programmes. Reliable, demand driven gender data are essential for evidence based policy making, effective planning, and the monitoring of progress towards continental commitments such as AU Agenda 2063, the Maputo Protocol. The continued use of concepts and methodologies that diverge from continental standards combined with quantitative surveys that inadequately capture gender dimensions has limited the capacity of AU member states to produce and robust gender data<sup>75</sup>. Greater investment in qualitative studies is also critical to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the lived realities of men and women especially those from marginalized groups<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup>. Furthermore, there is a lack of support throughout the gender data system for the

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<sup>75</sup> Assessment of the Gender Data and Capacity Gaps at the AUC, Africa UN Women, 2024

<sup>76</sup> Ibid

<sup>77</sup> UNFPA (2014), Guide on the Gender Analysis of Census Data

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<sup>78</sup>.

Both primary and secondary data is collected by most of the stakeholders. Primary data includes interviews with potential participants and this could be physical/in-person or online/virtual interviews. Primary data sources vary across the different stakeholders but most common methods include surveys, interviews, experiments, observations and research studies<sup>79</sup>.

Secondary data is obtained from various already produced sources and these vary across governments, private sector, academia and civil society organisations. Governments often utilize administrative data and department records such as census data, national and regional surveys<sup>80</sup>.

The private sector might leverage market survey reports, financial reports. Academia relies on academic journals, research databases and library archives while civil society organisations frequently use reports from other non-governmental organisations, government statistics and public opinion polls<sup>81</sup>. It was realised from the workshops that most data collection processes in African countries lack adequate gender considerations such as..... leading to significant gaps in understanding the lived realities of women, girls and gender-diverse groups<sup>82</sup>. This absence reinforces gender-blind policy making 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<sup>83</sup>.

The policy implications of poor quality or incomplete data on women's outcomes are significant. Women's productive work and contributions to development are therefore often underreported by official statistics across countries<sup>84</sup>. Data on these are not well covered by surveys, and consistent guidelines on gender disaggregated data collection for these topics are also not available<sup>85</sup>.

Even when data are collected, quality issues arise in the absence of consistent standards for data collection<sup>86</sup>. A major concern is the reliance by survey methods on using proxy respondents to report on outcomes for other household members, particularly women<sup>87</sup>. This approach frequently introduces measurement errors issues of women as they remain unreported by the proxy respondent, who is usually the household head/member<sup>88</sup>.

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 response particularly for sensitive questions<sup>89</sup>. 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

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<sup>78</sup> Beegle, K., Serajuddin, U., Stacy, B., & Wadhwa, D. (2023). Missing SDG Gender Indicators.

<sup>79</sup> Participant\_Ivory Coast workshop

<sup>80</sup> Participant\_Uganda workshop

<sup>81</sup> Participant\_Zambia workshop

<sup>82</sup> Participant\_Uganda workshop

<sup>83</sup> Africa Development Bank (2016), Using data to close gender gaps and accelerate women's empowerment in Africa

<sup>84</sup> UNFPA (2024), Guide on the Gender Analysis of Census Data

<sup>85</sup> Ibid

<sup>86</sup> Kabir, Sajjad. (2016). Methods of Data Collection.

<sup>87</sup> Cobb, Curtiss. (2017). Answering for Someone Else: Proxy Reports in Survey Research

<sup>88</sup> Ibid

<sup>89</sup> 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 ,

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<sup>90</sup>. Policy makers should ensure that the data being used to implement government services does not discriminate against already marginalized groups. Proper data collection is an essential starting point in realising 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<sup>91</sup>.

**Specific Action 1:** Standardise gender data production in line with continental, regional and national frameworks. This includes aligning with the mandates on gender for Agenda 2063, AU gender policy, AU data protection framework, and the Maputo protocol as well as related regional frameworks and country specific frameworks. Additionally, member states should update gender indicators and definitions as well as developing robust methodologies for disaggregated indicators for national reporting for each of the member states. Governments can invest in strengthening national statistical systems and harmonizing data collection tools to eliminate bias and gaps particularly for women and other marginalized populations.

**Specific Action 2:** Collaboration with women and other marginalized groups in survey design will help ensure that questions can capture the lived realities of these groups. Co-create data processes with these communities, through intersectional stakeholder mapping and community consent. Engage women and marginalized groups in the data collection process to ensure their voices and concerns are accurately represented.

**Specific Action 3:** Strengthen capacity within member states national statistical systems to produce gender data as well as integrating gender requirements into surveys, and other data collection tools and instruments. Capacity strengthening should also extend to data analysis, production of gender responsive reports and integration of gender data into national and regional statistical abstracts and profiles to enhance data availability and use at all levels of decision making.

**Specific Action 4:** Integrate intersectionality right from data collection. Data collection does not overlook the experiences of individuals with intersectional identities. Ensure 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. This involves designing surveys and data collection tools that allow for disaggregated data collection, asking nuanced questions that reflect the lived realities of women. By adopting this approach policy makers and other stakeholders can uncover the unique barriers faced by women and girls thereby informing more equitable gender transformative policies and interventions.

