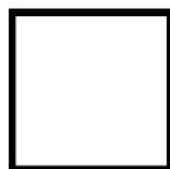


Participation Champion Handbook for Data Governance in Africa



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**INNOVATION
FOR POLICY
FOUNDATION**

Participation Champion Handbook for Data Governance in Africa

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INTRODUCTION:

THE CHAMPION'S MISSION

Welcome, Participation Champion!

This handbook is your essential guide and toolkit for stepping into the vital role of a Participation Champion in the dynamic world of data governance. Use this guide to ensure you are an active architect of how data serves our communities.

To implement effective data governance, a Participation Champion must distinguish between general participation, which can sometimes seem tokenistic, with that of meaningful participation, which shifts power and agency to the public.

I. How to use this guide

This guide is modular, and so you can engage any section in any order you wish. We cover why participation matters in the data governance space, what engagement means, core competencies to build and key concepts to learn. Select tools and resources are also on offer throughout to help you plan and build your participation intervention or sharpen your tools of analysis with informed learning.

II. Who is this guide for?

This guide is a practical resource for public officials, data stewards, and policy innovators within African governments and regional bodies who recognize that trust is the most valuable currency in the digital economy. It is specifically for those tasked with designing data-driven systems, drafting digital legislation, or managing public data assets who seek to bridge the gap between technical mandates and community needs. Whether you are a senior policymaker or a frontline data officer, this handbook provides the frameworks and competencies necessary to facilitate meaningful engagement and build robust, inclusive data ecosystems.

Primary audience (Internal Government)

- **Chief Data Officers (CDOs) & National Statistics Leads:** Interested in participation to ensure data standards are practical, interoperable, and meet the real-world needs of diverse departments.
- **Data Protection & Privacy Officers (DPOs):** Focused on reducing legal and reputational risk by ensuring "Privacy by Design" aligns with public expectations and ethical norms.

- **Sectoral leads (Health, Transport, Education):** Seek community buy-in to launch data-driven services that are actually used and trusted by the public.
- **Compliance & legal counsel:** Concerned with ensuring that participatory outcomes remain within statutory frameworks while benefiting from the increased legitimacy that public engagement provides.

Secondary audience (External Partners)

- **Digital rights & community NGOs:** Interested in acting as a "watchdog" to ensure data policies protect human rights and prevent unauthorized surveillance of vulnerable groups.
- **Tech SMEs & startups:** Participate to ensure that regulations are technically feasible and do not create high compliance barriers that stifle local innovation.
- **Academia & researchers:** Seek to validate policy impacts through evidence and promote "Data for Good" initiatives that address societal challenges like climate change or public health.
- **Data intermediaries (e.g., Data Trusts):** Interested in establishing the technical and legal "safe spaces" required for secure, multi-stakeholder data sharing.

III. Acknowledgements

This handbook results from a partnership between Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) office to the African Union, and Innovation for Policy Foundation (i4Policy). Developed with input from policymakers from across the continent, it reflects our collective understanding of what it takes to be a participation champion. We are grateful to everyone supporting a data governance system that values the human voices behind the data.

IV. How to credit this work

Innovation for Policy Foundation, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (2026). *Participation Champion Handbook for Data Governance in Africa*. Contact: community@i4policy.org

SECTION 1:

DEFINING PARTICIPATORY DATA GOVERNANCE

1.1 Core definitions

Data governance is a comprehensive framework defining authority and control over data and its permitted uses.¹ It encompasses the responsible planning and management of data assets, addressing technical architecture, security, documentation, and access.² It is increasingly being recognized as a "common good" where beneficiary interests are central to every decision as can be noted in various global and continental frameworks and mandates such as the African Digital Compact.³

Participation is the fundamental involvement of people in influencing decisions that affect their lives.

Participation in data governance is the systemic redistribution of power that enables individuals and collectives to exercise agency over the entire data lifecycle⁴ - from the initial decision of whether data should be collected, to the ways it is processed, shared, and used for automated decision-making.⁵ Rather than a mere consultative exercise for "beneficiaries," it constitutes a framework of shared sovereignty where data subjects and impacted communities have the structural authority to audit systems, demand algorithmic recourse,⁶ and negotiate the distribution of social and economic value derived from their information. This model ensures that data stewardship moves beyond individual consent toward a relational, democratic requirement⁷ that serves the public interest and fosters trust through genuine stakeholder agency rather than just institutional efficiency.

¹ **Delacroix, S., & Lawrence, N. D.** (2019). *Bottom-up data trusts: disturbing the 'one size fits all' approach to data governance*. *International Data Privacy Law*, 9(4), p. 241.

² **Micheli, M., et al.** (2020). *Emerging models of data governance in the age of datafication*. *Big Data & Society*, 7(2), p.5.

³ **African Union.** (2024). *The African Digital Compact / Data Policy Framework*, p.12

⁴ **Ada Lovelace Institute.** (2021). *Participatory Data Stewardship: A framework for involving people in the use of personal data*. London, UK, p. 18.

⁵ **Delacroix, S., & Lawrence, N. D.** (2019). *Bottom-up data trusts: disturbing the 'one size fits all' approach to data governance*. *International Data Privacy Law*, 9(4), p.243.

⁶ **Birhane, A.** (2020). *Algorithmic Colonization of Africa*. *Philosophy & Technology*, 33(3), p. 256

⁷ **Viljoen, S.** (2021). *A Relational Theory of Data Governance*. *Yale Law Journal*, 131(2), 582

Finally, what do we mean by Participatory Data Governance?

Let's put these definitions together:

Participatory Data Governance occurs when governments enable diverse constituencies to contribute meaningfully to data decisions while remaining transparent and accountable⁸. This shift is essential because data policies determine what is counted, how risks are assessed, and whose needs are prioritized⁹. It represents a transition from treating data subjects as passive recipients of policy to active partners in a "common good" framework where collective interests guide the governance of the entire data lifecycle.¹⁰

1.2 Why participation matters in decision-making

Decision-making regarding data collection and management has direct implications for human rights, service delivery, and public trust. To navigate these high-stakes consequences, participatory frameworks serve as a vital bridge, ensuring that technical governance remains grounded in social reality and democratic oversight. Participation can yield the following benefits:

- **Improves policy quality:** By incorporating lived experiences, communities can identify blind spots in data collection or unintended consequences that technical experts might overlook¹¹. Furthermore, by decentralizing expertise, governments can tap into hyper-local insights that are often invisible to centralized data architectures.
- **Strengthens legitimacy and trust:** When citizens see their input influences complex trade-offs between privacy and innovation, they view institutions as more accountable¹². Ultimately, this approach ensures that the digital transformation of the state remains tethered to democratic values rather than purely market-driven or bureaucratic incentives.
- **Reduces polarization:** Deliberative spaces allow stakeholders to move beyond simplified narratives to engage with the actual complexity of governance choices¹³. This proactive engagement transforms data from a tool of top-down surveillance into a resource for collective problem-solving and community empowerment.¹⁴

⁸ **Ada Lovelace Institute (2021)**. *Participatory Data Stewardship: A framework for delivering person-centred data governance*. London, UK. p.14.

⁹ **Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (2022)**. *The Data Values Manifesto: Reimagining Data Production, Sharing, and Use.*, p. 6.

¹⁰ **Verhulst, S., & Young, A. (2020)**. *The Theory of Change for Data Collaboratives*. NYU GovLab. p. 22.

¹¹ **Costanza-Chock, S. (2020)**. *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*. MIT Press, p. 85.

¹² **OECD (2020)**. *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*. OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 26-27.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ **D'Ignazio, C., & Klein, L. F. (2020)**. *Data Feminism*. MIT Press, p.52.

- **Promotes public sector innovation:** Embedding participation forces institutions to become agile, flexible, learning-oriented organizations that iterate systems based on citizen input. Beyond technical efficiency, participation acts as a critical safeguard against "automated inequality," ensuring that algorithmic systems do not codify historical biases into future public services.¹⁵

1.3 Moving toward meaningful participation

Effective data governance must move beyond "tokenism" toward people-powered decision-making. This transition requires a structural commitment to "deliberative democracy," where the public's role is not just to provide data, but to help define the rules that govern its flow.

