



DEPARTMENT OF
**ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL AFFAIRS**



APRM
African Peer Review
Mechanism

Africa Regional Forum on Data Governance and Digital Government

Date: 2-4 October 2024

Venue: Pretoria, South Africa

Concept Note

Executive Summary

Data and digital data governance in the public sector have become increasingly important in Governments' modus operandi and real-world applicability. Data are now integral to every sector and function of government—as essential as physical assets and human resources. Much of the operational activity in government is now data-driven or data-centric, and many Governments would find it difficult, if not impossible, to function without data.

This Regional Forum seeks to address existing challenges and gaps in national digital data governance, data management and cooperation, focusing on enhancing the institutional capacities of countries to utilize, manage and govern data in a comprehensive, objective and evidence-based manner, through regional and global cooperation. The aim is to build awareness and develop institutional capacities in building national data governance frameworks in developing countries, especially those in Africa region. Improving the limitations mentioned in the Chapter 2 of the E-government survey of 2022 finally contributing the long-term development plan for Africa set by the agenda 2063.

1. Background

Data is now a critical resource for Governments. Institutions will find it difficult, if not impossible, to function effectively without data. At the global level, the quantity of data is expected to increase more than five-fold from 33 zettabytes in 2018 to 175 zettabytes in 2025, with 49 per cent stored in the public cloud. Data and related issues and developments in the public sector have become increasingly important in terms of government analysis and operations, academic research, and real-world applicability and acceptance. Data are now integral to every sector and function of government—as essential as physical assets and human resources.

At the same, digital divides between and within developed and developing countries continue to widen, which is inhibiting developing countries from contributing to and benefiting from integration into the data economy. Given that there are both immense opportunities and inherent risks in what digital transformation can bring about, the need to address emerging requirements, risks, and challenges for digital public policies and to ensure inclusive multistakeholder engagement has become more critical, especially for countries with special needs.

Moreover, nations are advancing in the development and application of AI technologies within the public sector. These technologies offer significant advantages, such as enhancing efficiency, saving work hours, and eliminating redundant tasks such as backlogs and redundancies. Since AI technologies inherently require data to operate, there is a critical need to establish a robust database for their functionality. This further underscores the importance of developing a comprehensive data governance framework.

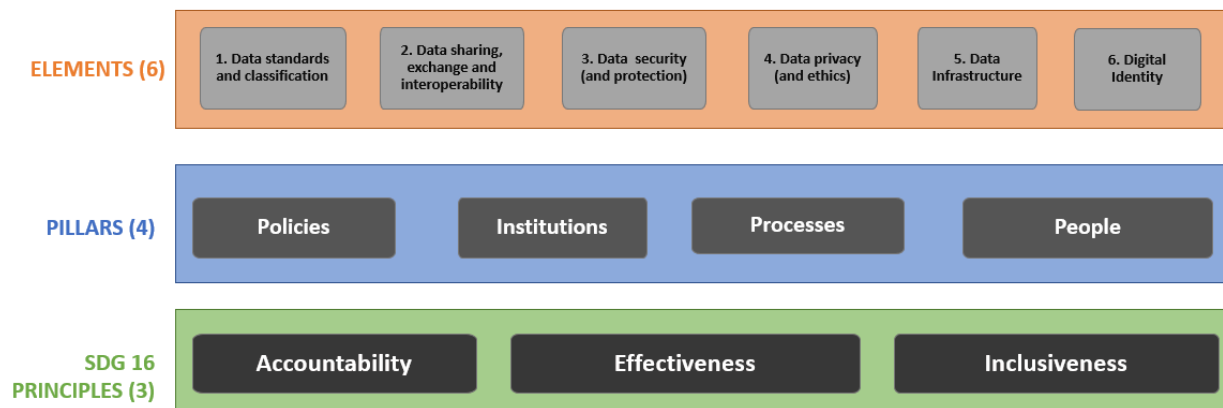
The propensity of data means that it also comes with a whole host of risks and challenges. Security, privacy and ethical issues are major concerns, and data literacy and institutional capacities remain insufficient in many areas, especially in developing countries, transition economies and countries in special situations. With the exponential increase in government data and the growing awareness of its enormous potential and attendant challenges, the need for effective data management and governance has gained new urgency.

Governments are the largest producers and consumers of data in many countries, and they also play a role in data regulation. Many African countries, however, lack the institutional capacity to fully implement data management and governance, impeding them to fully reap the benefits of data governance. In the E-government Survey 2020, only 24.1 per cent of African countries provided individuals with the ability to access their own data on government records, and 31.5 per cent offered similar access to businesses. Moreover, only 22 countries (41 percent) had established cybersecurity-related regulations or equivalents, while only 29 countries in Africa had implemented online privacy statements. Despite some progress, the region continues to lag behind neighboring regions, with 50 out of 54 African countries reporting EGDI values below the global average, as indicated in the E-government Survey.

