# POLICY Brief

JUNE 2026

# Who Benefits from Africa's Data?

## Turning Data Governance into Value, Skills, and Growth



Insights and Lessons from the African Development Bank's Leading Edge Insights (LEI-8) Knowledge Exchange Series

**Held on 10 June 2026**

AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK GROUP
GROUPE DE LA BANQUE AFRICAINE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Africa is generating unprecedented volumes of data through mobile money, digital commerce, digital identity systems, public services, and emerging artificial intelligence applications. As digital transformation accelerates across the continent, data is increasingly recognized as a strategic asset capable of driving innovation, improving public services, strengthening institutions, and supporting economic growth.

Yet the central challenge is not the availability of data, but the ability to translate data into tangible development outcomes. While many African countries have made significant progress in establishing data protection laws, governance frameworks, and digital strategies, institutional fragmentation, limited data sharing, capacity constraints, and trust deficits continue to limit the value generated from data.

Drawing on insights from the African Development Bank's Leading Edge Insights (LEI-8) session, **Who Benefits from Africa's Data? Turning Data Governance into Value, Skills, and Growth**, held on 10 June 2026, this policy brief examines how data governance can move beyond compliance to drive value, innovation, and development outcomes.

A central message emerged from the discussions: data governance is fundamentally a development agenda. Effective governance is not measured by the number of laws, policies, or audits completed, but by its contribution to stronger institutions, better services, increased trust, innovation, inclusion, and sustainable economic growth.

Five priorities emerged from the discussion:

1. Place development outcomes at the centre of data governance.

2. Build trust across the data ecosystem.

3. Strengthen institutional and human capacity.

4. Promote responsible data sharing and interoperability.

5. Strengthen Africa's digital agency and ownership of its data future.

Africa's greatest risk may not be data loss, but value loss—the failure to translate growing volumes of data into tangible benefits for citizens, businesses, and institutions. The continent's digital future will depend on its ability to build trusted data ecosystems that transform data into innovation, jobs, stronger institutions, improved services, and inclusive development outcomes.

# 01 WHY THIS MATTERS FOR AFRICA



## Africa is increasingly data rich. The challenge is ensuring that Africa also becomes value rich.

Across the continent, data is being generated at unprecedented scale through digital finance, e-commerce, digital identity systems, public services, and emerging AI applications. Yet data alone does not create development outcomes. Value is created when trusted governance systems enable data to be shared responsibly, used effectively, and translated into better decisions, stronger institutions, innovation, jobs, and improved lives.

The central question is therefore not who owns Africa's data, but who benefits from it. The answer will shape the continent's digital future. Where governance arrangements are weak, the economic and social value generated from data may accrue disproportionately to actors with the greatest capacity to collect, process, and monetize it, rather than to African citizens, institutions, and economies.

# 02 INTRODUCTION

Data is becoming one of Africa's most important strategic assets. Governments, businesses, and citizens generate vast amounts of information through digital financial services, e-government platforms, health systems, mobile technologies, digital identity programmes, and emerging artificial intelligence applications.

As digital transformation accelerates, data is increasingly recognized as a driver of productivity, innovation, service delivery, and economic growth. Data only creates value when it can be trusted, shared responsibly, and used effectively—a principle emphasized in the World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives (World Bank, 2021).

The eighth session of the African Development Bank's Leading Edge Insights (LEI) Series examined how data governance can move beyond compliance-focused approaches to become a catalyst for value creation, skills development, institutional strengthening, and inclusive growth. Bringing together experts from policy, academia, development institutions, and digital rights organizations, the discussion explored how Africa can build trusted data ecosystems that ensure citizens, businesses, and public institutions benefit from the data they generate. A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the need to move beyond compliance and focus on how data governance can create tangible value for citizens, institutions, and economies.

This policy brief synthesizes the key insights, lessons, and recommendations emerging from that discussion.



# 03 THE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE

## From Data Abundance to Development Value




Africa is one of the world's fastest-growing digital regions. Across the continent, citizens, businesses, and governments generate vast quantities of data through mobile money platforms, digital identity systems, e-commerce transactions, health systems, agricultural technologies, public services, and connected devices.

This expansion presents significant opportunities for economic transformation.

Data can support evidence-based policymaking, strengthen institutional performance, improve resource allocation, facilitate financial inclusion, enhance agricultural productivity, and enable new forms of entrepreneurship.

At the same time, the continent is experiencing a growing disconnect between data generation and data value. While digital activity continues to expand, many countries struggle to convert data into better decisions, improved services, stronger institutions, and measurable development outcomes.

Information frequently remains fragmented across institutions, trapped within organizational silos, inaccessible to decision-makers, or disconnected from broader development objectives. As a result, large volumes of potentially valuable information remain underutilized.

# 04 KEY MESSAGE FROM LEI-8

## «The critical question is not how much data we are generating on the continent, but who benefits from this data?»

This question, raised by Dr. Eric Kehinde Ogunleye, Director of the African Development Institute, shifts the discussion from data management to development impact.

