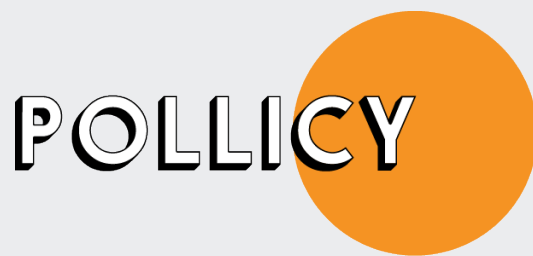


# **Data Governance:** **Gendered Data or** **Gendered Perspectives**

# AFRICA DATA GOVERNANCE HUB



Data Governance: Gendered Data/Gendered Perspectives.

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# Organization Profile

This Policy Brief was prepared by the African Digital Rights Hub (ADRH). ADRH is a not-for-profit organization with a site in Accra, Ghana. We are committed to promoting pan-African research and capacity building on digital rights. We operate as a “think and action tank,” focusing on the impact of digital technology on the continent. ADRH’s mission is to facilitate solutions for data governance and emerging digital technologies in Africa, ensuring the digital rights of all citizens. Its vision is to be Africa’s most influential and trustworthy source of information and support on digital rights. ADRH operates through multiple channels such as research, capacity building, policy advocacy, and stakeholder engagement. By collaborating with academic researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders, ADRH generates and scales innovative solutions tailored to Africa’s unique digital landscape. Women’s rights and inclusion are among several thematic areas ADRH is focusing on.

## The Need for Gendered Data Policy Perspectives

This policy brief presents findings on situational analysis on the inclusiveness of data governance policy frameworks in three African countries and offers recommendations on key policy areas to create balanced and inclusive data governance policies in Africa. The policy brief focuses on a specific vulnerable social group- women. Among other reasons for focusing on women, women constitute over 50% of the whole population in Africa. In addition, women ‘possess unique knowledge about agriculture and food production, environmental conservation, medicine, energy production, and artisanal mining’<sup>1</sup> knowledge that is crucial in and should be nurtured to support Africa’s development goals. Unfortunately, and despite the wealth of knowledge they possess, women are less involved in socio-political, economic decision-making, and policy development. As a result, we experience gender inequality. This is a major and persistent injustice to women and our present and future communities.

Gender-inclusive data governance policies have the potential to address long-standing gender inequalities and the widening gender digital divide. Promoting gender equality and closing the gender digital divide is not only necessary for social justice purposes, it is a critical driver of economic development, given that women represent the majority of the population. It is crucial, to establish an effective and sustainable data governance framework in Africa, it is essential that policies, practices and governance structures are inclusive and ensure equitable benefits for all.

## What is the Present Situation?

A look at three African countries namely, Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana shows not only that data governance policies are not in harmony among African countries, but also (policy strategies and initiatives) excludes women. This fact has also been acknowledged in the African Union documents such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (The Maputo Protocol). In embracing digital transformation, the three countries have adopted policies and strategies at different stages. Unfortunately, these initiatives fail to give women the deserving space. For example, the Kenya Digital Economy Blueprint (DEB) neither takes special cognizance of

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<sup>1</sup> Okeyo, N., “Role of Epistemic Data Justice in Data Governance for Rural Women in Africa”, March 22, 2024, <https://cipit.strathmore.edu/role-of-epistemic-data-justice-in-data-governance-for-rural-women-in-africa/> accessed on 19.02.2025.

women's or girls' social position nor sets goals to close the existing gender digital divide. In fact, the DEB has no mention of the gender digital divide. It has a total of 96 pages and women are mentioned only two times, and girls only one time on page 62. Similarly, women are mentioned only once and there is no mention of girls in the National Information, Communications and Technology (ICT) Policy (NICTP). However, the NICTP recognizes the need to create special opportunities for women, as part of disadvantaged social groups, to acquire ICT skills through e-inclusion and e-accessibility activities and programs. The Digital Economy Strategy (DES) and Policy on Information and Communication Technology in Education and Training (PICTET) do not mention women or girls at all.