In this connection, UN DESA has conceived the project supported by the UN Peace and Development Fund, entitled “Developing institutional capacities for digital data management and cooperation to advance progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals”, to support developing countries to assess key data management and governance challenges and strengthen government officials’ and stakeholders’ knowledge of sound and secure data management. This project seeks to address existing challenges and gaps in digital data management and cooperation, focusing on enhancing the institutional capacities of countries to utilize, manage and govern data in a comprehensive, objective and evidence-based manner, through regional and global cooperation.

Under the research framework established by UN DESA, digital data governance is supported by the three principles of Sustainable Goal 16 (accountability, effectiveness and inclusiveness) and examined through the lens of the four pillars (policy, institutions, people, and process) and six elements (see following illustration)¹. This allows for a comprehensive and holistic examination of the various procedural components, which together enable effective, accountable, and inclusive data governance.

UN DESA’s National Data Governance Framework



2. Objectives of the Regional Forum

This Regional Forum seeks to address the existing challenges and gaps in implementing national digital data governance frameworks among countries, through enhancing the institutional capacities of countries to utilize, manage and govern data in a comprehensive, objective and evidence-based manner, through regional and global cooperation. The aim is to build awareness and develop institutional capacities in building national data governance frameworks in developing countries, especially those in the African region. The forum will further:

¹ United Nations (2020), United Nations E-Government Survey 2020: Digital Government in the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development, UN DESA, p. 166.

- Support African countries to assess key data management and governance challenges and strengthen government officials' and stakeholders' knowledge of sound and secure data management, working closely with UN RCOs and UNCTs.
- Support national and regional initiatives in fostering an open, fair and non-discriminatory business environment for digital data cooperation through mutual benefit, win-win outcomes and common development.
- Support countries in the African region to foster institutional capacities for developing national digital data policies and strategies for ensuring data quality, access, security, privacy and usage, and for promoting data security through consultation, collaboration and shared benefits.
- Promote good governance and accountability in digital government initiatives by encouraging member states to adopt robust data governance frameworks that enhance public service delivery and transparency.

3. Link to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has made data a focal point, acknowledging that data are key to effective decision-making and that timely, reliable, quality, and disaggregated data are needed to facilitate the measurement of progress toward sustainable development and to ensure that no one is left behind. The latter imperative is reflected in multiple global indicators and entails not only reaching the poorest and most vulnerable groups but also combating rising inequalities within and among countries.

Given the cross-cutting nature of data management and coordination, its development and application would contribute potentially to the attainment of most SDGs and targets. Specifically, the Global Forum relates to the following SDGs and selected Targets, including:

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; target 8.2. Achieve higher levels of economic productivity and target 8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises.

Goal 9 Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation: target 9.1 Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure; 9.b Support domestic technology development, research and innovation; 9.c significantly increase access to information and communications technology.

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries; target 10.2 empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all; target 10.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome.

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient; target 11.1 ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums; target 11.3 enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management.

Goal 16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; target 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels (e-government); target 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (e-participation); target 16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements (access to data and information).

Goal 17 Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development – TECHNOLOGY); target 17.6 Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation; Target 17.9 Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building.

4. Expected Outcomes

The following are the expected outcomes of the Forum:

- To build institutional and individual capacities with participants and get insight into issues of national digital data governance frameworks.
- To build a shared understanding of issues of digital data governance in the public sector.
- To facilitate and support twinning arrangements between project countries and other developing countries that have put in place institutional and regulatory frameworks for sound and secure digital data management, data governance, and data cooperation – for peer learning and mutual exchange of experience and expertise.
- To identify the next course of action and potential interventions with a proposed timeline.

The outputs of each of the sessions and a follow up action plan will be captured in the summary report. A policy brief may be issued by UN DESA as a result.

5. Date and Venue

Date/time: 2-4 Oct 2024

Venue: Pretoria, South Africa

Number of participants (international and national): 40

(Note: By invitation only, including organizers, resource persons, and support staff)

6. Participants

It is expected that the participants for the workshop include:

- Ministers and senior government officials
- Experts from the private sector, civil society, think tanks, and academia with knowledge and experience in national data governance frameworks, digital transformation, and sustainable development.
- Senior officials and expert representatives from UN DESA and other international organizations.

7. Languages

The Workshop will be conducted in English.

8. Surveys and evaluation

Pre-workshop surveys and post-workshop evaluations will be circulated. A follow-up questionnaire could be sent out to participants after the Workshop.

9. Organizers and Facilitators

The workshop is organized by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), supported by and joined by the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) of the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UN ECA).

Following are our knowledge partners:

1. African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)
2. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UN ECA)

10. Documentation

- [UN E-Government Survey 2022 and 2024 \(pending release\)](#)
- [SDG Progress Report 2023 \(Special Edition\)](#)
- [Global Sustainable Development Report 2023](#)
- [UN Secretary-General's Report on Our Common Agenda](#)

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For any question, please contact:

UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)
Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG)
Junho Lee (junho.lee@un.org)
Monina Tran (monina.tran@un.org)