This question shifts the discussion from data management to development impact. Rather than focusing solely on technical systems, regulatory compliance, or data protection requirements, it directs attention to outcomes. Does data contribute to better public services? Does it strengthen institutions? Does it create economic opportunities? Does it improve lives?
Answering these questions requires a broader understanding of data governance.
Data governance is often viewed as a set of rules governing the collection, storage, protection, and sharing of information. While these functions remain important, the discussions emphasize that governance ultimately determines whether data creates value and for whom that value is created.

The challenge facing Africa is therefore not simply one of managing data. It is one of creating governance systems capable of transforming data into development value.



**Dr. Eric Kehinde Ogunleye**
Director, African Development Institute (ECAD), African Development Bank

This challenge is particularly important as countries pursue digital transformation, artificial intelligence, digital trade, and digital public infrastructure initiatives. Without effective governance arrangements, investments in digital technologies may increase data generation without necessarily increasing development outcomes.

Conversely, when supported by trusted institutions, effective governance frameworks, and strong implementation capacity, data can become a powerful enabler of growth, innovation, inclusion, and resilience.

Africa has already made important progress in building the foundations for trusted data governance. Today, 44 African countries have enacted data protection legislation and 38 have established operational data protection authorities[1]. More broadly, the Data Governance in Africa (DGA) Programme—a collaborative initiative of the African Union and the European Union—reports that more than 25 African countries are developing or have already adopted national data governance policies, reflecting growing recognition of data as a strategic asset for development. At the continental level, initiatives such as the African Union Data Policy Framework (African Union Commission, 2022) and the AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol provide a shared foundation for promoting trusted, interoperable, and inclusive data ecosystems that support regional integration and digital transformation.

These developments demonstrate growing recognition of the strategic importance of data governance across the continent. However, they also highlight a critical reality: establishing frameworks is only the first step. The greater challenge lies in ensuring that governance systems enable data to be used responsibly, shared effectively, and translated into tangible benefits for citizens and economies.

This raises a fundamental question: what kind of governance arrangements are needed to transform data into development value?

To answer this question, it is necessary to move beyond technical discussions of data management and examine the broader issues of power, accountability, incentives, trust, and institutional capacity that shape how data is collected, shared, and used. It is these governance dimensions that ultimately determine who benefit from Africa's growing data economy.

# Data Governance as a Question of Power, Agency, and Accountability

If the challenge is to transform data into development value, governance becomes the critical enabling factor. Data governance determines who can access data, under what conditions, for what purposes, and with what safeguards. These decisions influence not only how data is managed, but also who benefits from its use.

For this reason, data governance should not be viewed solely as a technical or regulatory exercise. It is fundamentally a question of power, agency, and accountability.

Professor Dominic Orr framed the discussion around three fundamental questions:[2]

**Figure 1. Three Fundamental Questions of Data Governance**

| Question | Key Consideration |
|---|---|
| Who decides? | Who controls data collection, access, use, and sharing? |
| By what process? | How are rules established, implemented, and enforced? |
| On whose behalf? | Whose interests are ultimately served by governance decisions? |

[1]Omotosho, B. S. (2026). Data Governance and Economic Development in Africa. Presentation delivered at the African Development Bank Leading Edge Insights Series, 10 June 2026.

[2] Orr, D. (2026). Foundational Framing: What Is Data Governance? Presentation delivered at the African Development Bank Leading Edge Insights Series, 10 June 2026.

# These questions highlight that data governance is not neutral

Decisions about data shape economic opportunities, influence access to services, determine competitive advantages, and affect how benefits are distributed across society.

As African economies become increasingly digital, these decisions carry growing significance. Data generated through financial services, digital platforms, public administration, health systems, and emerging AI applications is becoming a strategic resource. Governance therefore plays a critical role in determining whether this resource contributes to broad-based development or reinforces existing inequalities and institutional fragmentation.

The discussion emphasized that Africa must strengthen its ability to shape governance frameworks that reflect national priorities and regional aspirations. While international standards and global best practices provide important guidance, governance systems must ultimately respond to local realities, institutional capacities, and development objectives.

# Data Governance as a Question of Power, Agency, and Accountability (continued)

This is particularly important as countries seek to balance competing priorities. Data governance often requires policymakers to navigate competing policy objectives rather than pursue a single goal. Figure 2 illustrates some of the key trade-offs that governments face when designing data governance frameworks. The objective is not to maximize one side of each trade-off, but to strike an appropriate balance that promotes innovation, protects rights, builds trust, and supports sustainable development.

**Figure 2. Key Data Governance Trade-Offs**

| Objective 1 | Objective 2 |
|---|---|
| Privacy and Protection | Innovation and Data Use |
| Data Sovereignty | Regional Integration |
| Data Localization | Cross-Border Data Flows |
| Security and Control | Open Data and Accessibility |
| Regulation | Market Dynamism |

These trade-offs do not have simple solutions. Excessive restrictions can limit innovation and data use, while weak protections can undermine trust and public confidence. Effective governance therefore requires balancing competing objectives in ways that maximize development benefits while protecting rights and maintaining accountability.

