Bridging Data Governance Gaps in Africa's Electioneering Processes

IKIGAI INNOVATIONS INITIATIVE

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DATAFICATION AND DEMOCRACY FUND

Final Narrative Report

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PROJECT SUMMARY

The project "Bridging Data Governance Gaps in Africa's Electioneering Process" focuses on developing a robust data governance framework for elections in Nigeria and Kenya. Its objectives are to investigate current data governance practices, identify challenges, and propose actionable solutions to enhance electoral integrity, protect voter data, and reinforce the credibility of electoral systems. The project seeks to address the need for a robust data governance framework in electoral processes, focusing on Nigeria and Kenya.

The methodology combined comprehensive research with participatory approaches. An in-depth analysis of existing data governance frameworks and practices in recent elections in Nigeria and Kenya, and extensive literature reviews to explore global best practices and challenges. This was followed by focus group discussions and surveys collected opinions from 127 electorates, further validating the research findings. A hybrid stakeholder engagement session was then held, bringing together regulators, civil society organizations, and data governance experts to review the findings and provide feedback to proposed recommendations.

The project has now consolidated the insights gained and developed practical recommendations that can strengthen data governance frameworks and, by extension, the integrity of electoral processes in both countries.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS

Activity	Expected outcome Achieved result
Research and documentation	A comprehensive understanding of the data governance landscape in the electoral processes of Nigeria and Kenya. We conducted extensive research, culminating in the report "Data Governance in the Electioneering Processes of African Countries: Nigeria and Kenya as Case Studies." This report examines existing legal and institutional frameworks, highlighting gaps in voter data management and uncovering unfair practices that affect vulnerable electorates, diminishing trust in electoral integrity.
Electorate Survey and focus group discussions with	Insight into the experiences of voters, particularly minority groups, regarding data protection and governance during elections. Using surveys and questionnaires, we gathered data from 127 electorates, focusing on inclusivity, accessibility, and digital rights.
Stakeholder engagement with regulators and civil organizations	Collaboration with regulators, civil organizations and stakeholders to identify challenges and opportunities for improvement in data governance practices during elections. We hosted a hybrid stakeholder session with regulators, including the Nigerian Data Protection Commission (NDPC) and the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), along with civil society organizations. Discussions highlighted enforcement challenges and resource limitations. Stakeholders offered recommendations to enhance data governance, enforce stricter data protection measures, and promote transparency in data handling, which will inform our final recommendations.

| **Consolidation and analysis** | Comprehensive compilation and analysis of best practices and feedback from all activities. |
| | We compiled the best practices from research, focus groups, and stakeholder sessions, analysing feedback from the 127electorates. |

| **Developing actionable recommendations** | A set of actionable recommendations based on consolidated findings to improve data governance. |
| | Based on our findings, we have created actionable recommendations to address identified gaps and enhance accountability and transparency in electoral processes. |

| **Final report preparation** | A structured report that reflects findings and includes stakeholder feedback. |
| | The final report contains stakeholder insights and presents our findings clearly. It aims to advocate for a data governance framework aligned with democratic values, empowering citizens to engage meaningfully in governance. |

More information about the project can be found in our blog post here.

MAIN LEARNINGS DURING THE PROJECT

a. Low public awareness of data protection rights

One of the most striking findings was that many electorates, particularly in rural areas, were largely unaware of their data protection rights. During focus group discussions, participants expressed surprise at the existence of such rights and their implications for electoral processes. This lack of awareness hindered our data collection efforts, as many participants struggled to engage meaningfully in discussions about data governance. Recognizing this gap emphasizes the urgent need for public education initiatives. In future projects, we will prioritize community outreach programs that clearly communicate data rights and the importance of data governance in a relatable manner.

b. Navigating political sensitivities

The politically sensitive nature of the project led to some resistance from stakeholders who were concerned about the implications of our findings. Several stakeholders expressed hesitance to participate or share information, fearing potential political repercussions. This highlighted the need for us to be transparent about our intentions and to communicate the neutrality of our research. Building trust with stakeholders will be essential in future projects, so we plan to engage in proactive relationship-building efforts early in the project cycle.

c. The need for post-election enforcement (clean sweep)

Our research indicates that data protection violations occurring during elections often continue afterward. In Nigeria, electoral laws permit the publication of electorate data during elections; however, this data is often left at polling units post-election, leading to potential misuse. If the publication of voter details is justifiable during elections for verification purposes, its continued exposure after the election is unwarranted. Therefore, there is a pressing need for electoral commissions to ensure the immediate removal of all publicly published data once voting concludes.