**Specific Action 5:** Develop and refine research methodologies that capture the full spectrum of gendered experiences including of those marginalised groups. Training researchers/data collectors on gender sensitive and ethical data collection techniques will help sustain inclusive practices over the long term.

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<sup>90</sup> UNITED NATIONS(2024),Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses,

<sup>91</sup> UN Women (2022),Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality Results,



**Specific Action 6:** Ensure inclusive and participatory data governance processes particularly by investing in mechanisms that empower women and other marginalized groups and civil society and policy makers to use gender data for advocacy and policy making. Recognizing citizens, communities, and policymakers as key users of gender data is essential for ensuring that policies respond to lived realities and contribute to transformative policy outcomes.

## Check list for Strengthening Production and use of Gender Data

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

1. Does national gender strategy align with international standards for gender responsive data collection?
2. Are national statistical systems adequately funded and strengthened to systematically collect disaggregated data across all sectors?
3. Are national survey data collection tools designed, standardized and adapted to reflect the diverse realities of women and other marginalized populations?
4. Are women, girls and other marginalized groups actively engaged in the design of surveys and data collection tools?
5. Is stakeholder mapping conducted to ensure intersectional representation in data processes?
6. Are women and other marginalized communities engaged to validate data to ensure that their experiences are accurately represented in the data?
7. Are data collectors and researchers trained in gender sensitive and ethical data collection techniques?

## 4.4 Strategic Goal 4:Public-Private-CSO Collaboration and Partnerships

Collaboration between stakeholders including data producers, users, and affected communities is crucial to uphold accountability and adapt strategies as needed in data governance. This collaboration is essential for effective data governance with public sector setting frameworks, private sector providing expertise in data standards and services while CSOs advocate for public privacy, trust and rights. Key mandates like the African Union Data Policy Framework promote such multi-stakeholder collaborations to foster exchange and interoperability of data systems<sup>92</sup>.

Data governance cannot rest solely with governments. Effective governance requires collaboration among public sector, private sector, civil society and academia to ensure that data consistently delivers value for people<sup>93</sup>. For example governments play a central role in creating frameworks, the private sector contributes by adopting standards that enable them to build services, while CSOs and academia though often excluded are closest to the communities directly impacted by data

<sup>92</sup> African Union (2022), African Union Data Policy Framework

<sup>93</sup> Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (2024), National Progress Report on Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing +30) in Uganda (2020-2025)

governance, bring diverse expertise and perspectives to the table ensuring that data governance is inclusive and equitable<sup>94</sup>. Such collaborations and partnerships with diverse actors are necessary to address gender-specific needs and integrate gender-disaggregated data into policy frameworks.

Collaboration between national and regional stakeholders is also necessary for African countries to become more competitive in global policy setting forums where regulations for the global data economy are set and where African states have largely been standard takers<sup>95</sup>. Direct engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs) and members of underrepresented groups makes it possible to understand the issues relevant to them<sup>96</sup>. 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<sup>97</sup>. For example there are many efforts underway to promote better collaboration between countries at a regional and continental level, like the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which aims to foster economic integration and create a single digital market across the continent. This task includes efforts by several continental and regional institutions, such as AUDA-NEPAD and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), which are supported by our ADLI partner organizations, Smart Africa and UNECA<sup>98</sup>.

**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. For example national statistics offices can partner with feminist organizations and civil society groups to co-design gender sensitive surveys, ensure inclusive data collection methods, and jointly publish user friendly data products that inform policy and advocacy on issues of women.

**Specific Action 2:** Promote cross sector and cross community partnerships among governments, regional economic commissions, Civil society organisations, academia alongside those directly impacted. Collaborative approaches encourage innovative solutions, expand networks, and encourage transformative change as well as a more complete understanding and eventual solution to the issues.

**Specific Action 3:** Establish multi-stakeholder gender data task forces at national and regional levels that bring together government agencies, private sector actors and civil society organisations to co-create and oversee the development of gender data governance frameworks set shared standards for ethical data use and coordinate data sharing agreements that centre the rights, safety and representation of women and other marginalized groups.

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<sup>94</sup> Digital Impact Alliance (2024), Effective Data Governance in Africa Demands Collaborative Growth.ADLI Helps Pave the Way.

<sup>95</sup> Participant\_Zambia Workshop

<sup>96</sup> Participant\_Ivory Coast Workshop

<sup>97</sup> Participant\_Senegal Workshop

<sup>98</sup> Digital Impact Alliance (2024), Effective Data Governance in Africa Demands Collaborative Growth.ADLI Helps Pave the Way.

## Check list for Public-Private-CSO Collaboration and Partnerships

These check list questions guide governments 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. Do these collaborations foster innovative solutions in data governance and broaden networks to foster gender responsive data governance?
3. Has a national or regional multi-stakeholder gender data task force been established to oversee data governance processes?