Understanding governance as a question of power and accountability also changes how success should be measured. Too often, governance efforts focus primarily on laws, regulations, compliance frameworks, and

institutional mandates. While these remain important foundations, they are not ends in themselves.
The more important question is whether governance arrangements generate meaningful outcomes for citizens, businesses, and institutions.

This shift in perspective leads directly to a second challenge raised repeatedly during the discussion: moving beyond compliance and focusing on value creation.

# From Compliance to Outcomes

Over the past decade, African countries have made significant progress in establishing legal and regulatory frameworks for data governance. Data protection laws, regulatory authorities, cybersecurity frameworks, and digital strategies have expanded rapidly across the continent.

These developments provide important foundations for responsible data use and digital transformation.
However, as several speakers emphasized, compliance alone does not necessarily create value.

Many governance initiatives continue to focus on policy development, reporting requirements, audits, inspections, and enforcement actions. While necessary, these activities often measure processes rather than outcomes.

The central question is not whether organizations comply with governance requirements. The central question is whether governance arrangements improve development outcomes.
As Teki Akuetteh emphasized, data governance must move beyond a compliance mindset and become a catalyst for behavioural change, trust-building, innovation, and value creation.[3]

A useful example illustrates this distinction. A country may enact comprehensive data protection legislation and establish a regulatory authority, yet public agencies may still be unable to share information effectively to improve health services, agricultural planning, or social protection programmes. In such circumstances, compliance exists, but the developmental value of data remains largely unrealized.

The challenge is therefore not simply implementing regulations. It is ensuring that governance systems enable data to contribute to better decisions and better outcomes.

**Figure 3. From Compliance to Outcomes**

| Traditional Approach | Outcome-Based Approach |
|---|---|
| Laws and regulations | Development outcomes |
| Audits and reporting | Trust and confidence |
| Enforcement actions | Behavioural change |
| Institutional compliance | Value creation |
| Activity indicators | Impact indicators |

This perspective is reflected in the concept of Outcome-Based Collaborative Regulatory Systems (OBCRS), which emphasizes collaboration across stakeholders and evaluates governance success based on tangible development outcomes rather than regulatory activity or compliance alone. Under this approach, governance systems should contribute to:

- **Greater trust in digital systems** by ensuring that data is collected, managed, and used transparently, securely, and responsibly. Trust encourages citizens and organizations to participate confidently in the digital economy.
- **Improved public service delivery** through better use of data to inform decision-making, streamline services, and respond more effectively to citizens' needs.
- **Stronger protection of digital rights**

[3] Akuetteh, T. (2026). Linking Data Governance to Value Creation. Presentation delivered at the African Development Bank Leading Edge Insights Series, 10 June 2026.

by safeguarding privacy, ensuring accountability, and promoting fair, ethical, and transparent use of personal and public data.

- **Increased innovation and entrepreneurship** by creating governance frameworks that enable responsible data sharing, reduce unnecessary barriers, and support the development of new digital products and services.
- **Greater digital inclusion** by ensuring that all individuals and communities can participate in and benefit from the digital economy, regardless of geography, gender, age, or income.
- **Enhanced regional cooperation** by promoting interoperable data governance frameworks that facilitate trusted cross-border data flows, digital trade, and regional integration.
- **Stronger economic performance** by enabling data to support productivity, investment, evidence-based policymaking, innovation, and sustainable economic growth.

The shift from compliance to outcomes represents more than a change in measurement. It represents a change in purpose. Governance is no longer viewed as a mechanism for controlling risk alone; it becomes a tool for enabling development.
Yet achieving these outcomes requires more than effective regulations. It requires citizens, institutions, and organizations to have confidence in the systems through which data is collected, shared, and used.

This places trust at the centre of the data governance agenda.

