POLICY BRIEF

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Unlocking stronger institutions, policies and citizen participation in Africa for a more effective data driven public sector

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Summary
This brief evaluates the current state of enabling institutions, policies, and citizen engagement, in fostering greater data value creation in the public sector.

Based on our analysis of selected sub indicators from the World Bank's GovTech Maturity Index (GTMI or the Index)[i], we observe that while African countries are investing more in the digital transformation of their public sector, governments in the region have mainly focused on strengthening digital infrastructure to optimise public sector operations and service delivery, but have recorded mixed results in terms of the overall achievement of enabling institutions, policies and citizens' involvement to harness the potential of public sector data.

The implication of this is that several African countries continue to miss out on the benefits of leveraging data for public good, as measurable and consistent public value outcomes remains elusive. To overcome this problem, a holistic and whole of government strategic approach to digital transformation is required.

Background
Government ministries, departments and agencies typically collect vast amounts of data to support citizens and deliver services. As a result, a data-driven public sector can generate huge insights to improve policy making and public sector outcomes for the ultimate benefit of citizens and businesses.

As public sector activities become more digitised, effective data governance is critical to ensuring that the mechanisms and instruments used to generate public value from government data, are characterised by trust, integrity, ethics, privacy, transparency and security.
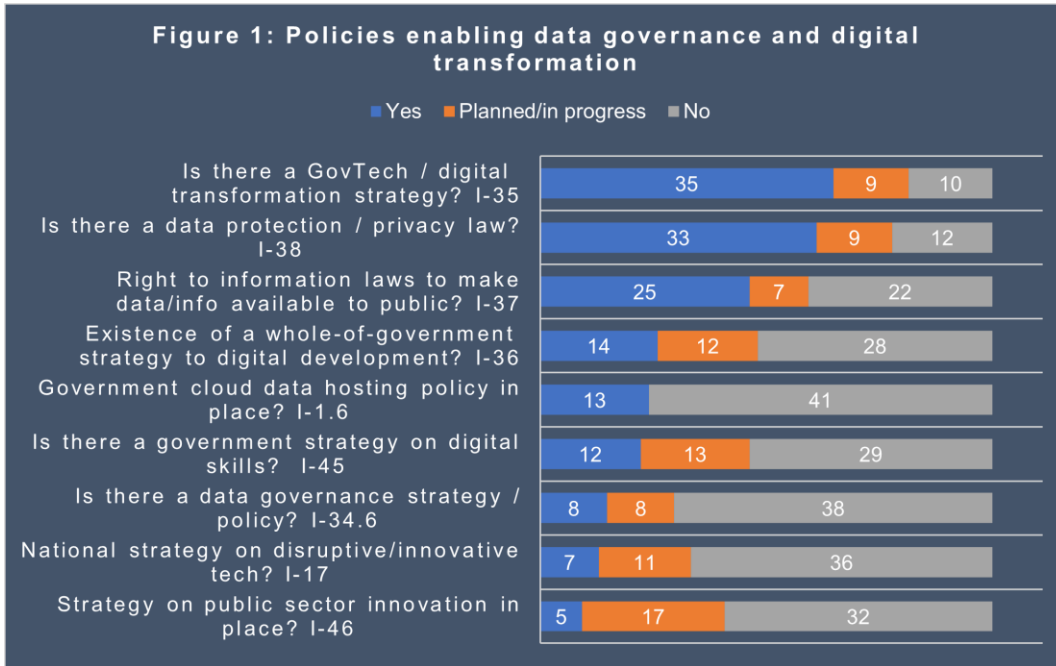
An enabling ecosystem that allows for responsible access, sharing and use of data to inspire innovation and opportunities for public sector, economic and social development is thus required, while increasing government transparency and accountability. Such an enabling environment consists of numerous components, including institutions with adequate capacity to forge and implement reforms, policies and strategies that reflect the evolving data landscape and are feasible to execute, and public participation in data and digital policy making.