In South Africa, gender equality is a constitutional guarantee. The Constitution also establishes a Commission for Gender Equality under Section 187 to reinforce this right. Unfortunately, data and digital governance and related policies do not withhold this spirit. The ICT and Digital Economy Master Plan for South Africa (IDEMP) neither mentions the existing gender digital divide nor acknowledges the vulnerable position of women and girls in the digital transformation process. In fact, the 86-page document does not have a single mention of the words 'women' or 'girls'. The established Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT) to implement the IDEMP and other policies, also does not mention 'women' or 'girls'. Although it has, within Strategic level 7 set up an objective to promote gendered capacity and skills building. The same thing is seen in the National Integrated ICT Policy White Paper (NIIPWP) reference to gender equality is missing.

Regardless of the above gaps, South Africa through the Department of Women is implementing several strategies and policies. One is the National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (NPFWEGE): This policy emphasized the need to create a mechanism to ensure women are actively involved in the definition, design, development, implementation, and gender-impact evaluation of policies related to the economic and social changes. In addition, there is the Strategic Plan of the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (2020 – 2025) which commits to ensure gender equality and women and girls literacy, especially in science and technology courses. Perhaps the most important initiative is the Women's Charter for Accelerated Development (WCAD) tabled at the Parliament in 2021. The WCAD was drafted to support women's inclusion and transformation considering the trajectory of women's struggles. The Charter advocates for designing and assessing policies based on their impact on inclusiveness and growth. This has an objective to support structural change. The Charter notes that women's exclusion is embedded in the economic structure, which can be traced back to colonial times. A structure that "continues to reflect distorted patterns of ownership and exclusion, which has very specific race and gendered dimensions" (p.16). To overhaul this, it suggests the need to have women's empowerment clearly articulated in policy documents and policy interpretation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation must inculcate a gender focus.

In Ghana, the ICT for Accelerated Development (ICT4AD) Policy acknowledges women's and girls' exclusion and sets a goal to empower them, foster their development, and eliminate gender inequalities. The ICT4AD also supports the creation of a mechanism to monitor progress towards gender equality (especially in digital space). Other policy actions include the government's commitment to:

- (i) ensure that policies at all levels are gender-sensitive and adjusted to meet women's specific development needs, and
- (ii) promote stronger participation of women and children in ICT initiatives and industry by addressing gender-based inequalities and implementing gender-sensitive policies.

In 2023, the government through the Ministry of Communications and Digitalisation started implementing the eTransform Ghana project or the 'Digital Ghana' project. Although women's and girls' empowerment is largely seen in terms of literacy, the project acknowledges the need for "integrating an inclusive approach into all planned activities and women's participation in the digital economy" (WB:8). The project document emphasizes consultations with women's groups and experts in the policy development process to ensure this goal is reached. It also insists on identifying the specific needs of vulnerable groups (where women are mentioned) and identifying public and community spaces largely populated by women (WB: p.15). Some of the strategies to involve women include profiling female role models and leveraging women's networks to get them involved in the process (p. 21). The whole project management undertakes to ensure that its implementation gives, "Special attention will be devoted to promoting equal participation of women in all decision-making bodies under the project and dismantling barriers to recruitment, retention, and promotion (WB: p. 24)."

Beyond lack of involvement in policy development and non-inclusion of their issue in policy strategies, there is another aspect that affects women's inclusion, i.e. lack of gender-disaggregated data. As a result, it remains difficult to identify and address the specific data governance policy gaps, challenges, and opportunities affecting women in Africa. This aspect goes beyond women's inclusion. It makes any initiative towards gender equality, inclusion, or closing the gender digital divide impractical due to the lack of gender-disaggregated data. Data that could give a clear picture of the problem or the challenges to be addressed.