# Trust: The Foundation of Data Value Creation

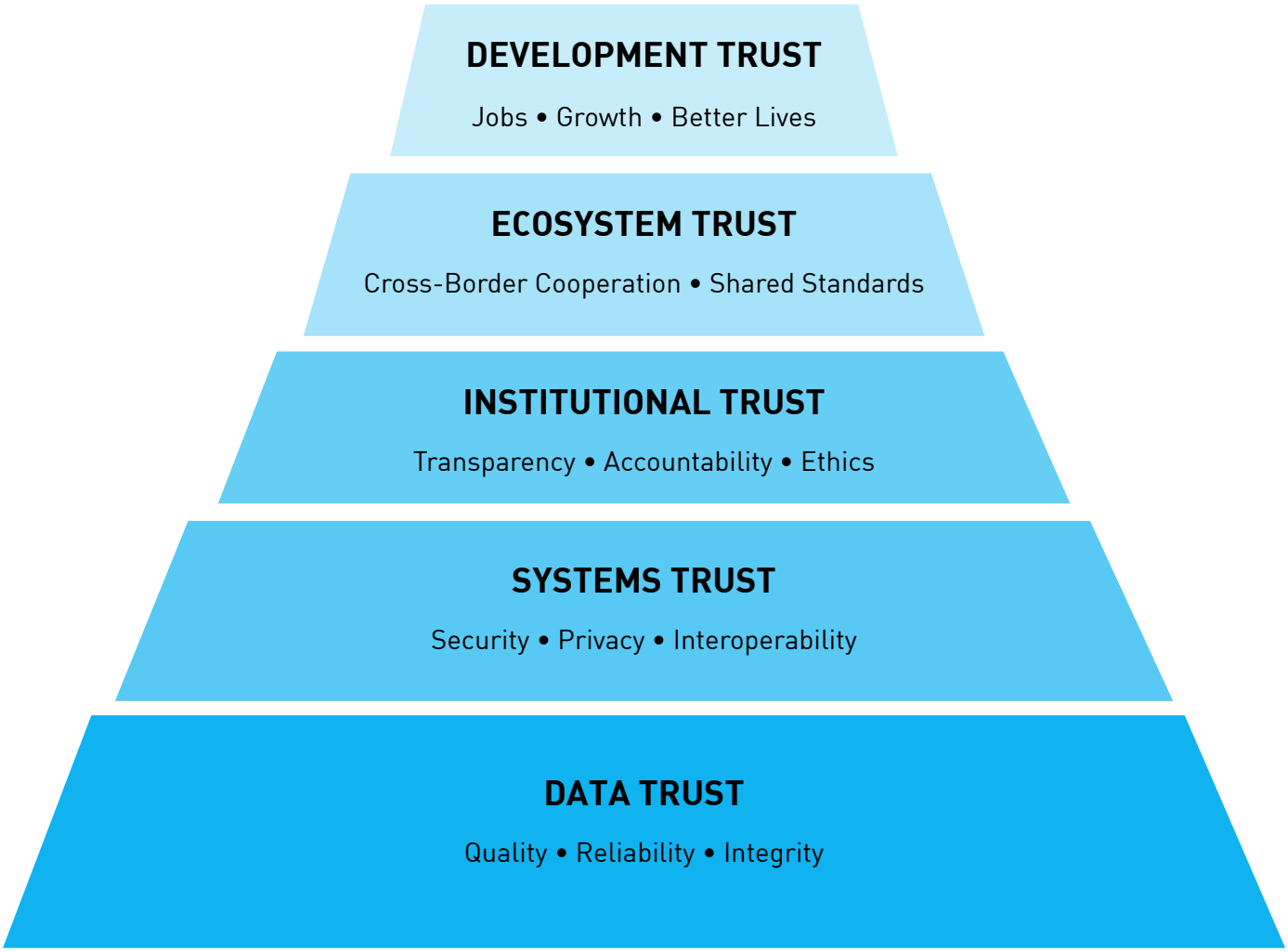
If data governance frameworks are to generate meaningful development outcomes, they must create conditions that enable individuals, institutions, and organizations to share and use data with confidence. Trust therefore becomes a foundational pillar of effective data governance, underpinning responsible data sharing, institutional collaboration, innovation, and the ability of data to generate value for citizens, businesses, and governments.

Data sharing, innovation, artificial intelligence, and evidence-based policymaking depend on trust among citizens, governments, institutions, and businesses.

Without trust, data remains fragmented and underutilized.
Citizens may be reluctant to share information if they fear misuse or inadequate protection. Institutions may hesitate to exchange data if accountability arrangements are unclear. Governments may be unwilling to cooperate across borders if governance standards are inconsistent. In each case, the absence of trust reduces the ability of data to generate value.

The discussions identified several interconnected dimensions of trust.

Figure 4. The Trust Pyramid




Trust begins with confidence in the quality of data and the systems used to collect, store, and protect it. It is strengthened by transparent, accountable, and ethical institutions and enables collaboration across sectors, institutions, and countries. Ultimately, development trust emerges when citizens experience tangible benefits through better services, economic opportunities, and improved outcomes.

Trust is therefore not simply an ethical principle but a strategic asset that underpins effective data governance. By enabling collaboration, data sharing, and informed decision-making, it creates conditions through which data can generate value.

## Building Value Through Data Sharing

Trust becomes meaningful when it enables action. In data governance, that action is responsible data sharing.

Many African countries have invested significantly in collecting and managing data, yet valuable datasets often remain fragmented across ministries, agencies, and organizations. This limits governments' ability to address complex challenges that require integrated decision-making.

For example, climate resilience and public health planning depend on combining data from multiple sectors and institutions. When information remains trapped in silos, opportunities for evidence-based policymaking and innovation are lost.

The challenge is not collecting more data but using existing data more effectively.

