

An introduction to the Data Values Project

Data and technology hold enormous potential to benefit people, yet barriers and entrenched inequalities continue to hinder data's potential to improve lives. Far too many people remain excluded from data, while others are harmed by their inclusion in it. Existing data is left unused or underused by policymakers. Top-down data governance solutions do not allow space for people to hold those in power accountable. Development agencies collect and use data primarily at the behest of donors, who are often out of touch with events on the ground. Data and automated decision-making reinforce structural inequalities—largely behind the scenes.

The Data Values team wrote these words at the launch of the project in 2022, and they still ring true. The world continues to rapidly digitize and utilize developments in technology, offering opportunity to drive progress on so many of society's most pressing issues, but action is required to take advantage of these possibilities and address the divides that data can exacerbate. From apps designed for female health monitoring that expose users to unnecessary privacy and safety **risks**, to image generators based on artificial intelligence that reinforce stereotypes, data is still being used unfairly.

The **Data Values Project** is about taking action to protect against these risks, create change, strengthen agency, and shift power. The project was designed to enable individuals and organizations to be agents of change and to take individual and collective control of their data and how it is governed for more



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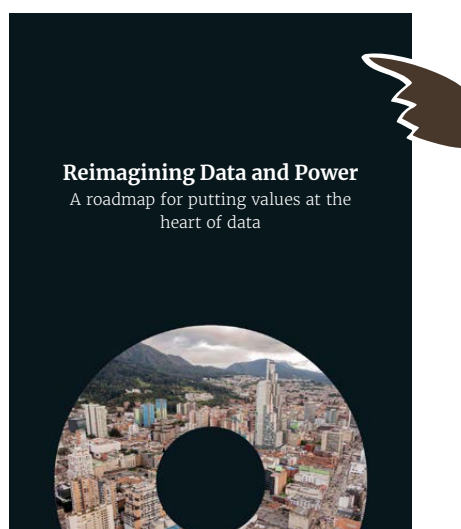
equitable outcomes. The Data Values Project is founded on the belief that data still can be a huge force for good. The project's principles and recommendations were developed to ensure that everyone in the global community can take advantage of the opportunities data offers.

In 2024, the United Nations and its member states came together to set a common agenda for how data and digital technologies can create a better world through the **Global Digital Compact**. This comprehensive framework for global governance of digital technology and artificial intelligence charts a roadmap for cooperation to harness the immense potential of digital technology and to close digital divides. The publication of the Global Digital Compact marks the global community's first real attempt to provide comprehensive guidance on harnessing data and digital technology for good.

Through the Global Digital Compact, the UN and member states have committed to digital inclusion, equity, transparency, and accountability. These concepts are foundational to Data Values and will require action from actors across the data for development sector. This renewed commitment from countries around the world demonstrates the need for Data Values today and in the future.

What is the Data Values Project?

- The Data Values Project is a global policy and advocacy movement seeking to shift power in data systems to ensure that benefits are shared equitably to improve lives and ensure no one is left behind.
- Data Values are the principles that data actions, projects, and activities must embody to ensure that data is used to do good, not harm, in communities around the world. They were defined in the **white paper** (pictured opposite) that launched the project as agency, accountability, and action. These are manifested in the world by taking the actions recommended in the **Data Values Manifesto**.



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- The five recommendations for action in the Data Values Manifesto are based on a vision of a fair data future in which people are equal players in the production and use of the data that impacts them.
- Under the banner of Data Values, hundreds of organizations and individuals from around the world are seeking to shift ethical guidelines and norms to ensure that data collection, use, storage, and management are fair, inclusive, and accountable. Data Values aims to develop a common agenda for data norms, rights, and governance issues and to influence decision-makers at national, regional, and global levels.

How was the Data Values Project created?

The Data Values Project is hosted by the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, a network of over 700 private-sector, academic, civil society, and international organizations and governments, with a Secretariat that spans eight countries. The Global Partnership leverages the power of data to change minds, policies, and lives for the better.

The Data Values Project was a response to calls from the Global Partnership's network to understand what principles should underpin the future of data for development and what actions would be required to get there.

More than 300 people from 63 countries weighed in during a year-long consultation to surface a collective vision for a fair data future. Through this consultation, consensus emerged on the need to critically examine how power is distributed in the production, sharing, and use of data, and how data use and governance can challenge or exacerbate existing power imbalances.

Three key themes emerged from the consultation and are explained more fully in the white paper:

- **Agency:** Individual and community power to shape personal and community data and decide whether, when, and with whom to share it.
- **Accountability:** Broad access to mechanisms to shape data governance decisions and to hold decision-makers accountable.
- **Action:** The imperative of data producers and decision-makers to use and share data to improve lives.



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The Data Values Manifesto lays out five recommendations to achieve fairness, equity, and inclusion across these three areas.

Who is the Data Values Project for?

The Data Values Project is for anyone who is passionate about creating a fair data future. This includes people in civil society organizations, nongovernmental organizations, government, and the private sector who have an interest in changing how data is collected, managed, stored, and used to ensure fairness, equity, and inclusivity.

