

**24th session of Committee of Experts on Public Administration - Dedicated
consultation with observers**

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EquiLabs (remote)**

Speech:

Thank you, Chair, Committee Members, and fellow observers.

I'm Luísa Franco Machado, founder of EquiLabs, a youth-led digital rights lab focused on justice-driven AI and data governance, and a UN Young Leader for the SDGs. I work across institutions and movements to advance inclusive, future-facing approaches to governance.

The expert paper reminds us that achieving the SDGs requires institutions capable of turning science and evidence into equitable action. But that also means asking: whose knowledge counts, and who gets to act on it?

Across the world, communities are generating data and shaping knowledge systems—but their insights are often excluded, filtered out by institutional bias, technical silos, and global North assumptions of legitimacy.

Meanwhile, governments are being asked to make evidence-based decisions with data they increasingly do not own. In many low- and middle-income countries, essential datasets—on health, mobility, identity—are held by private platforms that act as public infrastructure without public accountability.

This isn't just a data issue—it's a power imbalance. In a world defined by platform control, algorithmic decision-making, and democratic backsliding, institutions are not neutral. When they depend on systems they don't govern, exclusion deepens—especially for racialized, queer, gender-diverse, and Global South communities.

At EquiLabs, we're developing data and AI frameworks grounded in intersectional justice. But our work also responds to something strikingly absent from the paper: a meaningful institutional commitment to youth leadership.

Youth today are not just future leaders—we are architects of institutional alternatives. From feminist data collectives in Brazil to open-source civic tech in Kenya, we are building governance models that are participatory, rights-based, and inclusive by design.

We are not waiting to be invited. We are already leading AI ethics panels, shaping policy consultations, and holding governments accountable through digital mobilization. And yet, we're still excluded from the places where priorities are set and resources are decided.

This is not a gap—it's a governance failure. Because youth leadership is a structural necessity in the face of systems that were not built for us, and will not survive without us.

If institutions want to stay relevant, they must share power with those already building what's next. Young people are redesigning governance from the ground up—with new values, new tools, and new rules. We're not waiting for permission. We're already doing the work. The question is: will institutions catch up—or be left behind?

Thank you.