This requires clear governance arrangements, interoperable systems, trusted institutions, shared standards, and a culture of collaboration. Effective governance should not focus solely on managing risks; it should also enable value creation. When supported by appropriate safeguards, responsible data sharing can improve policymaking, strengthen service delivery, support innovation, enhance accountability, and accelerate development outcomes.

Data creates value when it moves from isolated repositories into decision-making processes. The ultimate objective is not data management, but development impact.

Achieving this objective, however, requires governance principles to be translated into operational systems and institutional practices. This implementation challenge is explored in the next section.

# Data Governance in Practice: Turning Principles into Action

The discussions highlighted a consistent message: the challenge facing Africa is no longer a lack of awareness about the importance of data governance. Increasingly, countries have policy frameworks, legal instruments, digital strategies, and institutional mandates in place. The greater challenge is implementation.

Moving from governance principles to development outcomes requires institutions that can operationalize data governance effectively. This means establishing the systems, capabilities, incentives, and partnerships necessary to ensure that data is not only protected but also used responsibly to generate public value.

As Professor Shivam Kishore emphasized, many countries have made substantial progress in developing governance frameworks. However, implementation often remains constrained by fragmented institutions, limited coordination, insufficient technical capacity, and weak operational mechanisms for data sharing and collaboration.

These challenges are not unique to any one country. Rather, they reflect broader issues faced across many developing and emerging economies as they seek to build effective data ecosystems.

The experience presented during the discussion demonstrates that successful governance depends not only on what policies say, but also on how institutions work together in practice.

# The Implementation Gap

A recurring challenge is the gap between policy ambition and operational reality. Many governments have adopted strategies for digital transformation, data protection, open government, and digital innovation, yet translating these ambitions into measurable outcomes often remains difficult.

The barriers are rarely technological alone. Institutions may lack the expertise needed to manage and analyze data effectively, operate with different standards and systems that hinder data sharing, or face uncertainty regarding ownership, accountability, and legal responsibilities. As a result, information that could support policymaking and service delivery often remains fragmented across organizations.

The consequences are significant. When institutions cannot combine and use relevant data, governments may struggle to address complex challenges that cut across sectors and jurisdictions.

The implementation gap therefore highlights a central lesson: governance frameworks are necessary, but not sufficient. Sustainable progress depends on institutions that can translate governance principles into operational practice.

[4]Kishore, S. (2026). Data Governance in Practice: Turning Policy into Value. Presentation delivered at the African Development Bank Leading Edge Insights Series, 10 June 2026.

# Four Pillars of Effective Data Governance

The discussions identified four interdependent pillars that underpin the successful implementation of effective data governance systems and the translation of data governance policies into development outcomes.

**Figure 5. Four Pillars of Effective Data Governance**

| Pillar | Purpose | Expected Outcomes |
|---|---|---|
| Governance Frameworks | Establish rules, responsibilities, and accountability | Clear, transparent, and accountable governance builds trust, protects rights, and enables responsible data use. |
| Institutional Capacity | Develop skills, leadership, and operational capabilities | Stronger institutional performance, improved implementation, and greater ability to manage and use data effectively for decision-making. |
| Stakeholder Coordination | Enable collaboration and trust across organizations | Improved data sharing, stronger partnerships, reduced fragmentation, and more coordinated action across institutions and sectors. |
| Technology and Infrastructure | Support secure and efficient data management and sharing | Trusted, interoperable, and secure data ecosystems that improve service delivery, innovation, and evidence-based policymaking. |

While each pillar is important, the discussions emphasized that no single pillar can succeed in isolation.

Technology cannot compensate for weak institutions. Policies cannot deliver results without implementation capacity. Data-sharing agreements are unlikely to succeed in the absence of trust and collaboration.

Effective governance therefore requires progress across all four dimensions simultaneously.



# Governance Frameworks: Creating Clarity and Accountability

Governance frameworks provide the institutional foundation for responsible data use.
They establish rules regarding data ownership, stewardship, access, sharing, protection, and accountability, while defining the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders within the data ecosystem.

Without clear governance arrangements, organizations may be uncertain about what information can be shared, with whom, and under what conditions. This uncertainty often creates barriers to collaboration.
By establishing clear responsibilities and decision-making processes, governance frameworks reduce ambiguity and increase confidence among stakeholders. They provide the institutional certainty necessary for responsible data use while protecting privacy, security, and citizens' rights.

However, frameworks alone do not guarantee success. Their effectiveness ultimately depends on the institutions responsible for implementing them.

# Institutional Capacity: The Missing Link

Throughout the discussion, capacity emerged as one of the most important determinants of successful data governance.

Even the most sophisticated policies will have limited impact if institutions lack the people, resources, and capabilities required for implementation.

Many organizations face challenges such as limited numbers of trained data professionals, inadequate analytical capacity, insufficient funding, and competing institutional priorities. These constraints often slow implementation and reduce the ability of institutions to use data strategically.

Addressing these challenges requires sustained investment in human capital.

Capacity building should extend beyond technical training to include leadership development, organizational change management, governance competencies, data stewardship, and cross-sector collaboration.

