Citizen Engagement and Innovative Data Use for Africa's Development (Data-Cipation)

Context

Data governance frameworks and related digital policies are critical for Africa's development in the 21st century: as much as digitalization and innovation are recognized as key enablers for participatory and inclusive decision making the former are instrumental to realize the vision of an "integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens" (Agenda 2063).

The African Union has prioritised citizens engagement as part of its institutional reforms agenda with the aim to foster systematic citizen participation across AU Organs and Institutions. In many African countries, citizen groups – women, youths, persons with disabilities, African Diaspora, private sector, civil society, media, and academics – are contributing actively to policymaking on governance and development agendas at all levels.

The AU **Digital Transformation Strategy** 2020-2030 envisions "an integrated and inclusive digital society and economy in Africa that improves the quality of life of Africa's citizens." Enhancing digitalization presents opportunities and challenges for governments, civil society, private sector and citizens alike. These are further implicated by power shifts and geo-political realities at national, continental as well as global level, which requires realistic and pragmatic policy responses and strategies. For example, despite the progress in internet penetration, mobile telephony and access to digital tools, emerging challenges such as data privacy concerns, digital sovereignty and taxation remain, requiring a coordinated as well as harmonized regional and continental approach. Continental and regional organizations such as the AU and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are in key positions to establish coordinated approaches and promote transparent, evidence-based and participatory policy making.

Approach

The objective of the programme is to "strengthen the engagement between AU Organs, Member States and citizens leveraging data, digital and non-digital approaches for good governance and development."
The political partner for the programme is the Bureau of the Chairperson at the African Union Commission, demonstrating the high political commitment on part of the AU, and will be implemented in cooperation with the African Union Commission and several of its Organs including the Information Society Division in the Infrastructure

Department, the AU Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), as well as the Communications and Information Technology Directorate (DIC).

DataCipation takes a systemic approach, focusing on implementation across three main areas as follows:

Connecting Policymakers with Africa's data & digital innovators for good governance and development by enhancing the collaboration and cooperation of AU Organs and Member States with Africa's digital innovation ecosystem.

Catalyzing citizen participation in good governance and development through innovative communications and engagement methodologies leveraging data, digital and non-digital approaches.

Supporting the implementation of digital policies across Africa to improve access to meaningful participation of citizens in the digital transformation and leverage its potential for social and economic development.

The benefits

Key initiatives to enable DataCipation include:

A **civic tech innovation fund** will identify, award and promote scaleable approaches across the continent that address citizen participation in governance and development spaces using civic technology, in close coordination with related EU programmes for the support of tech civil society. By providing networking opportunities and tailored scaling support, the fund will contribute to continent-wide dialogue and learning.

In other to deepen functional interactions between Africa's innovation ecosystem and the AU, the programme supports a **tech fellowship scheme**, adopting successful examples such as the German Chancellery's tech4germany approach to drive public sector innovation through fellowships. The scheme aims to integrate digital innovators into selected African Union Organs to ad advance innovative approaches to good governance and development on the continent.

Through the **continental data policy framework**, DataCipation supports the harmonisation of digital policy approaches in AU member countries to create comparable regulation for data protection, digital economy and technological standards in Africa. Aligning **digital**

African Union

Humanitarian Innovation Challenge
Solving problems through digital innovation

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identity systems is a key challenge to creating a unified digital market in Africa in line with the AfCFTA free trade agreement. The process is supported by DataCipation with the development of a continental framework that proposes a common vision and actionable values to member countries. A **digital policy expert pool** acts as a flexible instrument for AU member states to tap into independent expertise from African and European experts on emerging digital policy issues.

Through support to the implementation of the new African Union communication strategy, **new digital and hybrid communication formats** will be established in order to make information on key AU priorities more readily available to citizens continent-wide and acknowledge their contributions with regards to achieving the Agenda 2063. Through this, DataCipation supports an **Agenda 2063 Torchbearers Campaign** aimed at putting the spotlight on citizen champions whose personal initiatives help to drive progress towards attainment of the aspirations, goals and priority areas of the Agenda 2063.

Moreover, a **dedicated citizen engagement platform** will enable citizen groups to actively engage in and contribute to policy making processes, which will specifically target vulnerable and marginalized voices in formal policy processes on the continent. The platform will particularly be deployed to aggregate citizens´ voices and inputs towards the 2nd Ten-Year Implementation Plan of the Agenda 2063. Innovative dialogue formats with decision makers and interested citizens will further contribute to bringing AU policies and their impact closer to the population.

Success factors

The common denominator of all initiatives under the DataCipation project is to connect African Union Organs and Member States with the resourceful changemakers in Africa's data and digital innovation ecosystem. Success factors include:

- Enabling the African Union Commission to lead by example for digital transformation in public sector innovation as well as interactive, participatory communications efforts.

- Building coalitions of the willing of AU Member States for spearheading novel digital policy approaches that pave the way for broader adoption at continental level.

- Being a trusted partner to AUC and African policymakers by providing independent expertise geared towards realizing the strategic interests including techno-geopolitical sovereignty of the African continent.

An example from the field

The African Union Commission Energy and Infrastructure Department's Information Society Division (ISD) has led a multi-stakeholder process over the past year to develop two overarching policy frameworks that enable Member States to work towards common objectives for Africa: the **African Union Interoperability Framework for Digital ID** defines common requirements, governance mechanisms, and recommendations for further alignment between existing legal frameworks on the continent. It aims to help ensure that all Africans can easily and securely access the services and transactions they need, when they need them, from both public and private sector providers. The **Continental Data Policy Framework** aims to harmonize policies on data across the continent while recognizing the Member States' different economic, technical, and digital priorities and capabilities. The framework enables African countries to navigate a unified legal approach to data governance for maximizing the benefits of a data-driven society through creating an enabling policy environment.

The GIZ DataCipation project has been supporting this multi-stakeholder process by providing technical assistance as a member of frameworks' development task force that was set up by the African Union Commission. Moreover, the project supported the African Union Commission in organizing stakeholder consultation workshops. It is expected that the two frameworks will be adopted and endorsed by the African Union Member States. To this end, the DataCipation project will extend its support to the African Union Commission throughout the implementation phase.