In response to requests from the Data Values community, this Starter Pack was created to help individuals and organizations who want to take the next step in their own work or in influencing the work of other organizations to create a fairer data future. It will be of particular use to those unsure about where to start or what their next step should be.



What has the Data Values Project achieved already?

Since its launch in 2022, the Data Values Project has undertaken a wide range of community-building and advocacy activities, all with the focus of inspiring action to create and embed fairer data practices. Our impact has included:

- Building a community of over 800 individuals and organizations in over 100 countries that remain engaged with our events and communications
- Creating the **Data Values Advocates** program supporting 13 youth and community activists in 13 countries
- Engaging with and influencing government policy in Botswana, Costa Rica, Kenya, and Colombia
- Hosting sessions at a wide range of global events, including the World Data Forum, Festival de Datos, Digital Rights and Inclusion Forum, Rightscon, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia, and the Pacific Stats Cafe
- Holding informed data training, such as the Joint Identity Profiling Service collaborative leadership training program
- Distributing **five micro grants** to further fairer data practices
- Developing learning products on the implementation of fairer data practices



What is the Data Values Manifesto?

The Data Values Manifesto is an action-oriented agenda that forms the cornerstone of the Data Values Project. It consists of five recommendations that cover the broad action areas that will create a fairer data future where everyone can share in data's benefits. The Manifesto has recommendations to create fairer data practices at all stages of the data value chain, including collection, use, storage, management, and funding.



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The Data Values Manifesto:

An agenda for a fair data future

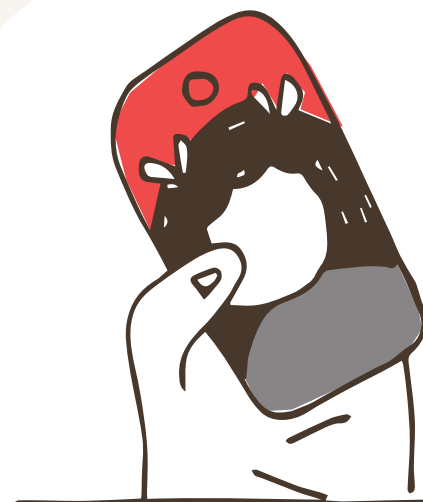
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Support people to shape how they are represented in data

People must have a say in data design and collection that affects their lives. Everyone deserves to have their needs, priorities, and experiences—as they define them—captured in data.

- Involving people in the collection of data that pertains to them makes that data more useful. New policies or services based on that data will be better targeted to the people they serve.
- Representation in data requires exploring ways for people to play more active roles in data systems—from consulting people on what issues should be prioritized in data collection and how survey questions should be phrased, to engaging them in collecting data.
- Not every person can, or should, be consulted on every aspect of data systems. The goal is to examine where historical underrepresentation in data has deepened structural inequalities and to explore how affected communities can be supported to change that.

Read about some actions organizations are taking to increase accountability around data in [Asset 5](#) which highlights case studies and best practices from across the Data Values community.



2

Invest in public participation for accountability

People must be included in decisions related to data use and reuse. This is essential to hold leaders accountable, protect people from harm, build trust, and improve lives.

- Participatory mechanisms can be built into or alongside more formal mechanisms of data governance (such as institutions and legislation).
- Existing models at the local level and in the health sector show that increased participation in data governance can lead to more equitable outcomes and prevent harm.
- Fostering greater participation in data governance requires time, money, and capacity. It's not going to happen overnight, and donors, governments, and organizations need to think through how they raise or allocate the resources necessary to enable affected communities to participate.

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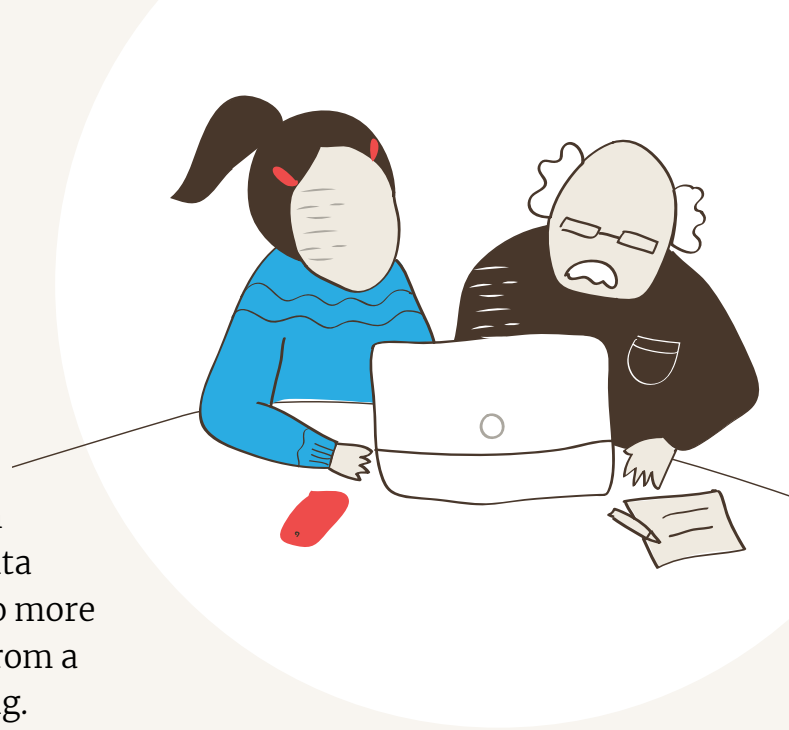
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Democratize data skills for greater equality

Everyone, everywhere must gain confidence to engage with and use data. Wide-spread data confidence is a building block of a fair data future.