As the digital economy continues to evolve, strengthening institutional capacity will become increasingly important for enabling countries to harness the benefits of data-driven development.

# Stakeholder Coordination: From Silos to Collaboration

If trust enables data sharing, coordination enables collective action.
Many of the development challenges facing African countries—including climate resilience, food security, health systems strengthening, urban management, and digital transformation—require cooperation across multiple institutions and sectors.

Yet institutional silos remain one of the most significant barriers to effective governance. Organizations often collect information independently, using different standards, technologies, and processes. While these systems may function effectively within individual institutions, they frequently limit broader collaboration and interoperability.

The result is duplication of effort, inconsistent information, and missed opportunities for evidence-based decision-making.
Effective governance therefore requires mechanisms that promote coordination and collaboration. These may include multi-stakeholder committees, shared standards, interoperability frameworks, data-sharing agreements, and joint governance structures.
Most importantly, they require a culture of collaboration in which institutions view data not simply as an organizational asset, but as a shared resource capable of generating broader public value.

## Technology as an Enabler, not a Starting Point

Discussions of data governance frequently focus on technology.

Technologies such as artificial intelligence, interoperability frameworks, digital identity systems, and advanced analytics are often presented as solutions to governance challenges.

While these technologies create significant opportunities, the discussion emphasized that technology should be viewed as an enabler rather than the starting point.

Technology can improve efficiency, scale operations, and facilitate data sharing. However, it cannot resolve underlying weaknesses in governance, institutional capacity, or stakeholder coordination.
Successful digital transformation therefore requires appropriate sequencing.
Governance frameworks must provide direction. Institutions must have the capacity to implement them. Stakeholders must be willing and able to collaborate. Technology can then accelerate and scale these efforts.

When introduced without these foundations, technological investments often fail to achieve their intended impact

The lesson is clear: technology supports governance, but it cannot substitute for it.

## Data Governance as Strategic Infrastructure

The implementation challenges discussed above take on added significance in the context of artificial intelligence, digital trade, and digital public infrastructure.

These emerging opportunities depend fundamentally on trusted, accessible, high-quality data.

Artificial intelligence systems require reliable data inputs. Digital trade depends on trusted cross-border data flows. Digital public infrastructure relies on interoperability, security, and effective governance arrangements.
In each case, data governance serves as foundational infrastructure.

Countries that strengthen governance, trust, interoperability, and institutional capacity will be better positioned to leverage digital technologies for development. Those that fail to address these foundations may struggle to realize the full benefits of digital transformation.

Data governance should therefore be viewed not as a standalone regulatory function, but as a strategic investment in Africa's digital future.

These practical lessons have important implications not only for individual countries but also for regional and continental development efforts. They help explain why data governance has become an increasingly important priority within the African Development Bank's broader development agenda.

# The African Development Bank Perspective: Data Governance as a Catalyst for Development

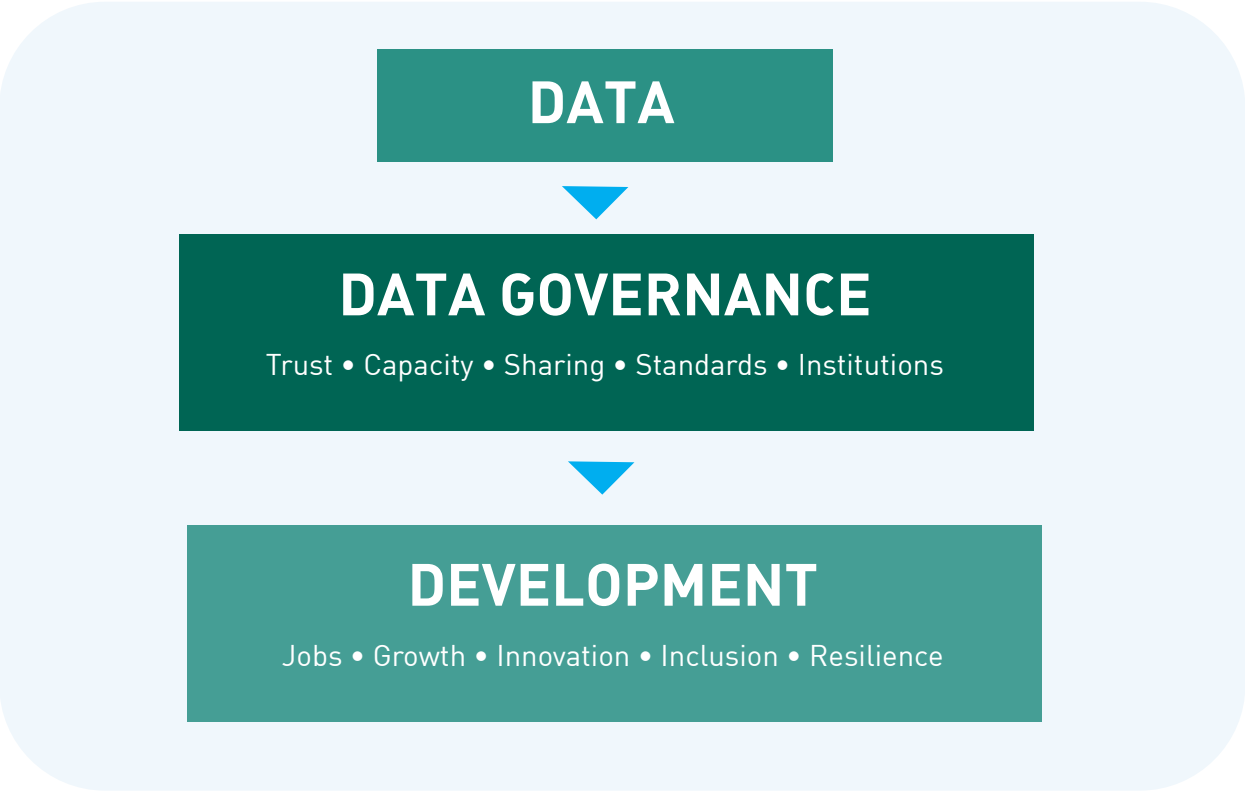
The discussions demonstrated that data governance is not an isolated technical issue. It influences how institutions function, how public services are delivered, how businesses innovate, and how development outcomes are achieved. These linkages explain why data governance has become an increasingly important priority within broader development strategies, including those of the African Development Bank.

