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IS OPEN DATA WORKING FOR WOMEN IN AFRICA?

Open data has the potential to change politics, economies and societies for the better by giving people more opportunities to engage in the decisions that affect their lives. Yet, open data initiatives supported by governments, civil society and funders have largely overlooked how open data can be used to meet the needs of women specifically.

What is open data?

Open data is data that can be **freely used, modified, and shared** by **anyone** for any **purpose**.

To realise the full potential of open data, it must be accessible to and used by all. Across the globe — and in Africa in particular — there is a significant gender gap in data access and use.

Our research, which explores whether and how open data is available to — and used by — women, reveals that while open data has the potential to radically change and empower women in Africa, the reality is that:

1. There is a closed data culture in Africa

Most countries lack an open culture and have legislation and processes that are not gender-responsive

- Institutional resistance to disclosing data means few countries have open data policies and initiatives at the national level.

- Gender equality legislation and policies are incomplete and ineffective in reducing gender inequalities.

- Africa lacks the cross-organisational collaboration needed to strengthen the open data movement.

2. There are barriers preventing women from using the data that is available

Cultural and social realities create additional challenges for women to engage with data and participate in the technology sector more broadly

- The high cost of data in Africa — 1GB of mobile data in Africa costs 10% of average monthly income — keeps women, who generally earn less than men, offline.

- Time poverty, the gender pay gap and unpaid labour create economic obstacles for women to engage with digital technology, including using data for their benefit.

3. Key datasets to support the advocacy objectives of women's groups are missing

Data on budget, health and crime are largely absent as open data

- Nearly all datasets in sub-Saharan Africa (373 out of 375) are closed, and sex-disaggregated data, when available online, is often not published as open data.

- Open data policies to support opening up of key datasets rarely exist, and when they do, they largely remain in draft form.

- Efforts to fund open data initiatives, establish good data management practices and implement Right To Information (RTI) reforms remain stagnant.

4. There is no strong base of research on women's access and use of open data

There is lack of funding, little collaboration and few open data champions

- Women's groups, digital rights groups, and gender experts rarely collaborate on open data and gender issues.

- Multi-stakeholder collaborations that integrate vertically and horizontally are essential to develop effective solutions.

- Funding, international partnerships and support are also needed and play a critical role in examining open data through a gender lens.

Our findings should act as a wake-up call — for policymakers, the private sector, and civil society alike — to address the opportunities for women to access and use open data for their benefit. How do we achieve data equity, and ensure data is accessible and used by everyone, especially women?
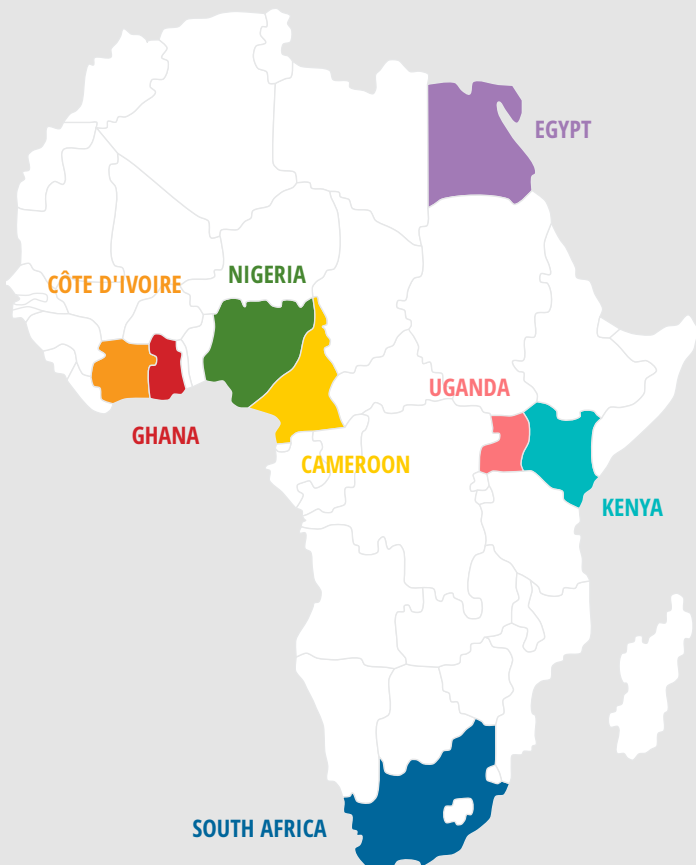
TechMousso

Open data and gender collaboration in action

The TechMousso (TechWoman) initiative in Côte d'Ivoire is one noteworthy collaboration that championed the of use of data to empower women. The project brought together the data, tech, and gender communities from across government, civil society and the private sector and challenged them to use public data to develop solutions to local problems around women's health, safety, education, and economic empowerment. The success of TechMousso created momentum for open data in Côte d'Ivoire where the government is now working on publishing data from these sectors on the national open data platform. In addition, the government has consulted with civil society organisations and is willing to engage them in opening up data they need.

Mapping the actors

Building a culture in which open data works for all, especially for women, requires a collaborative approach. Civil society actors from across the technology and gender spaces must unite and work with government and the private sector to make this culture a reality. The organisations mapped below work on open data, civic tech, ICT or women's rights and are key for making open data work for women in Africa. A more comprehensive list of organisations is available in the full report.

CAMEROON
– AfroLeadership
– Internet Sans Frontières
– Network for Women in Politics (NMWP)

CÔTE D'IVOIRE
– AE Tech Consulting

EGYPT
– Tadwein Gender Research Centre

GHANA
– Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)

KENYA
– International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IAWRT)
– WanaData

NIGERIA
– African Women Power Network
– BudgIT Foundation
– Paradigm Initiative

SOUTH AFRICA
– Africa Teen Geeks
– Girl Code
– Open Data Durban

UGANDA
– Zimba Women
– Uganda Media Women's Association
– Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET)
– Action for Rural Women Empowerment

CONTINENTAL
– Hacks-Hackers Africa

REGIONAL
– Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA)

This snapshot comes from a report that is the product of a collaborative effort across the African continent, and was written by Ana Brandusescu and Nnenna Nwakanma, with country-specific research contributions from Ayomide Faleye (BudgIT, Nigeria), Charlie Martial Ngounou (AfroLeadership, Cameroon), Dorothy Okello (Women of Uganda Network, Uganda), Sophie McManus and Richard Gevers (Open Data Durban, South Africa).

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The Web Foundation was established in 2009 by Sir Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web. Our mission is to establish the open web as a public good and a basic right.

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