Meaningful participation is defined by two key pillars:

- **Agency:** Activating participants to move from mere recipients of information to taking responsibility for managing data governance decisions.¹⁶ This shift ensures that communities are treated as owners of their digital destiny, possessing the legal and technical literacy required to challenge or endorse high-stakes data decision-making.¹⁷
- **Impact:** Closing the feedback loop so participants can see exactly how their input influenced the final framework.¹⁸ For participation to be sustainable, institutions must demonstrate "traceable accountability," proving that public deliberation resulted in tangible changes to policy, such as revised privacy settings or redirected resource allocation.

1.4 Strategic benefits for the African data governance context

Participatory data governance is a fundamental component of building a "people-centered" digital future for Africa¹⁹.

¹⁵ **Eubanks, V. (2018).** *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor*. St. Martin's Press, p.190.

¹⁶ **Ada Lovelace Institute (2021).** *Participatory Data Stewardship: A framework for involving people in the use of personal data*. London, UK, p. 29.

¹⁷ **Milan, S., & van der Velden, L. (2016).** *The Alternative Epistemologies of Data Activism*. *Digital Culture & Society*, 2(2), p. 62

¹⁸ **OECD (2022).** *Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes*, p.59.

¹⁹ **African Union (2022).** *AU Data Policy Framework*. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission, p.18.

Some key benefits in the data governance space include:

- **Establishing a "Social License" for innovation:** Involving those affected early builds the trust necessary to implement new technologies without public backlash. This trust is especially critical in sub-Saharan Africa, where historical exploitation has left a legacy of skepticism toward large-scale data collection.²⁰
- **Preventing "missing data" and bias:** Inclusion ensures that diverse and marginalized groups are reflected in evidence, preventing unfair targeting or exclusion by algorithms. By actively engaging local communities, governments can rectify the "data invisibility" of rural or informal sectors, ensuring public services are allocated based on accurate, lived realities.
- **Promoting data justice and economic sovereignty:** Participatory models help Africa manage its own data resources to avoid "data colonialism," ensuring data fuels local development rather than extractive global markets.²¹ This model asserts that those who generate the data must retain agency over its use, transforming data from a raw material for foreign extraction into a community-governed asset.²²
- **Harnessing collective intelligence:** Collaborative approaches ensure regulations are technically feasible, culturally relevant, and responsive to real-world African contexts. Integrating indigenous knowledge and local norms into governance frameworks ensures that AI and data policies respect values like *Ubuntu*, which prioritizes collective well-being over individualistic data ownership.²³
- **Redefining sovereignty through harmonization:** Continental participation supports the alignment of regional regulations, strengthening Africa's unified voice in global negotiations.²⁴ By co-creating standards across borders, African states can collectively negotiate better terms with global tech giants, ensuring that harmonized laws protect the rights of all citizens equally.

²⁰ **Research ICT Africa (2022).** *African Data Trusts: New Tools Towards Collective Data Governance?*, p.1

²¹ **Policy Center for the New South (2025).** *Digital Sovereignty and Data Colonialism: Shaping a Just Digital Order for the Global South*, p.9.

²² **Cambridge University Press (2025).** *Digital Colonialism and the Role of Local Intermediaries.* *Business and Human Rights Journal*, p. 303.

²³ **Gwagwa, A., et al. (2021).** *Roadmaps for African AI Governance and the Value of Ubuntu*, p.3.

²⁴ **CIGI (2024).** *Harmonization of Data Governance Frameworks in Africa.* Pg 5.

SECTION 2:

THE ROLE OF A PARTICIPATION CHAMPION

2.1 Data stewardship as the goal, participation as the driver

This handbook builds on established approaches designed to strengthen participatory models of data governance. It draws specifically on emerging thinking around participatory data stewardship, which views good governance no longer as a technical management or regulatory compliance approach. Stewardship is defined here as the responsible collection, use, and management of data in ways that are participatory, rights-preserving, value-driven, and attentive to fairness. These approaches recognise that data governance systems must actively involve those affected by data practices to remain legitimate, equitable, and trusted.

2.2 Key commitments and continental charters

There are a number of foundational continental and global frameworks that are unified by a commitment to multi-stakeholder engagement and bottom-up inclusion, ensuring Africa's digital evolution is deeply participatory rather than strictly top-down. Key continental and global strategies that reinforce this "people-centred" digital future include the following:

- **[The Global Digital Compact, Africa Digital Compact & AU Data Policy Framework](#)**: Advocate for the active involvement of civil society, the private sector, and academia in governance.
- **[Agenda 2063 & the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa](#)**: These visions promote a collaborative ecosystem where citizens act as co-creators of technology, not just consumers.
- **[Sectoral Strategies \(Agriculture, Health, Education\)](#)**: These prioritise community-level feedback to ensure digital tools meet local needs.
- **[The Malabo Convention & Digital ID Framework](#)**: These focus on building public trust through transparent data protection and inclusive identity systems.

- **The Digital Single Market:** This requires cross-border cooperation between regulators and SMEs to harmonise policy and empower every citizen.

While many frameworks focus on institutional arrangements and technical mechanisms, this handbook focuses on the **human role** within those systems: the **Participation Champion**.

2.3 What is a Participation Champion and who is eligible?

Anyone can be a Participation Champion. Whether you are an internal government reformer (Data Steward) pushing for transparency or an external advocate fighting for digital rights, your defining trait is *transparency, accountability and inclusion*.

A Participation Champion is defined not by a formal title, but by their disposition and readiness to act. Being a Participation Champion is both a role and a mindset. It involves recognising opportunities within policymaking processes, taking responsibility for improving how decisions about data are made, and ensuring that inclusion, transparency, and accountability are embedded in practice rather than treated as procedural afterthoughts. Later on in this handbook (Section 5, pg. 19), you will learn how to build the core competencies of a Participation Champion in data governance.

2.4 The role of a Participation Champion in data governance

Inclusion is often understood primarily through data disaggregation, breaking down information by characteristics such as gender, age, or disability status in order to reveal disparities. While this is critical, focusing only on disaggregation confines inclusion to the data collection stage.

Participatory approaches expand this understanding by placing individuals and communities in a position to influence how their data are defined, collected, managed, shared, and used across the entire data lifecycle:

- **Before data collection begins,** engagement helps clarify what should be measured and how to reflect the lived realities of marginalized groups.
- **After data is collected,** collaboration supports decisions about how information should be communicated and accessed.

- **At the stage of data use**, participatory practices can improve policy design, service delivery, and accountability by ensuring that data-driven decisions reflect real needs and contextual knowledge²⁵.

These dynamics explain why Participation Champions are necessary. Inclusion, accountability, and responsiveness do not occur automatically within digital governance systems. Champions help ensure that participation is embedded at each stage of the data lifecycle, that transparency is meaningful rather than symbolic, and that public voices influence real outcomes. In doing so, they shift data governance from a purely technical exercise to a democratic practice grounded in equity, trust, and shared responsibility.

Reflection: Mapping participation in your context

Think about your own institution, department, or government.

1. How can participation from key stakeholders (e.g., policy owners, data stewards, legal/compliance teams, and citizen representatives) be formally embedded into data governance processes such as policy design, data sharing agreements, and data quality oversight?
2. Who do you need to champion this change?
3. How might this handbook help you advocate for this change?

²⁵ **Open Government Partnership (OGP). (2022, August 26).** *Participatory Data Governance: How Small Changes Can Lead to Greater Inclusion.* [[Online](#)].

SECTION 3:

THE PARTICIPATION JOURNEY

3.1 Understanding your starting point

Becoming a Participation Champion is a continuous journey rather than a single event. It begins with the realization that meaningful engagement does not happen by accident; every governance process has an entry point. The focus is not on *whether* to start, but *where*. This section provides the tools to help you orient yourself within the data governance landscape, clarify your purpose, and select the level of participation appropriate for your context.