The Bank views data governance through a development lens. While privacy, security, and regulatory compliance remain important, the ultimate objective is to ensure that data contributes to economic transformation, institutional effectiveness, regional integration, and improved quality of life.

As countries accelerate investments in digital transformation, trusted data ecosystems are becoming as important as physical infrastructure. Just as roads, ports, and energy systems enable economic activity, effective data governance enables the flow of information that supports decision-making, innovation, service delivery, and growth.

Dr. Babatunde Omotosho emphasized that data governance serves as the bridge between data and development. Data in isolation has limited value. It is only when data is governed effectively, shared responsibly, and integrated into decision-making processes that it generates meaningful social and economic returns.

**Figure 6. Data Governance as the Bridge Between Data and Development**




This perspective aligns closely with the African Development Bank Group's Ten-Year Strategy 2024–2033 (African Development Bank Group, 2024), which identifies governance, digital transformation, regional integration, institutional capacity, and economic resilience as critical drivers of sustainable development.

From this perspective, data governance is not simply about managing information. It is about creating the conditions through which information can contribute to development outcomes.

# Africa's Foundations for Data Governance

While significant challenges remain, Africa has made important progress in building the foundations for data governance. Over the past decade, countries across the continent have introduced legal, regulatory, and institutional reforms to strengthen trust, protect rights, and support digital transformation.

**Figure 7. Selected Indicators of Africa's Progress in Data Governance**

| Indicator | Status |
|---|---|
| African Union Data Policy Framework | Adopted |
| Countries with Data Protection Laws | 44 |
| Countries with Operational Data Protection Authorities | 38 |
| AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol | Adopted in February 2024 |

**Sources**: African Union Commission (2022); African Union (2024); Omotosho (2026).

These developments reflect growing recognition that data governance is a strategic enabler of development and regional integration. They also provide a foundation for building trusted and interoperable data ecosystems across Africa.

However, establishing policies and frameworks is only the first step. As one speaker observed: **«Development happens when continental aspirations are translated into national implementation.»**
The next phase must therefore focus on strengthening institutions, data-sharing mechanisms, digital skills, and governance capacities that can turn policy ambitions into measurable development outcomes.

# Building Trusted Data Ecosystems

The discussion highlighted a central proposition: trust is both the foundation and the outcome of effective data governance. Without trust, citizens may hesitate to share information, institutions may be reluctant to collaborate, and businesses may be less willing to invest in data-driven innovation. With trust, data can flow more effectively across systems, sectors, and borders, unlocking opportunities for innovation, better services, and economic growth.

**Figure 8. The Five Layers of Trust for Effective Data Governance**

| Layer | Focus |
|---|---|
| Data Trust | Quality, integrity, and reliability |
| Systems Trust | Security, privacy, and interoperability |
| Institutional Trust | Transparency, accountability, and ethics |
| Ecosystem Trust | Collaboration and cross-border cooperation |
| Development Trust | Better lives, stronger institutions, and economic growth |

These dimensions are mutually reinforcing. Improving data quality strengthens confidence in decision-making; strong privacy safeguards encourage participation in digital services; and transparent institutions promote collaboration and data sharing. Together, they create the trusted ecosystems needed for data to generate development value.

Trust should therefore be viewed not as a secondary consideration, but as a strategic policy objective and an important indicator of governance success.

# Implications for National Statistical Systems

The growing importance of data governance is reshaping the role of national statistical systems across Africa. While statistical agencies have traditionally focused on producing and disseminating official statistics, today's data ecosystem extends far beyond conventional sources.