## Conclusion

The research leading to this policy brief indicates the absence of deliberate efforts toward closing the gender digital divide, or at least towards the intentional inclusion of women in digital-related strategic policies. These policies and related strategies do not take cognizance of the vulnerabilities of women and girls in this regard. Although some of these policies acknowledge that women and girls are among special/vulnerable social groups, policy objectives, and their implementing strategies fail to give that special consideration to women and girls. In other words, these policies are not gender sensitive. As a consequence of the absence of gender-sensitive policies and data governance structures in Africa, women's issues, challenges, and needs are not equally presented in strategic policies and their participation in decision-making is very limited. This hinders efforts to achieve gender equality and the closing of the gender digital divide in general.

## Recommendations

**Inclusive policies:** We, at the Africa Digital Rights Hubs, recommend that digital and data governance policy development and related implementing strategies include measurable and specific targets towards women's inclusion – both in policy development and strategic policy implementation.

**Women's involvement:** Women should be involved in the development of data and digital governance structures. Women's presence and involvement would enable them to identify issues that lead to the gender digital divide, from their personal experience and recognize practical gaps that need to be addressed to support their involvement in policy development and decision-making processes.

**Women capacity building:** Research shows that despite women being the majority of the population, men still dominate science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education (STEAM education). To support women's inclusion and participation, there is a need to build women's capacity and skills, especially in STEAM education. This is to enable women and girls to acquire the necessary knowledge to be able to demand a seat at the table and present their issues and expectations to promote their digital livelihood.

**Accountability structures:** There is a need to establish transparent and accountability structures alongside specific policies and their strategic implementation. Ideally, such a structure should support achieving policy objectives – including those specific to women's inclusion, involvement, and in the closing of the gender digital divide. On women, the designed structure should include such aspects as a consultation process with women or women groups, consultation with gender policy experts, and collating collected views with pre-collected gender aggregate data against policy objectives.

Ideal structure (responsible government department) should:

- i. identifying specific policy strategies and objectives and categorize them in their respective clusters (i.e. women inclusion – in policy-making, decision-making, STEM education, bridging the gender digital gap etc.);
- ii. identify implementing organs and relevant stakeholders to support the implementation of those objectives;
- iii. create an implementing plan – in consultation with implementing partners/organizations. The plan should include a strategic implementation plan for each specific objective, timelines for each goal, required resources (both financial and human resources);

During the implementation phase, implementing organs should have a system in place that:

- i. participatory: consulting with women/women groups who are to benefit from implementing measures to assess the actual status quo, and discuss and agree on practicable approaches to implement specific programs. It also allows the implementing organization to share and get views on the overall project implementation strategy from these groups. This allows for implementing organs to understand specific demands from specific demographic groups and be able to develop appropriate/tailor-made implementing strategies.
- ii. indexes relevant progress on specific objectives,
- iii. assess the success of the plan (if the plan does not work as expected, the implementing organ should be able to identify this early and change, adjust or improvise). If it involves outreach activities, there should be outreach indicators to show success or progress.
- iv. Create and keep a database of the program and outcome. This will allow relevant government departments and implementing organs to have a better understanding of the impact of your implemented measures. Additionally, this information will support the creation of gender aggregate data for future policy development and implementation purposes.

At the end of the program, the implementing organization needs to report and share the result with the relevant government department. The results are important for future policy formulation and relevant interventions in cases where the objectives were partially met. To ensure transparency, it is important the government convene a meeting and share the results with relevant stakeholders.

**Advocate for gender aggregate data:** There is a dire need for gender aggregate data. Without such data, women's inclusion, involvement, and the closing of the gender digital divide would remain on campaign platforms. Governments should make it a priority to collect, routinely update and maintain databases with comprehensive gender aggregate data. Data that should differentiate the cluster affecting or supporting women's involvement, inclusion or exclusion in policy-making, decision-making, policy implementation, their STEAM skills and capacity, their access and use of ICT and online presence, their safety and protection online, and their readiness for the digital transformation processes.