- Increasing people's comfort level with data will help to improve accountable data governance, as it will empower people to more effectively engage with data processes from a position of knowledge and understanding.
- Enabling more people to engage in data systems requires building their awareness, confidence, and skills around data. This doesn't mean training everyone to undertake statistical analysis, but rather focusing on building skills that allow individuals to critically consider how data impacts them, their communities, and larger societies.
- Different stakeholders—leaders of organizations, community advocates, policymakers, legislatures, and individuals—will need different supports to be able to engage around data.
- Data confidence and skills can be built in a variety of ways, including online trainings, discussions, workshops, data journalism, and communications.
- Institutions must focus more attention on translating data processes and outputs into accessible and compelling formats and build awareness within their organizations and more broadly so that everyone—not only the technical leads—has a role in data systems.

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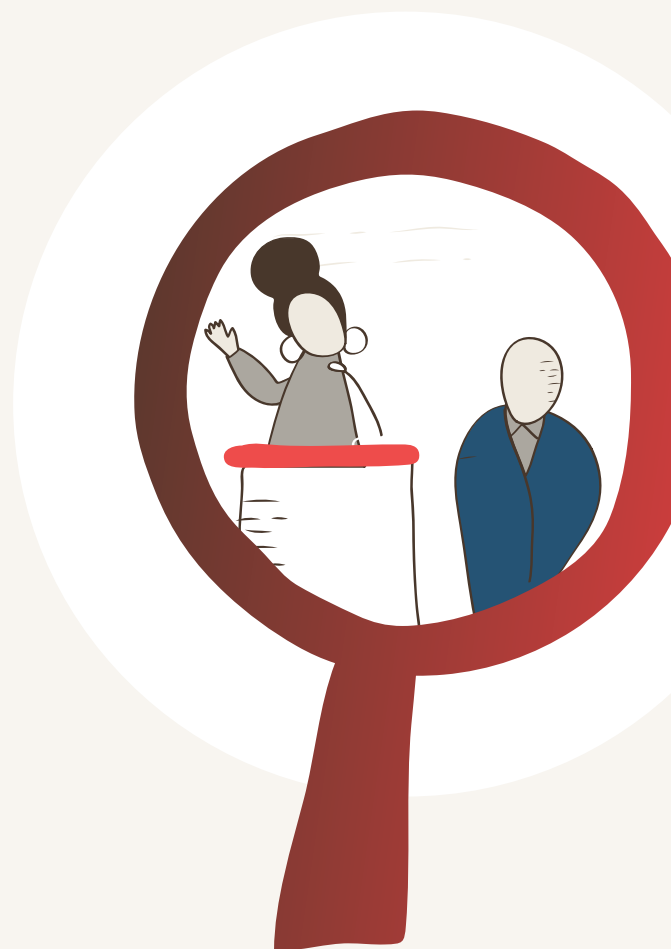
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Create cultures of transparency, data sharing, and use

All leaders must invest in strengthening cultures of data use and reuse. Repeated positive experiences of regulating, sharing, and using data for public good will build trust.

- Making data accessible and putting it to use must receive as much attention as data collection and analysis. For data to create positive change, people must see it as a tool that helps them achieve their goals.
- People's willingness to participate in data efforts and to use the resulting data is closely tied to their trust in the institutions involved. By focusing on improving transparency, institutions can increase people's trust in their work over time. Equally, people will be more likely to engage if they see the resulting data being used to create positive change.
- Leaders must be incentivized to make data-driven decisions and be more open about the data and analysis underpinning those decisions. This means everything from making data use a core part of people's jobs to building public engagement and support so that the public rewards public institutions that make data-driven decisions.

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5

Fund open and responsive data systems so that all people share the benefits of data

- Governments and donors must dedicate more funding to data systems that support action and promote participation and inclusion from start to finish.
- Mechanisms must be put into place to enable participation and so that the systems can be responsive to feedback.
- Donors and governments can't adopt these values without allocating adequate resources, time, and capacity.

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Photo: Page 4: Oni Abimbola/Shutterstock.com. Page 5: Joon Baek, Data Values Advocate speaks in a plenary session at the Festival de Datos in Uruguay, 2023.



The Data Values Project team and wider Global Partnership are here to help any individual, organization, or team who wants to go further in implementation, whether through training or consultation on strategy or project development. To start the discussion, please get in touch with the Data Values team (DataValues@data4sdgs.org).

data4sdgs.org/datavaluesproject