Administrative records, digital platforms, geospatial technologies, private-sector datasets, sensor networks, and citizen-generated data are creating new opportunities for evidence-based decision-making. As a result, national statistical systems increasingly need to serve as coordinators and stewards of broader national data ecosystems.

This expanded role includes:

- Promoting responsible data sharing
- Supporting interoperability across institutions
- Developing standards for data quality and governance
- Strengthening analytical and institutional capacity
- Facilitating multi-stakeholder collaboration
- Building trust in national data systems

While these new data sources can improve policymaking and deepen understanding of complex development challenges, realizing their potential requires stronger governance frameworks, technical capabilities, and institutional coordination. National statistical institutions will therefore play an increasingly important role in transforming growing volumes of data into reliable evidence for development decision-making.

# Policy Recommendations

Africa's next phase of progress will depend less on developing new policy frameworks and more on strengthening implementation, institutional capacity, and trusted data ecosystems.

**Figure 9. Key Recommendations for Strengthening Data Governance in Africa**

| Recommendation | Key Action |
|---|---|
| **1. Focus on Development Outcomes** | Assess governance by its contribution to trust, innovation, service delivery, inclusion, and economic growth—not compliance alone. |
| **2. Invest in Institutional and Human Capacity** | Strengthen technical expertise, leadership, data stewardship, and organizational capabilities to support implementation. |
| **3. Promote Data Sharing and Interoperability** | Establish governance arrangements, standards, and interoperability frameworks that enable secure and responsible data sharing. |
| **4. Strengthen Multi-Stakeholder Governance** | Foster collaboration among governments, regulators, businesses, academia, civil society, and development partners. |
| **5. Treat Trust as a Strategic Asset** | Invest in transparency, accountability, ethics, privacy protection, and institutional credibility. |
| **6. Accelerate Regional Harmonization** | Advance implementation of continental frameworks to support trusted cross-border data flows and regional integration. |
| **7. Build Digital and Data Skills** | Invest in data literacy, analytics, digital governance, artificial intelligence, and related competencies. |
| **8. Recognize Data Governance as Strategic Infrastructure** | Treat data governance as foundational infrastructure for digital transformation, innovation, and economic development. |

# Five Imperatives for Turning Data into Development Value

**1. Data Governance Is a Development Agenda**
Governance should be viewed not as an end in itself, but as a means of achieving better development outcomes.

**2. Trust Creates Value**
Data generates value only when citizens, institutions, and organizations have confidence in how it is managed and used.

**3. Capacity Matters as Much as Policy**
Strong legislation is important, but implementation depends on capable institutions and skilled people.

**4. Data Sharing Unlocks Development Impact**
Responsible sharing and interoperability enable better decisions, stronger services, and greater innovation.

**5. Africa Must Shape Its Own Digital Future**
Effective governance strengthens agency, supports regional integration, and ensures that the benefits of data accrue to African citizens and economies.

# Conclusion

Africa stands at a pivotal moment in its digital transformation journey. As governments, businesses, and citizens generate unprecedented volumes of data, the opportunity lies not in data itself, but in the ability to transform it into better decisions, stronger institutions, improved services, and sustainable economic growth.

Data governance is therefore not simply a technical or regulatory concern; it is a development imperative. While Africa has made significant progress in establishing governance frameworks, data protection laws, and continental strategies, the next phase requires implementation--translating policies into trusted systems, stronger institutions, and measurable outcomes.

Africa's future will be shaped not by the amount of data it generates, but by its ability to govern data in ways that build trust, unlock innovation, and create value for citizens, businesses, and governments. By placing development outcomes at the centre of data governance, Africa can transform data into a strategic asset for inclusive growth, resilience, regional integration, and sustainable development.

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# Acknowledgements

This policy brief was prepared by **Sheila Jagannathan**, Senior Consultant, African Development Bank Group (AfDB).

It draws on insights shared during the eighth session of the Leading Edge Insights (LEI) Knowledge Exchange Series, entitled "**Who Benefits from Africa's Data? Turning Data Governance into Value, Skills, and Growth**," organized by the African Development Bank's African Development Institute (ECAD).
The brief reflects contributions from the distinguished speakers:

**Dr. Babatunde Samson Omotosho**, Director, Statistics Department (ECST), African Development Bank Group;

**Professor Dominic Orr**, Associate Professor, University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia;

**Ms. Teki Akuetteh**, Founder and Executive Director, Africa Digital Rights Hub; and

**Professor Shivam Kishore**, Professor of Practice, University of Hawai'i.
Special appreciation is extended to Ms. Carina Sugden, Lead Governance Officer, African Development Bank Group, for her excellent moderation and facilitation of the discussion.

The author also wishes to thank **Dr. Eric Kehinde Ogunleye,** Director (ECAD) and **Dr. Namawu Alolo**, Manager (ECAD3), whose leadership, vision, and continued support were instrumental in convening this dialogue and advancing knowledge exchange on data governance and digital transformation across Africa.