Key findings and implications
The index shows that while African countries are investing more in the digital transformation of their public sector, governments in the region have mainly focused on strengthening digital infrastructure to optimize public sector operations and service delivery, but are met with subpar results in terms of the overall achievement of enabling institutions, policies and citizen involvement to harness the potential of public sector driven data to serve the public interest and deliver public good.
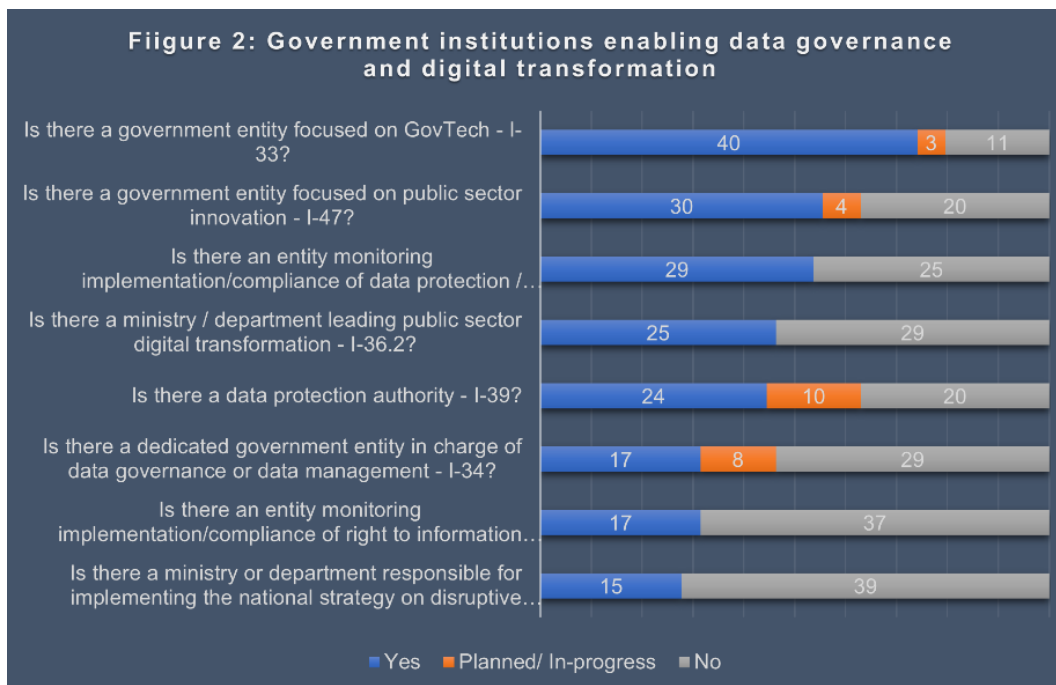
1. **Inadequate policies:** Although there's been an increase in the number of supporting policies, there remains scope for more comprehensive strategies, consistency and clarity in their implementation. For instance, only 8 countries in the region have a national data governance strategy in place for the integration of government data and services, with an additional 8 in draft stage. Similarly, just 13 of the 54 African countries surveyed have a policy on cloud data hosting. The absence of such legal frameworks and regulations can impede innovation, collaboration, and investment in technology and data-driven solutions for public services.
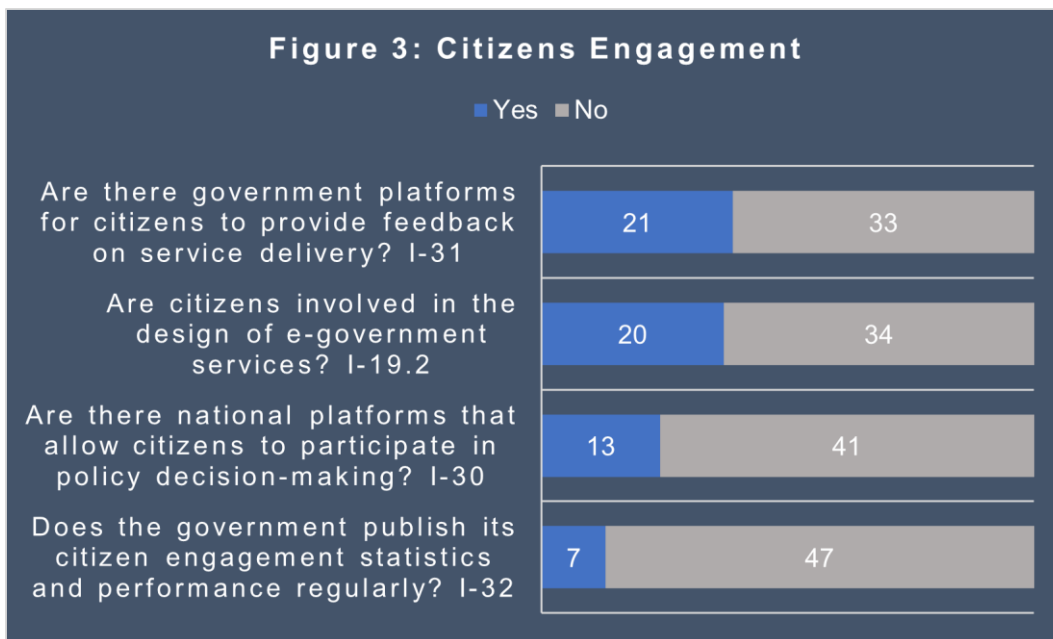

