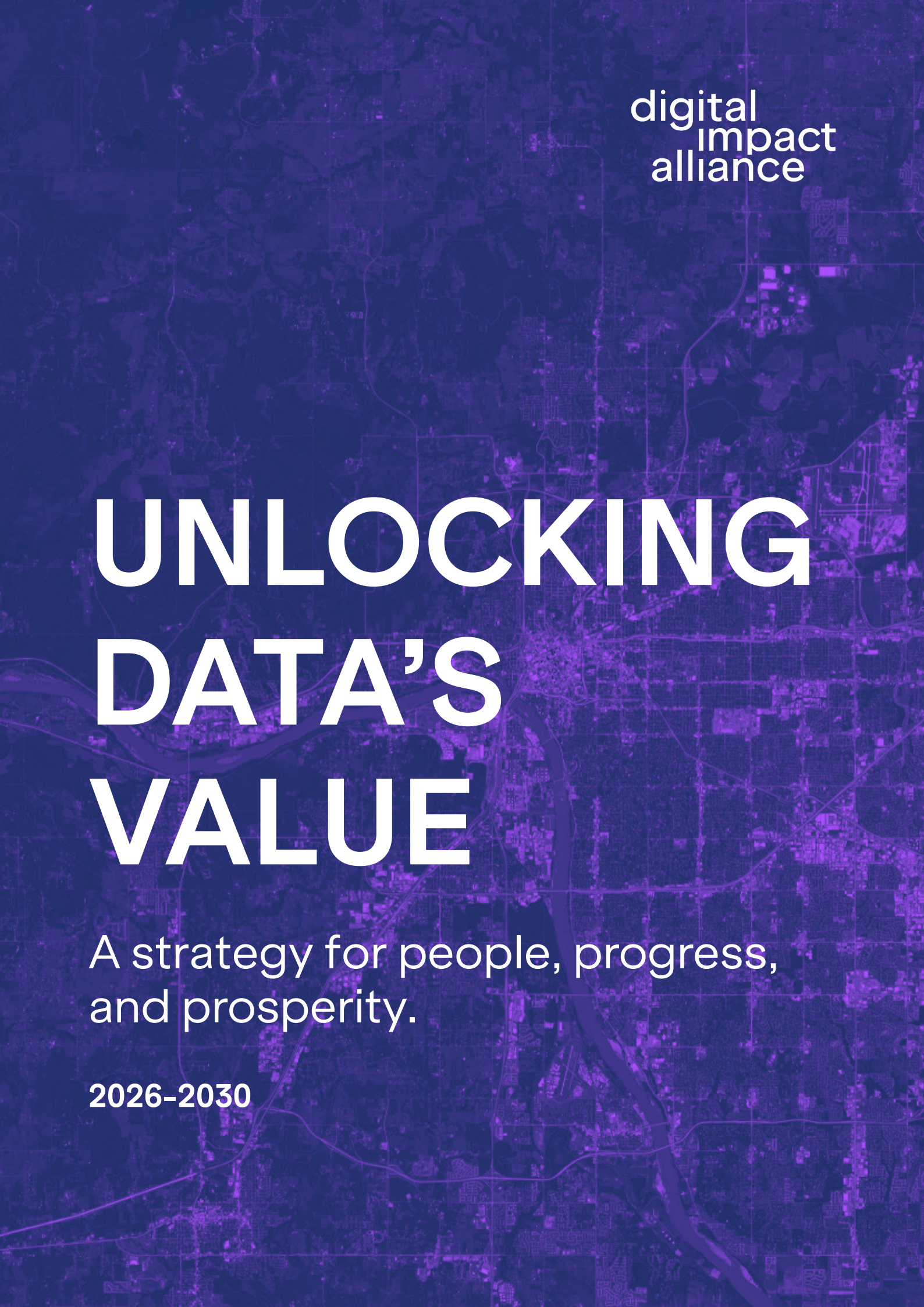




digital
impact
alliance

UNLOCKING DATA'S VALUE

A strategy for people, progress,
and prosperity.

2026-2030

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Since our founding a decade ago, the Digital Impact Alliance (DIAL) has been at the forefront of Africa's digital transformation.

Set up by the United States Agency for International Development, UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, Gates Foundation, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, we were created to be a powerful and agile partner – one that meets the challenge of the moment and delivers practical solutions that unlock real impact for people. And, we delivered.

We helped international funders mobilize critical resources for digital development across the continent; championed open-source innovation and strengthened some of the most widely used digital tools; and pioneered reference architectures for modular, flexible foundational systems – what the world now recognizes as digital public infrastructure – enabling governments to accelerate their journeys without reinventing the wheel.