3.2 Defining purpose and maturity

Before launching a participatory activity, a Champion must answer four critical questions to determine the necessary level of engagement:

1. Why is this participatory activity needed?
2. What is the general issue being addressed?
3. What is the specific outcome you hope to achieve?
4. What level of engagement is required to make this happen?

3.3 Model: The Purposes of Political Participation

“Purposes of Political Participation”²⁶, developed by the Innovation for Policy Foundation (i4Policy), this framework tracks maturity levels by building on the IAP2 Spectrum²⁷ and Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation²⁸. It allows Champions to categorize interventions and ensure the participation level matches the intended goal.

²⁶ **Innovation for Policy Foundation (2022)**. *Purposes of Political Participation*. Website: www.i4policy.org

²⁷ **International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). (2018)**. *IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation*, p. 1.

²⁸ **Arnstein, S. R. (1969)**. A Ladder of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), p. 217.

Participation Levels and data governance applications

While some scenarios only require efficient information sharing, the complex nature of data governance often necessitates moving toward higher maturity levels (levels 3, 4, 5).

Participation level	Definition & description	Data governance statement ²⁹
Level 0: Co-exist	Baseline level; decisions are made in a vacuum without public awareness.	<i>Data is treated as a proprietary asset to be mined and used at will.</i>
Level 1: Communicate	One-way engagement; the goal is simply to inform the public of decisions already made.	<i>Reporting to the public on how their data was used and managed.</i>
Level 2: Consult	Two-way communication; decision-makers actively seek advice, inputs, or feedback on a plan.	<i>Listening to concerns and providing feedback on data governance plans.</i>
Level 3: Collaborate	Those affected by policy work alongside decision-makers to design or implement plans.	<i>Working with stakeholders to ensure their concerns are accounted for in plans.</i>
Level 4: Co-decide	Equal, shared decision-making authority between stakeholders and officials.	<i>Deciding together on the best way to design data governance models.</i>
Level 5: Co-Create *	Direct citizen power to undertake decisions with the support of authorities.	<i>Supporting and assisting a community's own vision for how their data is governed.</i>

* **A note:** The model was updated in 2026 for this data governance handbook to incorporate the highest level of participation, “Co-Create,” where citizens hold direct decision-making power with institutional support.

YOUR EXPERTISE IS NEEDED

Can you think of any examples in the data governance space that have reached level 5 “Co-Create” of citizen power in Africa?

If so, send us your thoughts: community@i4policy.org

²⁹ Inspired by **Ada Lovelace Institute. (2021).** *Participatory Data Stewardship: A framework for involving people in the use of personal data.* London, UK.

3.4 Legal and ethical standards

To move beyond tokenism, Champions must ensure the quality of consultation remains high. The Gunning Principles³⁰ are a good place to start, and is used in the UK and elsewhere, to provide a legal foundation for legitimate engagement:

- **Formative stage:** Engagement must occur while proposals are still being shaped, not after a decision is finalized.
- **Informed consideration:** Participants must receive sufficient information to make an informed choice.
- **Adequate time:** Stakeholders need a supportive environment and enough time to respond.
- **Conscientious consideration:** Decision-makers must provide evidence that they fully considered the feedback. Also dubbed “closing the feedback loop”.

3.5 TOOL: Participatory Activity Canvas

Why not start sketching out your journey?

Designing participation is itself a governance task. The Participatory Activity Canvas, developed by i4Policy, is a simple, visual planning tool that helps Participation Champions structure participatory processes in a deliberate and transparent way.

The Canvas supports you and your team to answer a basic but often overlooked question: *What exactly are we inviting people to participate in, and why?*

What the Canvas helps you do:

- Clarify the purpose of participation before choosing methods;
- Identify who needs to be involved, and in what capacity;
- Decide how participation connects to real decisions (impact goal);
- Avoid common pitfalls such as vague consultations or unrealistic expectations (manage risks).

It is particularly useful in data governance contexts where participation risks becoming symbolic, overly technical, or disconnected from decision-making.

³⁰ The **Ada Lovelace Institute** (2021) *Participatory Data Stewardship: A framework for involving people in the use of personal data*. London, UK, p.29

Download the [Participatory Activity Canvas](#) here.

Participatory Activity Canvas

1 Purpose: Topic
Why is the participatory activity needed? What is the general issue being addressed?

2 Purpose: Process & Desired Outcome
What is the activity seeking to support? What's the outcome that you hope to achieve? If the process is supporting a decision-making process, what phase or stage of the ADDIS process is it contributing to?

3 Stakeholders & Roles
Who are the key stakeholders involved? What roles should they serve in the activity?

Convener(s)
Who should organize and host the activity to best achieve your purpose?

Participants
Who should be included in the activity to best achieve your purpose? What principles are most relevant to achieve the activity's purpose (for example, Inclusivity, representation, lived experience)?

...Other Roles
What other roles would be important to include to ensure the success of your activity?

4 Outreach Method
How should participants be reached or selected?

5 Levels of Engagement
What is the level of engagement?

6 Other Important Considerations
What are other important considerations relevant for the design of your democratic innovation? How might your activity to connect with other other initiatives, or with formal decision-making processes? How might participants interact with each other? How might your activity be designed to ensure integrity?

7 Storyboard of the Activity
Draw the story of how the activity would take place.

Source: Innovation for Policy Foundation | License: CC BY-SA 4.0

Learn more on: <https://decisionthinking.org/canvas/>

SECTION 4:

CHALLENGES & PARTICIPATION

TRADE-OFFS

4.1 Democratic trilemma

Every journey involves difficult choices. Inspired by the work of James S. Fishkin³¹, the Participation Champion navigates a terrain shaped by the democratic trilemma: a persistent tension between core democratic ideals. Just as a traveler cannot be in three places at once, a champion often struggles to maximize three democratic ideals simultaneously.

In any participation strategy, you are constantly balancing:

1. **Political equality:** Giving everyone an equal chance to participate (equal opportunity).
2. **Deliberation:** Ensuring the participation is deep, informed, and thoughtful (quality engagement).
3. **Participation numbers:** Getting a large volume of people involved.

The Strategic Trade-off

The trilemma forces a choice of "two out of three":

- **High numbers + equality:** Results in broad but shallow engagement (e.g., *a referendum or a mass survey*), where deliberation is sacrificed.
- **High equality + deep deliberation:** Requires small, representative groups (e.g., *a Citizens' Assembly*), where mass participation is sacrificed.
- **Mass participation + deep deliberation:** Usually lacks equality, as those with the most time, resources, or loudest voices dominate the conversation.

Your goal is not to solve this impossible puzzle, but to read the context carefully and assess which tool is most appropriate for the specific policy terrain. Success lies in being transparent about which peak you are climbing and why.

³¹ **Fishkin, J. S. (2009).** *When the people speak: Deliberative democracy and public consultation.* Oxford University Press.

Fact Check: Busting Participation Myths

The policy landscape is often stalled by persistent myths that undermine genuine engagement. A Champion's first task is to challenge these misconceptions with evidence-based reality:

- **Myth 1: The "Suggestion Box" Fallacy**
 - **The belief:** Participation is a one-way channel for collecting complaints or "ticking a box."
 - **The reality:** Authentic participation is about shared governance. It moves stakeholders from being passive subjects of data collection to active architects of their own data futures.³²
- **Myth 2: The Efficiency Trap**
 - **The belief:** "Involving the public slows down the technical timeline."
 - **The reality:** While the design phase may take longer, skipping participation creates a "trust deficit" that leads to policy rejection, legal challenges, and costly implementation failures later on. Participation is an investment in long-term friction reduction.³³
- **Myth 3: The "Silent Public" Delusion**
 - **The belief:** The general public is too disinterested or "unqualified" to engage with complex data policy.
 - **The reality:** People engage deeply when data is framed not as an abstract technicality, but as a matter of fundamental rights, privacy, and economic survival. Silence is usually a symptom of poor framing, not a lack of interest.³⁴

4.2 Data Governance Challenges

In addition to navigating the participation dilemmas, the data participation champion has to also be aware of the specific challenges embedded in the data governance domain. Most of these challenges were identified and shared during a knowledge exchange session convened by GIZ with experts from Research ICT Africa³⁵.

