

ENGLISH

Shifting the Data Highway: Introducing the Afro-Feminist Data Governance Project***Shifting the Data Highway***

All over the world, people share their personal information to get assistance, social services, entertainment and knowledge. However, gender data remains understudied and underutilized, often enveloped in the general scope of data. Prior research was conducted by Pollicy in collaboration with [My Data Rights](#) on [Afrofeminist Data Futures](#), which included a white paper titled [What Is an Ideal Internet to You? A Global Exploration of Digital Rights Trends](#). The research identified a lack of inaccessible gender data collection, use and protection and what is counted as the basis for policymaking and resource allocation.

The research further highlights that in Africa gender data has also remained under-collected and large gender data gaps exist in both national and international databases. [A 2019 Data 2X study of national databases](#) in 15 African countries, including leading economic and digital hubs such as Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, found that “Gender-disaggregated data was available for only 52 percent of the gender-relevant indicators. Large gender data gaps existed in all 15 countries, with these gaps unevenly distributed across the indicators. For instance, no indicator in the environmental domain had gender disaggregated data at the international database level”.

Even though data governance frameworks are meant to boost innovation opportunities for often marginalized groups, such as women and girls, these frameworks still stem from an angle that tends to disregard the unique experiences of women. For instance, according to [Global Partnerships for Sustainable Data](#), “more than half the population of Sub-Saharan Africa will be subscribed to a mobile service by 2025” and therefore, the need for inclusive data governance frameworks to monitor overall mobile phone usage in Kenya. In this study however, the only mention of women was with regards to how new mothers can use mobile services to register births occurring outside of healthcare facilities. Other experiences, such as accessibility and affordability of mobile services for women, were not addressed.

In another instance, the word gender appears only two (2) times within the text of the [African Union Data Policy Framework](#). In the first particular, gender is mentioned to capture the importance of inclusion and diversity for data managers. The second occurrence focuses on the need to have ethical codes and standards that are gender-sensitive so as to reduce harm and exclusion of women and girls.

Other studies have also shown a deprioritisation of womens’ issues such as, manipulation of data, lack of trust and poor ethics around data governance across Sub-Saharan Africa with most frameworks providing data governance leaning towards the private sector and financial services mostly. We anticipate our research will show us who the power movers in the data governance ecosystem are and how they can share the resources and *shift power in the Data Governance Highway*.

Introducing the Afro-Feminist Data Governance Project

To repurpose a better understanding of data use for stakeholders, the **Afrofeminist Data Governance Project** implemented in four countries: Kenya, Zambia, Cote D’Ivoire and Ghana hopes to interrogate and co-create data-driven solutions with governments, civil society actors, and regional mechanisms specifically the African Union (AU), sub-regional economic blocks such as The East Africa Community (EAC), Economic Community of West African States

(ECOWAS) and The Southern African Development Community (SADC). This work will look into instrumental Data and Digital Frameworks, for example, but not limited to the AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection 2014, - [the Malabo Convention](#) and the African Commission Resolution on the Protection of Women Against Digital Violence in Africa - [ACHPR/Res. 522 \(LXXII\) 2022](#)

To achieve this goal, the project takes a feminist ethics approach of care, transparency, accountability, and co-creation with the stakeholders involved, including secondary research, dialogues, workshops, and engagements on data governance practices. The project will provide concrete examples of how gender data gaps exist in national and international governance mechanisms and how they can be addressed through improved data governance practices. For example, the project will explore ways to collect gender-disaggregated data and ensure it is protected and used ethically. Through coalition building and collaboration, the AFDG project provides an opportunity for civic techs, civil society, journalists, lawmakers and other stakeholders to revise and develop policies and frameworks that are gender-sensitive and inclusive, taking into account the unique experiences of women and girls in the four countries.

Therefore, our project takes on a collaborative feminist approach to data governance grounded in African realities and experiences in hopes of having them adopted and nationalised by stakeholders across the region.

Rationale

In 2023 alone, Kenya is currently digitising over 5000 government services which will lead to *rapid* advances in digitisation and is considered one of Africa's leading economic and digital hubs, having held elections in 2022. The rapid digitisation process may open up serious challenges on these government services' design, access and use.

Zambia has faced foreign company involvement in government surveillance of opponents, as revealed in previous [Afrofeminist Data Futures](#) research. As one of the leading economies in West Africa, Ghana stirred our interest as a target country for this project, given its preparations for the 2024 general elections and exploring their data governance frameworks to know how responsive they are to the needs of women political candidates.

Lastly, Côte D'Ivoire as the lone francophone country in this project, uniquely strives to improve freedom of expression following the violent incidents in the 2020 election, and its unique proposition of hosting the Africa Development Bank (AfDB) whose [ICT Operations Division](#) supports African member states to create robust digital economies, with a priority on digital connectivity and affordable infrastructure, policies and upskilling. Furthermore, the World Bank Digital Development Programme notes that unlocking Africa's digital potential requires addressing the significant disparities between countries on their progress toward digital transformation, which is key to shifting power dynamics and shaping data governance frameworks encompassing our diversity as Africans. Our research will take multiple methods, including high-level dialogues, workshops and engagements on data governance development and practices, to envisage the Afro-feminist Data Futures we want to see.

Our work at Pollicy on data governance is greatly enhanced through the collaborative support of [the Ford Foundation](#) and [the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation](#). This support remains invaluable in engaging stakeholders from the target countries and fostering progress in our initiatives.

Written by [Mwara Gichanga](#) for My Data Rights & [Rachel Magege](#), [Angela Dzidzornu](#) and [Irene Mwendwa](#) for Pollicy

About

This is a collaborative research project by Pollicy and My Data Rights Africa.

[Pollicy](#) is a feminist civic technology organisation working at the intersection of data, design and technology. It has contributed to research, capacity building and technology development in emerging technologies such as data governance, artificial intelligence and inclusive/creative approaches to digital access. We are a feminist collective of technologists, data scientists, creatives and academics working to digitally transform service delivery across Africa and craft better life experiences through improved data processes. The principles of feminist research mainly guide our strategies for research. This means we focus broadly on the root causes of inequality and discrimination and seek to expose and/or challenge unequal power relations.

[My Data Rights Africa](#) is a feminist curation project on understanding how data is framed within the African context in relation to AI, privacy and data protection. MDR was developed after a Mozilla Foundation Tech Policy Fellowship in 2019 and 2020. The project is led by women and collaborates with African feminists to contextualise experiences of data collection, processing and use. The purpose is to shape policy, discourse, data protection, and privacy implementation.