Figure 1: Policies enabling data governance and digital transformation

Legend: Yes | Planned/in progress | No

Question	Yes	Planned/in progress	No
Is there a GovTech / digital transformation strategy? I-35	35	9	10
Is there a data protection / privacy law? I-38	33	9	12
Right to information laws to make data/info available to public? I-37	25	7	22
Existence of a whole-of-government strategy to digital development? I-36	14	12	28
Government cloud data hosting policy in place? I-1.6	13		41
Is there a government strategy on digital skills? I-45	12	13	29
Is there a data governance strategy / policy? I-34.6	8	8	38
National strategy on disruptive/innovative tech? I-17	7	11	36
Strategy on public sector innovation in place? I-46	5	17	32

2. **Limited institutional capacity:** The institutional structures and mechanisms to effectively coordinate digital growth strategies and data regulations, that can sustain/drive reforms is inadequate, thereby exposing African countries to significant risks.

More than two-thirds of the countries in the region do not have any entity monitoring implementation or compliance of right to information laws to make data/information available to the public digitally. Half of the region has not instituted or set in motion, the establishment of a dedicated government entity to take charge of data governance or data management. Most countries embed them within other government institutions, resulting in lack of autonomy and effectiveness.

Fiigure 2: Government institutions enabling data governance and digital transformation

Legend: Yes | Planned/ In-progress | No

Question	Yes	Planned/ In-progress	No
Is there a government entity focused on GovTech - I-33?	40	3	11
Is there a government entity focused on public sector innovation - I-47?	30	4	20
Is there an entity monitoring implementation/compliance of data protection /…	29		25
Is there a ministry / department leading public sector digital transformation - I-36.2?	25		29
Is there a data protection authority - I-39?	24	10	20
Is there a dedicated government entity in charge of data governance or data management - I-34?	17	8	29
Is there an entity monitoring implementation/compliance of right to information…	17		37
Is there a ministry or department responsible for implementing the national strategy on disruptive…	15		39

3. **Low levels of citizen participation:** Meaningful citizen participation in the formulation of government policies related to digital technology and data governance via platforms is insufficient, indicating lack of inclusivity and responsiveness towards citizens' interests and needs. 3 out of every 4 countries in the region do not have any form of national online platform that allows citizens to participate in digital and data policy decision-making.

Figure 3: Citizens Engagement

■Yes ■No

Question	Yes	No
Are there government platforms for citizens to provide feedback on service delivery? I-31	21	33
Are citizens involved in the design of e-government services? I-19.2	20	34
Are there national platforms that allow citizens to participate in policy decision-making? I-30	13	41
Does the government publish its citizen engagement statistics and performance regularly? I-32	7	47

Opportunities

To address these, African countries must apply a holistic approach to transforming public service delivery, whole-of-government approach to data governance required, and invest in building institutional capacity, establish robust data governance standards, and equip citizens with data skills.

1. **Strengthen institutional capacity:** African governments should prioritise the establishment of robust institutional structures and allocate adequate resources to sustain digital transformation and data governance efforts. This includes the creation of autonomous agencies responsible for data stewardship and digital transformation, as well as providing ongoing training for public officials. Relevant institutions to be formed to foster a data driven public sector should include those involved in strategy planning; setting standards; compliance and enforcement; and measuring/evaluating progress.

2. **Develop supportive policies**: develop comprehensive strategies that outline the integration of government data and services. These strategies must be aligned with broader national development goals and ensure coordination among different policies and administrative regulations.

3. **Citizen empowerment**: public participation in data governance and extensive collaboration with data subjects is key to re-balancing power structures. The public can only take an active role in data policy processes and decision-making when they are aware of their rights and responsibilities and have adequate knowledge on issues related to data governance. Empowering citizens to engage in deciding how their data is governed can be achieved through increased transparency, investing in targeted awareness campaigns, training initiatives, data literacy, and improved access to digital technologies, including internet connectivity.

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i The GTMI 2022 measures four broad aspects of GovTech in 198 economies (1) core government systems (2) online public service delivery (3) digital citizen engagement and (4) GovTech enablers e.g. strategy, institutions, regulations, and innovation policies.