³² **Sloane, M., et al. (2020).** *Participation is not a Design Fix for Machine Learning*. arXiv preprint, p. 6.

³³ **Involve. (2005).** *The People and the Profits: The Stakeholder Perspective on Public Participation*. London, UK, p. 14.

³⁴ **Kennedy, H., et al. (2020).** *Living with Data: Surveying Public Attitudes Towards Data Practices*. University of Sheffield, p. 42.

³⁵ The insights referenced here were shared by a researcher from Research ICT Africa during a Knowledge Exchange Session convened by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on September 29, 2025, and have been synthesized here for the purposes of this work. Research ICT Africa, view: <https://researchictafrica.net/>

1. Representation & inclusion

Genuine inclusivity remains elusive, as marginalized groups, including women, persons with disabilities, and rural populations, are frequently absent from high-level policy discussions. This exclusion is often exacerbated by weak civil society networks that fail to reach grassroots actors. When these diverse lived experiences are missing, data policies risk reproducing existing biases and failing to protect the most vulnerable members of the digital ecosystem.

2. Awareness & technical capacity

A pervasive misconception equates data governance strictly with technical IT infrastructure, obscuring its human rights and social dimensions. Decision-makers often lack the methodological tools to translate complex data concepts for lay audiences or to facilitate non-traditional engagement. Consequently, potential participants are alienated by jargon, preventing them from understanding how specific data policies directly impact their privacy, economic agency, and civil liberties.

3. Resources & logistical barriers

Meaningful participation is resource-intensive, yet budget allocations rarely cover the costs of genuine engagement. Without financial support for travel, accommodation, or compensation for time, participation becomes a privilege available only to well-funded urban elites. Grassroots communities face insurmountable logistical hurdles to attending venue-based consultations, leading to a skew in representation where only professional NGOs can afford to show up.

4. Power dynamics & institutional gatekeeping

Due to the participation myths such as the "Efficiency Trap" [Refer to Page 17 Fact Check: Busting Participation Myths] on Bus, institutions may decide to work with key known groups of stakeholders (experts, technocrats, etc.) to fast track decision-making. We need to be aware that this may lead unintentionally to institutional gatekeeping.

Furthermore, many governments lack binding legal frameworks that mandate multi-stakeholder approaches, meaning participation often relies on the temporary goodwill of specific officials rather than entrenched institutional policy.

5. Tokenism & lack of feedback loops

A critical failure point is the "consultation without impact" trap, where participation is treated as a box-ticking exercise. Stakeholders may provide input, but without transparent accountability mechanisms or clear feedback loops, they rarely see how their contributions influence the final policy. This perceived tokenism erodes trust and generates "stakeholder fatigue," causing communities to disengage from future governance processes because they see no tangible return on their invested effort.

SECTION 5:

CORE COMPETENCIES & SELF-ASSESSMENT

5.1 Building your Participation Champion profile

Acting as an effective Participation Champion in data governance requires a distinct set of capabilities that go beyond technical expertise alone. Validated through engagement with experts and practitioners across the African continent³⁶, these can be clustered into five core competencies, pointing to a unique blend of technical understanding, strategic positioning, and relational intelligence needed to navigate complex governance environments and ensure that participation meaningfully shapes decision-making:

Competency	Definition & Goal
1. Data governance & policy know-how	Champions must understand the minimum technical requirements to translate citizen input into legally sound and feasible decisions.
2. Participatory design & stakeholder engagement	Participation must be deliberately designed, convened, and nurtured; it does not happen automatically. This competency ensures engagement is empowering rather than extractive.
3. Political, institutional & strategic navigation	Champions must navigate power-laden institutional environments to ensure participatory inputs influence actual policy outcomes.
4. Ethics, human rights & accountability	The Champion acts as a guardian of rights, ensuring that data governance protects people rather than instrumentalising them.
5. Communication & relational intelligence	Participation depends on trust and clarity. Champions must translate complexity and maintain legitimacy across technical and non-technical communities.

³⁶ This framing draws on insights synthesized from approximately 60 policymakers working on data governance across Africa, who shared their perspectives on the core skills and knowledge required for effective Participation Champions. These insights were gathered during a knowledge exchange session organised by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on 23 February 2026.

5.2 The Participation Champion's value set

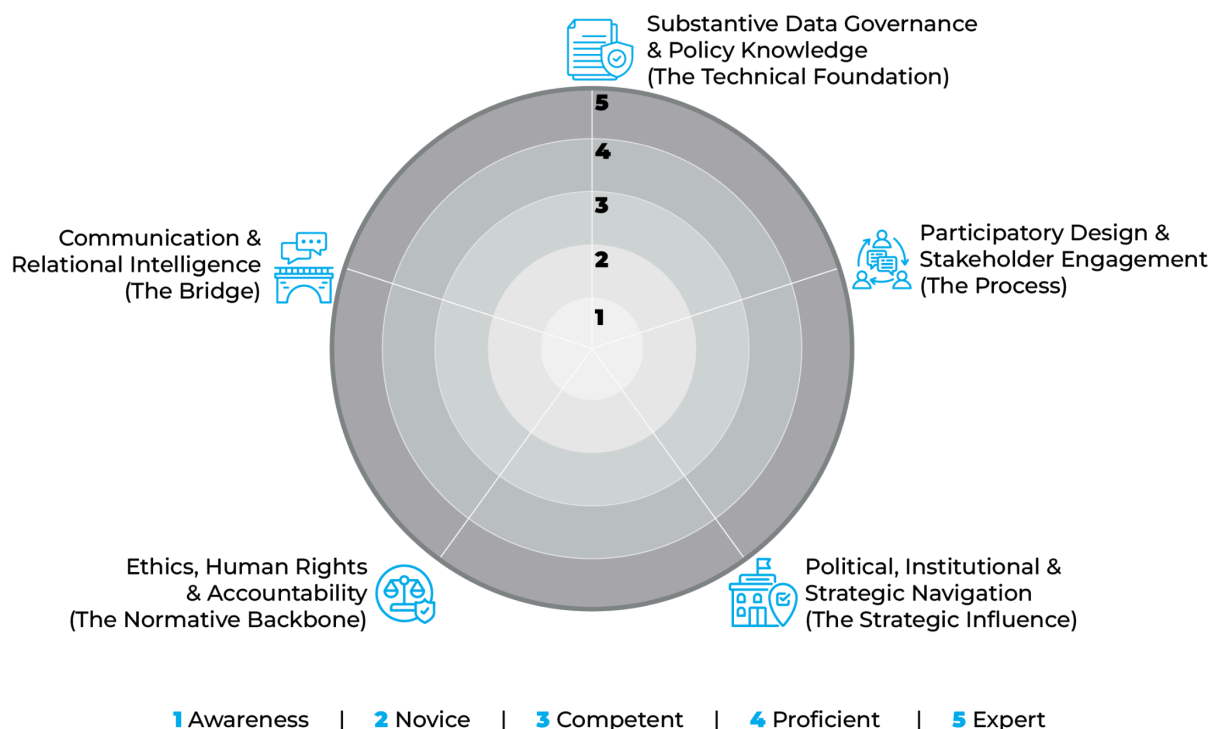
A Champion's profile is ultimately built on a core set of values that ensure they do not merely engage in "participation theatre":

- **Integrity:** Accountability, transparency, and trust;
- **Engagement:** Collaboration, facilitating (difficult) conversations, and grassroots empowerment;
- **Mindset:** Agility, non-judgment, respect, and academic humility;
- **Safety:** Prioritising equity, evidence-based outcomes, and the safety of participants.

