Webinar Summary: Who Benefits from Africa's Data? Turning Data Governance into Value, Skills and Growth

Title: Who Benefits from Africa's Data? Turning Data Governance into Value, Skills and Growth
Date: June 10, 2026
Moderator: Ms. Carina Sugden, Lead Governance Officer, African Development Bank Group
Hosted by: Dr. Eric K. Ogunleye, Director, African Development Institute (ECAD), and Dr. Namawu A. Alolo, Manager, ECAD3, African Development Bank Group

Speakers:

- Professor Dominic Orr, Associate Professor, University of Nova Gorica
- Ms. Teki Akuetteh, Founder and Executive Director, Africa Digital Rights Hub
- Professor Shivam Kishore, Professor of Practice, University of Hawai'i
- Dr. Babatunde Samson Omotosho, Director, Statistics Department, African Development Bank Group

Overview

The eighth session of the African Development Bank's Leading Edge Insights Series focused on the theme **"Who Benefits from Africa's Data? Turning Data Governance into Value, Skills and Growth."** The session examined how African countries can move beyond compliance-focused approaches to data governance and ensure that data contributes directly to development outcomes.

As Africa's digital transformation accelerates, vast volumes of data are being generated through mobile money, digital commerce, public services, digital identity systems, health platforms, agricultural systems, and emerging artificial intelligence applications. The session emphasized that data alone does not create value. Value is created when data is governed responsibly, shared securely, trusted by users, and applied to improve decisions, services, institutions, and economic opportunities.

Dr. Eric K. Ogunleye opened the session by underscoring the central question: not how much data Africa generates, but who benefits from it. This framing guided the discussion across the presentations, which collectively highlighted the need for trusted data ecosystems, stronger institutional capacity, responsible data sharing, and outcome-oriented governance frameworks.

Session Highlights

This highly substantive session brought together perspectives from policy, regulation, institutional implementation, and the African Development Bank's own work on data governance and development. Key highlights included:

- **Foundational Framing of Data Governance:** Professor Dominic Orr introduced data governance as a question of power, agency, and accountability. He emphasized that data governance is not only a technical or regulatory issue, but also a governance question involving who decides, by what process, and on whose behalf decisions are made.
- **Moving from Compliance to Value Creation:** Ms. Teki Akuetteh discussed the limitations of approaches that focus only on laws, audits, reporting, and enforcement. She emphasized the need for outcome-oriented governance that builds trust, changes behaviour, supports innovation, protects digital rights, and creates measurable value for citizens, businesses, and society.
- **Practical Implementation Challenges:** Professor Shivam Kishore focused on the practical realities of operationalizing data governance. He highlighted that many countries have policies and frameworks in place, but implementation is often constrained by fragmented institutions, limited coordination, insufficient technical capacity, and weak mechanisms for responsible data sharing.
- **AfDB Perspective on Data Governance and Development:** Dr. Babatunde Samson Omotosho presented the African Development Bank's perspective on data governance as a development agenda. He emphasized that data governance is the bridge between data and development, linking trusted data ecosystems to better decisions, stronger institutions, economic transformation, jobs, inclusion, and improved lives.
- **Trust as a Core Enabler:** Across the session, trust emerged as a foundational theme. Participants discussed how trust in data quality, systems, institutions, and cross-border arrangements is essential for enabling responsible data use and collaboration.
- **Data Sharing for Development Impact:** The session emphasized that data creates value when it moves from isolated repositories into decision-making processes. Responsible data sharing can improve policy design, service delivery, innovation, accountability, and development outcomes.

Lessons from the Webinar

Key takeaways for participants included:

- **Data Governance Is a Development Agenda:** Data governance should not be viewed only as compliance, privacy, or regulatory issue. Its ultimate purpose is to enable better development outcomes.
- **Compliance Alone Is Not Enough:** Laws, policies, and regulatory authorities are important foundations, but they do not automatically generate value. Governance must be assessed by its contribution to trust, innovation, service delivery, inclusion, and economic growth.
- **Trust Creates Value:** Data sharing, artificial intelligence, digital public infrastructure, and evidence-based policymaking all depend on trust among citizens, governments, institutions, and businesses.
- **Institutional Capacity Is Critical:** Effective data governance requires skilled people, strong institutions, leadership, data stewardship, technical capabilities, and sustained implementation capacity.
- **Responsible Data Sharing Unlocks Impact:** Climate resilience, public health, agriculture, social protection, and digital services often require data from multiple institutions. Without responsible sharing and interoperability, valuable data remains underused.
- **Technology Is an Enabler, Not a Substitute for Governance:** Artificial intelligence, digital identity systems, interoperability platforms, and analytics tools can support development, but they cannot compensate for weak governance, limited capacity, or institutional fragmentation.
- **Africa Must Shape Its Own Data Future:** Data governance frameworks need to reflect African priorities, institutional realities, and regional aspirations, while supporting integration, innovation, and inclusive growth.

Useful Resources

Participants may wish to consult the following resources to deepen their understanding of data governance and development:

- African Union Data Policy Framework: https://au.int/en/documents/20220728/african-union-data-policy-framework
- African Development Bank Group Ten-Year Strategy 2024–2033: https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/african-development-bank-group-ten-year-strategy-2024-2033

- World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives: https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2021

Audience Questions and Discussion

The discussion highlighted strong interest in the practical implementation of data governance across African countries. Key themes included:

- **How can countries balance data protection with innovation?**
  Speakers emphasized that governance should protect rights while also enabling responsible data use, innovation, and digital transformation.
- **How can institutions move from data silos to data sharing?**
  The discussion highlighted the importance of clear governance arrangements, data-sharing agreements, interoperability standards, and trust-building mechanisms across institutions.
- **What capacities are needed for effective data governance?**
  Participants discussed the need for technical skills, institutional leadership, data stewardship, analytical capacity, and sustained investment in human capital.
- **What role should national statistical systems play?**
  The session emphasized that national statistical systems are increasingly expected to serve as stewards of broader national data ecosystems, supporting data quality, interoperability, coordination, and evidence-based decision-making.
- **How can trust be built across the data ecosystem?**
  Speakers emphasized transparency, accountability, privacy safeguards, ethical stewardship, data quality, and visible development benefits as essential foundations for trust.
- **How does data governance relate to artificial intelligence and digital public infrastructure?**
  The discussion underscored that AI and digital public infrastructure depend on trusted, accessible, high-quality data and strong governance arrangements.

Closing Reflections

The session concluded with a clear message: **Africa's challenge is no longer simply whether it can generate data, but whether it can govern data in ways that create value for citizens, businesses, and institutions.**

Effective data governance requires more than legal frameworks. It requires trust, institutional capacity, responsible sharing, collaboration, interoperability, and a strong focus on development outcomes.

By building trusted data ecosystems, African countries can transform data into a strategic asset for innovation, inclusion, regional integration, resilience, and sustainable development.