## 4.5: Strategic Goal 5: Strengthen women leadership in data governance

Women's representation in leadership and decision-making in data governance across African countries is limited and this highlights enduring significant disparities between men and women leaders, and decision makers<sup>99</sup>. The causes of women's continued lag behind men in leadership and participation in decision-making are hardly unfamiliar. They include persistent highly patriarchal political systems, inadequate training of aspiring women leaders, poverty, and illiteracy<sup>100</sup>. To promote women's leadership and participation in decision-making in pursuit of gender equality it is imperative ongoing successful strategies are continued, and more innovative approaches introduced to accelerate the advances made thus far<sup>101</sup>. These measures may include supporting special leadership training programmes to develop the leadership capacities of women and enhance their effective participation in decision-making. For example, there is increasing women's representation and participation in democracy and political leadership. Abantu for Development in Ghana works to strengthen the capacity of women to participate in decision-making at all levels, to influence policies from a gender perspective and to address inequalities and injustices in social relations<sup>102</sup>.

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<sup>103</sup>. This underrepresentation is driven by barriers such as unequal access to information, limited opportunities for leadership development, lack of women-centred public policies, patriarchal

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<sup>99</sup> The Common Wealth (2015), The Status of Women in Leadership Across the Commonwealth In Political and Civil Service, State-owned Enterprises and Private Sector Corporate Boards

<sup>100</sup> Ibid

<sup>101</sup> Women Democracy Network (2025), Empowering Women to Lead

<sup>102</sup> Hamida Maalim Harrison (2019), Abantu for Development and Change

<sup>103</sup> 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/>

dominance in the operations of governments and persistent gender stereotypes that undermine women's authority and influence<sup>104</sup>. 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<sup>105</sup>. 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<sup>106</sup>. Governments and other stakeholders should intentionally identify and nurture women leaders to ensure their voices are heard in national, regional and global data governance platforms. By fostering an environment in data governance where women leadership is valued and sustained, data ecosystems can become inclusive for all.

**Specific Action 1:** Establish a women 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 ethical, inclusive and gender responsive 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:** 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

**Specific Action 3:** Ensure opportunities for women to play an active role in decision-making. There can be many obstacles to women's participation, including unequal access to necessary information, lack of knowledge about decision-making procedures, and the negative attitudes of others on decision-making bodies. Steps must be taken to ensure that women not only take a place on decision making bodies, but that they have a real possibility to participate effectively and influence decisions

**Specific Action 4:** Provide positive role models for women in data governance leadership and decision making. These may be women leaders already holding positions of leadership or influence in data governance across the continent in government institutions, civil society, academia among others. Actively mentor young women and girls to enter and thrive in data related careers.

**Specific Action 5:** Provide targeted interventions to support women's roles in decisionmaking and leadership. It may be necessary to design inputs targeted to leaders that will address stereotypes and negative attitudes towards women's involvement, especially in leadership roles; or to design empowerment interventions focused on increasing women's own awareness of their rights and strengthening their self-esteem and confidence.

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<sup>104</sup> Baba Musami, Hauwa & Abdullahi, Muhammad. (2023). Women Participation In Governance: Prospects And Challenges.

<sup>105</sup> Participant\_Uganda Workshop

<sup>106</sup> Participant\_Zambia Workshop

Designing targeted interventions to improve women's participation in decision-making fora can be very practical, such as addressing problems of safety and timely transportation, or inappropriate meeting times. As well as supporting women's role in decisionmaking and leadership through integrated actions, and the introduction of targeted interventions. Specific training for women to facilitate their effective participation could be one such essential targeted activity

### **Check list for strengthening women 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 and technology 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?

## **4.6 Strategic Goal 6: Capacity building**

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 the data ecosystem will also need to be built in state institutions, among other sectors and communities. There have been capacity building efforts by various African governments on enforcing data protection laws and managing cross border data flows by UNECA<sup>107</sup>, 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<sup>108</sup>.

**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. Equipping both policymakers and community members with the skills they need not only empowers users but also bridges the gap between ambition and reality, driving tangible progress.

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<sup>107</sup> UNECA (2025), Mozambique hosts data governance workshop to strengthen national digital capacity

<sup>108</sup> APHRC (2023), Strengthening Sub-National Data Value Chains in Sub-Saharan Africa

**Specific Action 2:** Integrate gender and intersectionality modules into national and regional data governance training programs to ensure that policy makers, statisticians, civil society organisations and technologists understand and apply gender responsive approaches in data collection and use.

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

## Check list for Capacity building

To strengthen gender responsive 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.

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 responsive 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?

## 4.7 Strategic Goal 7: Research and Development

Strengthen research and innovation ecosystems that prioritize gender equality in 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 harmonise standards, skills and infrastructures, can enable governments 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 focussed 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 research categories.

## Check list for Research and Development

The following checklist questions help assess whether gender data hubs and participatory research initiatives are in place to strengthen collaboration and evidence based policy making 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. Are there funding mechanisms 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 and ensuring accountability for equitable outcomes, data governance systems that are fair, transparent and inclusive can be built.

Ultimately gender transformative is not a parallel agenda but rather a foundational requirement for a 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.