5.3 TOOL: Participation Champion Competency Wheel

PARTICIPATION CHAMPION COMPETENCY WHEEL

SELF-ASSESSMENT RADAR CHART (5 levels & 5 spokes)



This self-assessment tool is designed for **Participation Champions** to evaluate their current standing across the five core pillars of participatory data governance. Inspired by the "Wheel of Life,"³⁷ this diagnostic tool helps you identify where your "spokes" are strong and where the wheel might be out of balance.

Rate your current level of expertise for each competency on a **Likert Scale of 1 to 5**:

- **1 - Awareness:** I know the concept exists but have no experience applying it.
- **2 - Novice:** I have basic knowledge and require significant guidance.
- **3 - Competent:** I can apply these skills independently in standard situations.
- **4 - Proficient:** I can lead others and adapt these skills to complex contexts.
- **5 - Expert:** I am a recognised authority and can innovate new frameworks.

Core Competency	Your Rating (1-5)
1. Substantive data governance & Policy know-how (The technical foundation)	
2. Participatory design & stakeholder engagement (The process)	
3. Political, institutional & strategic navigation (The strategic influence)	
4. Ethics, human rights & accountability (The normative backbone)	
5. Communication & relational intelligence (The bridge)	

If you scored 1-2 in any of your domains, See **Section 5.4 “Actions to build your core competencies”**, to help you move from **Awareness** to **Expert**. These actions are designed to ground your work in the realities of African data governance while adhering to international standards for meaningful participation.

³⁷ Meyer, P. J. Success Motivation® Institute, Inc. (Foundational training materials from the 1960s).

5.4 Actions to build your core competencies

Building these five core competencies requires intentional practice and continuous learning. If you are looking to strengthen your capacity as a Participation Champion, the following actions offer practical entry points to develop each area:



Competence 1:

Substantive data governance & policy know-how

Goal: Anchor participation in technical and regulatory reality.

- **Audit the legal landscape:** Conduct a review of your national data protection laws and the **AU Data Policy Framework** to identify the specific rights (e.g. right to explanation) currently afforded to citizens.
- **Simplify technical jargon:** Create a "plain language" glossary for your current project that translates complex terms like "metadata" or "fiduciary duty" into human stories.
- **Engage data stewards early:** Host a "Knowledge Exchange" session with your department's technical leads to understand the data architecture and security constraints before designing public engagement.



Competence 2:

Participatory design & stakeholder engagement

Goal: Move from "suggestion boxes" to collective creation.

- **Map your entry points:** Use the *Participatory Activity Canvas* to identify exactly where in the data lifecycle (collection, analysis, or use) you will need governance input from the public that will have the most impact (building better policies).
- **Diversify the room:** Intentionally recruit participants from marginalised or rural populations to ensure your "consultation" doesn't just include urban people.
- **Facilitate for empowerment:** Refer to the *Purposes of Political Participation Model* to see which of your interventions could benefit from higher participation and co-creation levels. (Refer to page 12-13 on Section 3.3 Model: The Purposes of Political Participation)
- **Meaningful participation:** Check against the *Gunnings Principle* whether your participation or intervention will have the intended impact. (Ref to page 14 on Section 3.4 Legal and ethical standards.)



Competence 3: Political, institutional & strategic navigation

Goal: Ensure participatory inputs influence real outcomes.

Competence 3: Political, institutional & strategic navigation

Goal: Ensure participatory inputs influence real outcomes.

- **Identify policy windows:** Map out the legislative calendar in your region to find "windows of opportunity" where public input can legally influence a bill's adoption.
- **Build internal coalitions:** Identify other "Participation Champions" in related sectors (like Health or Transport) to create a united front for multi-stakeholder approaches.
- **Anticipate resistance:** Conduct a "Pre-mortem" exercise to identify potential institutional gatekeepers and develop a strategy to persuade them using evidence of successful case studies. (Refer to Page 17 Fact Check: Busting Participation Myths) or (Refer to Page 32 SECTION 7: Participatory Data Governance Case Studies)



Competence 4: Ethics, human rights & accountability

Goal: Act as a guardian of rights and inclusion.

- **Form a Lived-Experience Panel:** Recruit a group of "experts by experience" to review your data governance framework for potential algorithmic biases or privacy risks.³⁸ (Refer to Page 28 "6.2 Analogue and digital participation methods")
- **Establish a public feedback loop:** Create a transparent mechanism where citizens can track exactly how their input was used, ensuring you "close the loop" with clear communication.
- **Commission an independent ethics review:** When dealing with sensitive data, involve external human rights experts to audit your processes and mitigate risks of surveillance.

³⁸ **Ada Lovelace Institute. (2021).** *Participatory Data Stewardship: A framework for involving people in the use of personal data.* London, UK, p. 45.

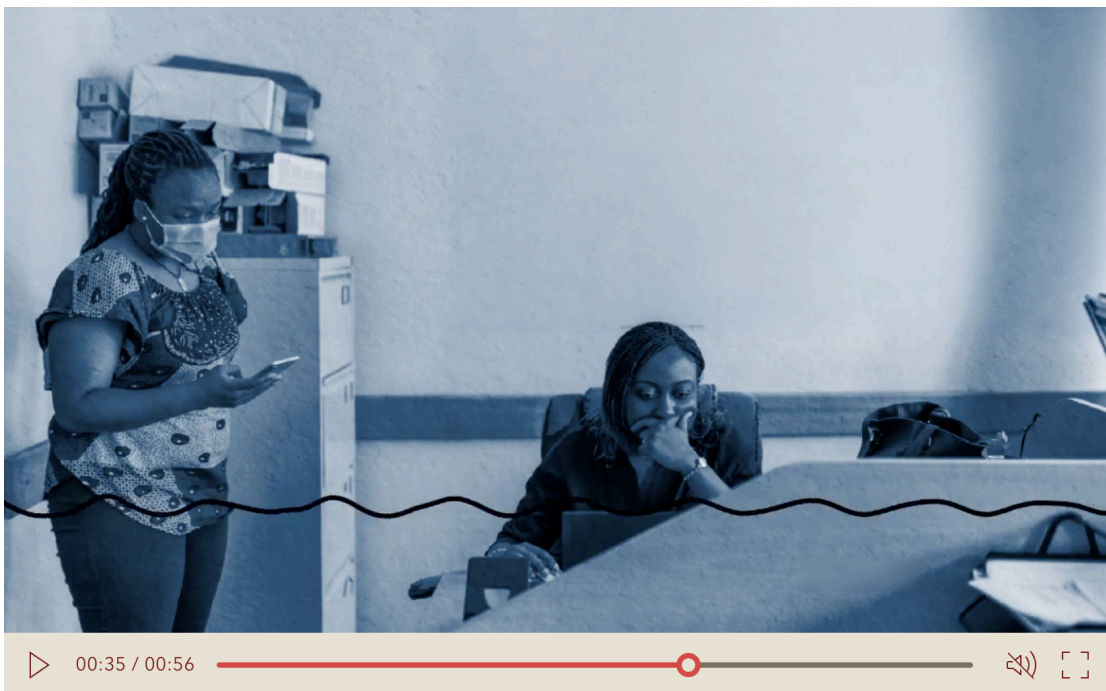


Competence 5: Communication & relational intelligence

Goal: Maintain trust and legitimacy across communities.

- **Practice active listening:** In your next workshop, use "[deliberative mapping](#)" method to ensure you are listening to clarify concerns rather than just to respond.³⁹ (Refer to Page 28 on section 6.2 Analogue and digital participation methods)
- **Cultivate academic humility:** Openly acknowledge the limits of your own technical knowledge during public sessions to build trust and encourage participants to share their local expertise.
- **Standardise "Impact stories":** Develop a communication strategy that uses human-centric narratives to explain the social welfare benefits of complex data policies.

*The Data Values Project have an amazing storytelling resource for inspiration: [The Voices of #DataValues](#)



³⁹ Burgess, J., Stirling, A., et al. (2007). *Deliberative Mapping: A User's Guide*. Wellcome Trust, p. 12.