d. Insufficient avenues for voters to exercise their data subjects' rights

We discovered that even among more educated voters who understand the legal provisions regarding data governance, there are limited channels to exercise these rights. The disconnect between regulators and voters creates a situation where voters lack avenues to demand accountability and transparency or to assert their rights effectively.

e. The urgent need to engage all demographics of the electorates to achieve better accountability in data protection practices during elections

Certain demographics within Nigerian society are often excluded from discussions on data governance issues in elections. However, these groups are equally affected by the system. Our project faced limitations in reaching certain populations due to budget constraints; virtual focus group sessions and surveys were unable to engage individuals in rural areas who lack access to the internet. An on-site survey would have significantly improved participation and provided more comprehensive insights. Therefore, there is an urgent need to include all demographics in conversations about data protection practices to enhance accountability.

MAIN OBSTACLES DURING THE PROJECT

Some of the key challenges that we faced during the course of the project include:

a. Non-response from Key Regulators

One of the primary challenges we faced was securing timely responses from key stakeholders, particularly regulators and election bodies. Their internal approval processes for participation in our stakeholder engagement session caused significant delays. Notably, the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) did not engage in our activities, as we were unable to elicit a response despite multiple follow-up attempts. This lack of participation from such a crucial regulatory body posed a significant challenge, as their insights would have been invaluable for understanding electoral data governance practices.

b. Logistical Constraints

Coordinating the stakeholder engagement session presented notable logistical challenges, especially regarding the transportation of participants to the venue. Organizing travel for key stakeholders from various regions proved more complicated than anticipated, with some participants facing difficulties due to budget constraints and limited transportation options. This complexity not only hindered participation but also led to costs that exceeded our fixed budget for this activity. However, the reliability of virtual alternatives was leveraged for some stakeholders.

To mitigate these issues in future projects, it is essential to plan for potential logistical challenges early on. This includes adjusting budgets for travel and exploring alternative engagement methods, such as hybrid or fully in-person meetings, depending on regional infrastructure.

c. Budget Constraints

Budget limitations significantly impacted our project scope. The costs associated with conducting in-depth surveys, facilitating stakeholder engagements, and traveling to rural areas exceeded our initial estimates. While in-person surveys would have provided richer insights, budget constraints prevented us from pursuing this option. Consequently, we had to prioritize certain activities, which limited broader electorate participation and reduced opportunities for longer-term follow-ups after the stakeholder engagement.

RELATION WITH DATAFICATION AND DEMOCRACY

The project aimed at bridging data governance gaps in Africa's electioneering processes is intricately linked to the themes of datafication and democracy. The challenge of insecurity about voters' data, which affects elections in Africa, can be traced back to the governance structures in place concerning data management. Having identified a gap in African countries' data governance structures, this project seeks to contribute valuable insights, research, and advocacy efforts to enhance transparency, due process, and citizen autonomy within the evolving landscape of data-driven electoral systems.

Our methodology employed a multi-faceted approach that included researching data governance practices in Nigeria and Kenya, qualitative surveys, focus group discussions, and stakeholder engagement sessions. These components were critical in revealing how datafication affects public perception and engagement in the democratic process.

The qualitative surveys and focus group discussions targeted diverse demographics, aiming to gauge awareness of data protection rights among electorates. The stakeholder engagement sessions were pivotal in bringing together regulators, civil society organizations, and electoral bodies. These

discussions highlighted the issues impacting data governance during elections. By facilitating dialogue among key stakeholders, the project aimed to bridge the gap between regulatory intentions and public understanding. The outcomes of these sessions emphasized the need for transparent communication and collaborative efforts to build trust in electoral systems.

The project's outcomes strongly correlate improved data governance with enhanced democratic practices. Our consolidation and analysis involved meticulously compiling best practices gathered from research, focus groups, and stakeholder engagement. This included analyzing feedback and recommendations from discussions with 127 electorates, which revealed significant insights into public perceptions and needs.

From these findings, we will develop a comprehensive set of actionable recommendations aimed at addressing the identified gaps in data governance. This approach emphasizes the critical role of an informed citizenry in enhancing accountability and transparency in electoral processes.

The final report incorporates stakeholder feedback to clearly reflect project findings. By presenting these insights effectively, we aim to advocate for a data governance framework that aligns with democratic values, ensuring that citizens are empowered to engage meaningfully in governance.