PRO TIP: African Partners for Participatory Data Governance

Many governments recognise the need for meaningful participation but often lack the deep know-how to make this happen. As a governmental Participation Champion, partnering with external experts in the field can help achieve your participation goals faster while ensuring data governance is technically sound and publicly endorsed.

The following African organisations can provide technical rigour and deep contextual knowledge of the African digital landscape to augment your work on the ground:

- **Innovation for Policy Foundation (i4Policy)** A global foundation with African roots, that connects governments and communities to co-create policy. They provide research and development, knowledge-sharing and advisory services to better harness collective intelligence for resilient, inclusive societies. **Website:** <https://www.i4policy.org>
- **Research ICT Africa (RIA)** A think tank conducting multi-disciplinary research on digital governance and "Data Justice". They provide the Strategic Navigation skills required to influence continental frameworks like those of the African Union. Website: <https://researchictafrica.net>
- **Pollicy (East & West Africa)** A feminist data collective specialising in data storytelling and the "Safety" of marginalised groups. They help Champions address Intersectionality in Policy to ensure data products improve service delivery for all. Website: <https://pollicy.org>
- **Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA)** A leading pan-African organisation advancing inclusive digital policy and governance. They conduct research, policy analysis, and capacity building on issues such as internet freedom, data governance, and digital inclusion. They support Participation Champions in navigating Regulatory Frameworks and strengthening Accountability by bridging civil society, governments, and regional institutions. Website: <https://cipesa.org/>
- **African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP)** A regional non-profit that bridges the gap between research and public policy. They support Substantive Data Governance Knowledge by facilitating evidence-informed decision-making in parliaments. Website: <https://www.afidep.org>
- **Open Institute (Kenya)** Experts in Radical Transparency and open data, working at the "Grassroots" level. They provide sub-national data dashboards that allow citizens to monitor government performance directly. Website: <https://openinstitute.com>
- **Paradigm Initiative (PIN)** A pan-African social enterprise advocating for digital rights and inclusion. They lead "Lived Experience" advocacy to ensure policy design protects vulnerable populations from mass surveillance. Website: <https://paradigmhq.org>

SECTION 6:

KEY CONCEPTS & METHODS

6.1 Concepts and theories

This section outlines some common concepts that underpin your participation approach. Each concept is summarised and gives some useful key takeaways to bear in mind in your participation journey.

1. Deliberative democracy

Unlike standard consultation (which often aggregates static opinions), deliberative democracy focuses on informed discussion. It involves representative groups of citizens learning about an issue, weighing trade-offs, and finding common ground.

Key Takeaway: Moving from "what people want" (raw opinion) to "what people would want if they had the time to learn and discuss" (public judgment).

2. Co-creation and co-production

This concept shifts the government's role from a "provider" of solutions to a "partner." It implies that citizens and policy beneficiaries should be involved in the design and delivery of public services from the very beginning, not just asked for feedback on a finished draft.

Key Takeaway: Policy is designed with people, not for people.

3. The "Feedback Loop" (Closing the Loop)

One of the biggest causes of cynicism is the "black hole" of consultation, where citizens provide input but never hear how it was used. Closing the loop means explicitly communicating: "We heard X, we did Y. If we didn't do Y, here is the reason why."

Key Takeaway: The participation process is not complete until the participants know how their input influenced the decision.

4. Participation fatigue

Citizens are often asked for input on multiple disparate issues without coordination, leading to burnout and disengagement. A champion recognizes this risk and advocates for streamlined, meaningful, and respectful engagement that values the citizens' time.

Key Takeaway: Treat attention as a scarce resource; coordinate across departments to avoid over-surveying the same communities.

5. Intersectionality in policy

Derived from Kimberlé Crenshaw's work, this concept highlights that individuals hold multiple overlapping identities (race, gender, class) that create unique modes of discrimination or privilege. A policy participation champion ensures that engagement strategies account for these complex layers rather than treating groups as monolithic (e.g., "women" or "youth"). A recent publication by i4policy, goes into more detail on this element. View ["Making It Real - Tools and Pathways for Intersectional Policymaking, 2026"](#)

Key Takeaway: Inclusive policy design requires data and dialogue that capture overlapping vulnerabilities.

6. Radical transparency (Open Government)

Transparency is the prerequisite for participation. Citizens cannot meaningfully participate if they do not have access to the same data and reasoning as the decision-makers. This goes beyond "publishing decisions" to publishing the *evidence and criteria* behind them.

Key Takeaway: Information asymmetry kills trust. Open data is the fuel for effective public oversight.

7. The Policy Entrepreneur

A "Policy Entrepreneur" is an individual who takes advantage of "windows of opportunity" to push for policy change. They are persistent, well-networked, and skilled at framing problems. A participation champion often acts as an entrepreneur for the *process* of engagement itself.

Key Takeaway: Great ideas (or great engagement plans) don't sell themselves; they need a champion to couple them with political problems and solutions.

8. Process vs. outcome evaluation

Champions must distinguish between evaluating the *success of the policy* (did crime go down?) and the *success of the participation process* (did people feel heard?). High-quality participation can sometimes lead to a decision people dislike, but they will accept it if they view the process as legitimate.

Key Takeaway: A good outcome from a bad process is a fragile victory; a fair process builds long-term institutional trust.

6.2 Analogue and digital participation methods

This toolbox offering 12 innovative and traditional participatory methods, utilizes the Purposes of Political Participation Model (comprising Co-exist, Communicate, Consult, Collaborate, Co-decide, and Create) to frame engagement as a progression of influence and shared power rather than a one-off event. Each maturity level demands specific tools and institutional openness to successfully transition from basic information-sharing to deep collaboration. By aligning traditional and innovative methods with this model, Participation Champions can intentionally select the most effective analogue, digital, or hybrid formats to strengthen policy quality, democratic legitimacy, and public trust.

Maturity Level	Participation Purpose	Methods	Format
Level 0	Co-exist: Decisions made in a vacuum without public awareness.	<i>No participatory methods are traditionally applied at this level.</i>	N/A
Level 1	Communicate: One-way dissemination of information regarding decisions.	Government Gazette: Official publication used to formally communicate laws, regulations, and policy decisions to the public.	Hybrid: Published through official government websites and printed gazette bulletins.
		Public Hearings/Town Halls: Meetings to present proposals for public awareness.	Analogue: Traditional face-to-face community meetings.
Level 2	Consult: Two-way flow where decision-makers actively seek feedback.	Citizens' Jury: A representative group of citizens deliberating on complex issues.	Analogue: Typically requires intensive, multi-day in-person deliberation.

		Focus Groups: Small, facilitated discussions to uncover underlying attitudes.	Analogue: Best suited for reading non-verbal cues in person.
		3D Consultation: Structured, distributed deliberation across multiple communities.	Hybrid: Often combines local physical meetings with digital synthesis of data.
		Deliberative System Mapping: Visualizing actors and power dynamics before defining a policy problem.	Hybrid: Can be done via physical workshops or digital mapping software.
Level 3	Collaborate: Working alongside stakeholders to design or draft plans.	Policy Hackathon: Rapid, collaborative development and stress-testing of policy options.	Hybrid: Often utilizes digital collaborative tools within a physical event space.
		Regulatory Sandbox: Testing innovations and rules in a controlled, live environment.	Hybrid: Involves physical oversight and digital technical testing.
		Community-Based Monitoring: Involving stakeholders in tracking policy implementation on the ground.	Hybrid: Physical site visits paired with digital reporting apps.

Level 4	Co-decide: Equal, shared decision-making authority.	Citizen Assembly: A representative group of 50–150 people using lottery-based selection to reach consensus on policy recommendations.	Analogue: Prioritizes face-to-face trust-building for high-stakes decisions.
		Participatory Budgeting: Citizens directly voting on and allocating public funds.	Hybrid: Community brainstorming (Analogue) followed by digital voting.
		Lived-Experience Panels: Empowering those most affected to co-design frameworks.	Hybrid: Combines in-depth workshops with ongoing digital advisory roles.
Level 5	Co-Create: Direct citizen power to manage decisions with support.	Community Data Trusts: Supporting a community's autonomous vision for data governance.	Digital: Technical and legal frameworks for secure data sharing.

6.3 Cautionary Note: Navigating digital participation platforms

For the Participation Champion, digital platforms offer a deceptive trade-off: they provide the scale to reach thousands, but can simultaneously jeopardize the "Social License" required for innovation. If the very tool used to "engage" the public is extractive, poorly secured, or opaque, it undermines the credibility of the entire governance framework. Policymakers must therefore treat the selection of a digital platform not as a procurement task, but as a primary act of data governance in itself.

Critical Considerations for Digital Engagement

- **Handle with extreme care:** Digital platforms frequently process personal and sensitive information that, if mishandled, can lead to unauthorized surveillance or the reinforcement of existing power imbalances.

- **Compliance is mandatory:** It is critical to select platforms that comply with the highest international standards of data protection and align with frameworks like the Malabo Convention and the AU Data Policy Framework.⁴⁰
- **Consent and transparency:** Platforms must provide clear, accessible mechanisms for obtaining user consent and must explicitly state how data is stored and managed to avoid the "empty ritual" of tokenistic consultation.⁴¹
- **Anonymity as a safeguard:** If a program requires it, the platform should facilitate participant anonymity to protect vulnerable groups from potential exclusion or harm.

⁴⁰ **African Union. (2024).** *The African Digital Compact / Data Policy Framework*, p. 28.

⁴¹ **Arnstein, S. R. (1969).** A Ladder of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), p. 216.

SECTION 7:

PARTICIPATORY DATA

GOVERNANCE CASE STUDIES

7.1 Real world applications

Around the world, decisions about data increasingly affect people's everyday lives. These decisions shape who collects data, how it is used, who can access it, and how people's rights are protected. In areas such as health, social services, digital identity, and artificial intelligence, data governance choices can either build trust or deepen harm.

This section presents African case studies of participation in data governance, drawn from real processes where communities were meaningfully involved in shaping how data is governed. The cases show that participation includes consultation, but also goes beyond it. Depending on the context, participation can involve informing, consulting, collaborating, and in some cases sharing decision-making responsibility around how data is governed.

Each case study is structured around four elements:

1. The participation journey
2. Participation Champions and their core competencies
3. Key challenges
4. Participatory methods used

CASE STUDY 1: The MindKind Project (South Africa)

Years: 2020–2022

Location: South Africa (with parallel processes in India and the United Kingdom)

Lead organisations: Wellcome Trust; Sage Bionetworks

Policy domain: Health data governance

Stage of data lifecycle: Design, collection, sharing, analysis, reuse

1. The participation journey

<https://connectedbydata.org/cases>

Between 2020 and 2022, the Wellcome Trust commissioned a large-scale engagement programme to support the design of a Global Mental Health Databank (GMHD). The project aimed to test the feasibility of collecting and sharing app-based, longitudinal mental health data from young people aged

14–24 with lived experience of anxiety or depression. From the outset, the project treated data governance as a central concern, focusing on how data would be designed, collected, shared, reused, and made available to researchers globally, while protecting privacy and building trust.

Participation was implemented by placing young people at the centre of data governance design. Across South Africa, India, and the UK, the project established national Young People’s Advisory Groups, supported by Professional Youth Advisors, as well as a Global Youth Panel. These groups were consulted through advisory processes, deliberative workshops, peer research activities, and a randomised control trial that tested attitudes towards different data governance models. Their input directly informed decisions about consent, data sharing, collective benefits, and limits on commercial use. The results of this participation process were used to assess whether the databank should proceed, leading to clear go/no-go decisions and the development of a formal data governance specification for future stages of the project.

2. Participation champions and core competencies

In the MindKind project, Participation Champions were the people and groups who helped ensure that young people had a real voice in decisions about how mental health data would be governed. These champions operated at different levels of the project and played complementary roles.

- **Convening participation champions:** These were the organisations with formal decision-making responsibility, including Wellcome Trust and Sage Bionetworks. They decided to embed participation into the project and committed to using its results to inform key decisions, including whether the databank should go ahead and under what conditions.
- **Community participation champions:** These were young people with lived experience of mental health challenges. Through national Young People’s Advisory Groups, a Global Youth Panel, and an International Youth Panel, they shared views on consent, data sharing, and acceptable data use. Their input shaped how different data governance options were designed and assessed.
- **Expert participation champions:** These were researchers involved through the Data Use Advisory Group. They contributed expertise on research use, ethics, data access, and governance, and engaged with the concerns raised by young participants.

3. Key Challenges

The MindKind project surfaced several challenges that are highly relevant for Participation Champions working in African data governance contexts.

- **Engagement:** The project identified that participation in app-based, remote mental health studies often drops off quickly. This concern informed the project's core hypothesis that young people's willingness to participate in digital research is influenced by their involvement in decisions about how their data is collected, shared, and used. Engagement levels were therefore treated as a key uncertainty in the project's feasibility assessment.
- **Privacy:** The project addressed the challenge of making data available to researchers globally while protecting the privacy of young people contributing sensitive mental health data. Different governance models were explored to test how data access and use could be structured in ways that respected participant preferences and privacy expectations.
- **Sustainability:** A major challenge emerged around the potential commercial use of mental health data. Participants expressed a presumption against the databank being used for commercial gain. These concerns directly affected the project's assessment of long-term funding sustainability and resulted in a 'Stop' flag in the go/no-go evaluation.

4. Participatory Methods Used

The project combined multiple participatory methods, chosen to support informed decision-making rather than one-off consultation.

Key methods included:

- **Community advisory Groups:** National Young People's Advisory Groups, a Global Youth Panel, and an ad hoc International Youth Panel provided ongoing feedback on study design, data collection, and data governance options through regular online meetings and virtual exchanges.
- **Peer research:** Professional Youth Advisors were embedded as full-time members of each country team to support youth participation, facilitate advisory groups, and synthesise participant input for project decision-making spaces.
- **Expert advisory panel:** The Data Use Advisory Group brought together researchers from multiple countries to advise on scientific use, research ethics, data governance models, data access, and researcher requirements.
- **Randomised control trial:** Participants using the MindKind app were randomly assigned to different data governance conditions to test preferences and engagement under alternative rules for data access and use.
- **Deliberative forums:** Structured deliberative sessions enabled participants to learn about and discuss different data governance models, first within countries and later across countries, to explore informed and evolving perspectives.

CASE STUDY 2: Advancing Practical Data Governance in Africa (Pan-African)

Years: 2025

Location: Africa (continental, with in-person convening in Conakry, Guinea)

Lead organisations: Smart Africa; UNESCO

Partners: World Bank; International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

Policy domain: Data governance

Stage of data lifecycle: Cross-cutting (governance across the full data lifecycle)

1. The participation journey

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/ict-leaders-africa-advance-practical-data-governance-solutions-transform-africa-summit>

In November 2025, Smart Africa and UNESCO convened a high-level, in-person workshop on data governance during the 7th Transform Africa Summit in Conakry, Guinea. The session brought together more than 50 senior ICT policymakers, regulators, and industry representatives from 23 African countries. Its purpose was to address persistent legal, technical, and institutional gaps in data governance as African countries accelerate their digital transformation.

Rather than introducing new concepts, the workshop focused on supporting participants to translate existing data governance principles into concrete national and regional action. Building on the Broadband Commission's Data Governance Toolkit, the AU Data Policy Framework, and the Smart Africa Data Governance Blueprint, participants assessed their countries' data governance maturity, identified priority challenges, and exchanged practical experiences. The session created a shared learning space where national authorities could reflect on implementation realities, learn from peers, and identify next steps for strengthening data governance institutions, coordination mechanisms, and technical capacity.

2. Participation champions and core competencies

In this case, Participation Champions were primarily institutional actors with formal responsibility for data governance, supported by convening and facilitation roles that enabled peer learning and collective reflection.

- **Convening participation champions:** Smart Africa and UNESCO acted as conveners, designing the space, setting the agenda, and framing participation around practical implementation rather than abstract principles. They ensured that participation outcomes were connected to ongoing continental and global policy frameworks, including the Data Governance Toolkit.
- **Institutional participation champions:** Senior policymakers, regulators, and ICT authority representatives from 23 African countries played the

central participatory role. They contributed country-level experiences, assessed national maturity, and identified concrete governance gaps and priorities within their own institutional contexts.

- **Facilitation and knowledge champions:** Representatives from UNESCO, Smart Africa, the World Bank, and ITU facilitated structured discussion, introduced shared frameworks such as the 4P model, and supported cross-country learning and exchange among participants.

3. Key challenges

The workshop surfaced challenges that align closely with those described in Section 3 of the Handbook.

- **Awareness & technical capacity:** Pre-workshop findings and participant discussions confirmed that many countries face limited technical capacity for data management and sharing, alongside gaps in institutional understanding of how to operationalize data governance principles in practice.
- **Power dynamics & institutional gatekeeping:** While there is strong political will to advance data governance, participants highlighted persistent institutional gaps, including fragmented mandates and coordination challenges between authorities responsible for data, digital transformation, and sectoral regulation.
- **Tokenism & lack of feedback loops:** The workshop explicitly sought to move beyond high-level commitments by creating space for practical reflection and peer learning, responding to a recognized gap between policy principles and day-to-day implementation in national contexts.

4. Participatory methods used

The Transform Africa Summit workshop in Conakry brought together more than 50 senior ICT policymakers, regulators, and industry representatives from 23 African countries to translate data governance principles into practical national and regional action. Based strictly on the information provided, the following participatory methods can be identified.

- **Pre-workshop questionnaire:** Before the in-person session, participants completed a questionnaire assessing national data governance barriers, including legal, regulatory, and technical gaps. This served as a structured input mechanism to ground the workshop discussions in real country contexts. *(In the deliberative democracy realm, this would typically be described as a consultative instrument.)*
- **High-level multi-country workshop:** More than 50 senior ICT policymakers, regulators, and industry representatives from 23 African countries convened to assess national data governance maturity, identify priority challenges, and explore practical pathways for implementation and

regional alignment. *(In democratic innovation terminology, this type of format is often referred to as a multi-stakeholder policy dialogue or invited deliberative forum. The notes describe it as a high-level workshop.)*

- **Structured 4P Framework Assessment:** Participants were introduced to the 4P framework (Purpose, Principles, People, Processes) from the Data Governance Toolkit and used it to assess their national context and identify gaps. This provided a common analytical structure for reflection and discussion. (In deliberative design terms, this would often be called structured or framework-based deliberation. The notes confirm the use of the framework but do not specify the interaction format.)

CASE STUDY 3: The Communications Authority of Kenya's Regulatory Sandbox (Kenya)

Years: Launched in 2023 (ongoing at time of reporting)

Location: Kenya

Lead organisation: Communications Authority of Kenya (CA)

Policy domain: ICT regulation and data governance

Stage of data lifecycle: Design, testing, use (regulatory experimentation)

1. The participation journey

<https://www.thedatasphere.org/datasphere-publish/africa-sandboxes-outlook/>

As digital technologies rapidly reshaped Kenya's ICT landscape, the Communications Authority of Kenya identified that traditional regulatory tools were no longer sufficient to address emerging technologies that fell outside existing frameworks. In response, the CA launched a regulatory sandbox as an alternative regulatory tool to enable controlled testing of innovative ICT products and services, while safeguarding consumer interests and managing risks.

Participation was implemented through a collaborative testing model between regulators and innovators. The sandbox was designed to be open to early-stage ICT innovators and startups, with application fees waived to lower barriers to entry. Accepted participants worked directly with CA experts to pilot their solutions under real-world conditions, sometimes accessing scarce public resources such as spectrum frequency. Through this process, regulators and innovators engaged in bidirectional learning, using sandbox testing to generate evidence that may inform future regulatory adjustments, although formal regulatory outcomes were still anticipated at the time of reporting.

2. Participation champions and core competencies:

In the CA Regulatory Sandbox, Participation Champions played complementary roles in enabling collaborative regulatory experimentation:

- **Convening participation champions:** The Communications Authority of Kenya acted as the institutional convener, establishing the sandbox, defining its objectives, setting participation rules, and retaining final regulatory oversight throughout the testing process.
- **Community participation champions:** ICT innovators and startups participating in the sandbox acted as key contributors by testing solutions, engaging with regulators, and providing practical feedback on regulatory constraints, risks, and implementation challenges. Their participation shaped the learning generated through the sandbox, although they did not hold formal decision-making authority over regulatory outcomes.

- **Expert participation champions:** Regulatory experts within the CA supported participants throughout the application and testing process, advising on compliance, risk mitigation, and regulatory implications of emerging technologies, and facilitating learning between innovators and the Authority.

3. Key Challenges

The CA Regulatory Sandbox surfaced several challenges relevant to Participation Champions working in African data and ICT governance contexts:

- **Representation & inclusion:** Limited public awareness of what regulatory sandboxes are, and confusion with incubators or funding mechanisms, constrained broader participation and required additional effort to explain the sandbox's purpose to potential applicants.
- **Awareness & technical capacity:** Both applicants and regulators faced learning curves in understanding how sandbox participation differs from standard licensing processes, highlighting the need for clear communication and capacity-building around regulatory experimentation.
- **Resources & logistical barriers:** While application fees were waived, the sandbox required significant time and effort from both regulators and participants, and early application processes were reported as slow and resource-intensive due to the sandbox's pilot nature.

4. Participatory methods used

The CA Regulatory Sandbox operates as a collaborative and interactive regulatory process that enables regulators and ICT innovators to jointly test, learn from, and reflect on emerging technologies. Participation is embedded across the sandbox lifecycle, primarily through structured engagement between innovators and the Communications Authority of Kenya.

- **Open and rolling application:** The sandbox is open to early-stage ICT innovators whose products or services fall outside existing regulatory frameworks. Application fees are waived to reduce financial barriers and encourage broader participation. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis as new innovations emerge.
- **Selection and admission:** Applications are reviewed by the Communications Authority of Kenya to assess regulatory relevance, potential risks, and alignment with sandbox objectives. Selected applicants are admitted into the sandbox for a defined testing period under agreed conditions.
- **Collaborative testing with regulators:** Admitted participants work directly with CA experts to pilot their solutions in real-world conditions. Regulatory requirements are temporarily relaxed to allow experimentation, while

safeguards remain in place to protect consumers and manage risks. In some cases, innovators are granted access to otherwise restricted public resources, such as spectrum frequency, to enable meaningful testing.

- **Interactive Engagement and Learning:** Throughout the testing phase, innovators receive hands-on guidance and support from CA staff. This interactive process allows regulators to observe how emerging technologies operate in practice, while innovators gain insight into regulatory expectations and constraints, supporting bidirectional learning.
- **Regulatory Reflection and Future Adjustment:** Insights generated through sandbox testing are used by the Communications Authority to reflect on existing regulatory frameworks and identify potential areas for future adjustment. While the sandbox does not guarantee regulatory approval or immediate regulatory change, it creates a formal space where evidence from testing can inform longer-term regulatory evolution.

Readers interested in exploring additional examples can consult existing platforms that have systematically mapped case studies on participation and data governance. These resources provide further practical illustrations, comparative insights, and documentation of how different actors have approached data governance challenges in diverse contexts. They can support deeper learning and help Participation Champions identify approaches that may be adapted to their own contexts.

Further case study repositories and resources:

1. [Datasphere Governance Atlas 2025](#)
2. [D4D Resources](#)
3. [Global Data Barometer](#)
4. [Global Governance Innovation repository](#)
5. [Participatory data governance in practice](#)
6. [Data 4 SDGS Case Study Asset #5](#)

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