From the very beginning, collaboration has been our blueprint. Through our work across Africa and efforts to shape global policy and practice, we have built trusted networks among governments, policymakers, technologists, and funders – connecting ideas, people, and resources to drive lasting impact.

Today, we are in an era of extraordinary change.

Geopolitical tensions, technological disruption, and financial uncertainty are reshaping the digital landscape. Data – how it is governed, shared, and used – is now the defining frontier for equitable development.

This strategy is our response. It builds on our proven track record while sharpening our focus on the next decisive challenge: ensuring that data serves people, progress, and prosperity.

Over the next five years, we will equip those working on the forefront of digital transformation with the insights, tools, and knowledge needed to design effective systems, develop inclusive policies and governance, and enable trusted data sharing.

Together, we can realize a positive digital future where data works for everyone.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'PV' with a stylized flourish.

Priya Vora
Chief Executive Officer

INTRODUCTION



The world is making real progress toward a more digitally powered future. Internet access, mobile penetration, and digital public infrastructure (DPI) approaches are expanding at remarkable speed, breaking through traditional barriers to development and creating new pathways for inclusive economic growth, more responsive public services, and improved quality of life.

Today, roughly 6 billion people — 74% of the world's population — are online, unlocking opportunities to participate in digital commerce, access government information, and benefit from remote learning or telemedicine. Governments are leveraging the same digital infrastructure and systems to expand essential service delivery, strengthen public institutions, and direct welfare payments with unprecedented precision to the people who need them most.

But progress isn't evenly felt.

By 2030, Africans will make up half of all new workers entering the global labor force. Yet, 63% of the continent remains effectively offline, with their languages, culture, and information needs inadequately represented online — resulting in a pressing data divide. This inequity hampers equitable development, undermines evidence-based policymaking, and limits economic planning and targeted interventions. And, just as critically, it prevents hundreds of millions from tapping into the opportunities of the data economy — restricting access to credit, education, training, and essential services.

We have reached a critical moment.

Data — who has it, who can use it, and who can benefit from it — will determine which countries, communities, and individuals thrive, and which risk being left behind. The rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI) only heightens both the promise and the peril, amplifying the stakes for every decision made today.

The choices before us are stark. Data can be harnessed as a catalyst for inclusive growth, innovation, and equity across Africa, or it can become a force that deepens inequality, concentrates power, and erodes public trust.

What we decide and do today will shape the digital future — for better or worse — for generations to come.

STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE



What's at stake

Data has become the defining opportunity – and challenge – of this new digital era. Four emerging risks are raising urgent questions about the future of data and its impact on people, communities, and society.

1

Missed opportunities could hinder social and economic progress.

In low-resource settings, the failure to capture, share, and responsibly use data carries high opportunity costs. Critical insights that could improve decision-making – such as identifying where to build infrastructure, who most needs welfare, or how to improve service delivery – are lost. Without better access to and use of data, countries risk falling further behind in addressing urgent social and economic challenges.

2

Misuse of data could erode trust and individual agency.

When data is concentrated and governance rules are weak, individuals lose control over how their information is used. This can lead to corporate or state surveillance, unauthorized data sharing, and abuses of privacy. Over time, these practices undermine public trust, compromise personal agency, and create environments where people feel exploited rather than empowered.

3**Rising foreign influence could result in loss of resilience and control.**

As digital systems become central to national development, the stakes around digital and data sovereignty and resilience are rising sharply. Sensitive data, such as health records, risks exploitation when controlled by foreign actors, while over-reliance on a single vendor or platform leaves countries vulnerable to lock-in and limited autonomy. For many African nations, the path to long-term stability lies in building resilient, diversified, and locally controlled systems that safeguard both sovereignty and sustainability.

4**Data monopolization could concentrate power and limit opportunity.**

As more people and institutions come online, the accumulation of data – and the power it confers – may increasingly accumulate in the hands of a few powerful public and private actors, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of control that risks deepening inequalities. This “hoarding” of data enables those actors to generate insights and capture new markets – such as Amazon’s entry into healthcare or Netflix’s move into film production – while others are locked out of innovation opportunities. The result is a widening gap between data-rich and data-poor actors, undermining competition, and democratic access to opportunity.

Reasons for optimism

Our extensive research and collaborative efforts to date show that well-designed data ecosystems – where data is created, governed, and shared to maximize public benefit – have transformative potential. They can unlock more competitive markets, enable smarter and more responsive public services, and empower individuals to have access to and benefit directly from their own data.

Our optimism is grounded in three critical observations:

1

DPI creates the foundations for trusted, inclusive, and sustainable digital transformation at scale.

As an approach to designing, implementing, and governing core digital systems – such as digital ID, payments, and national data exchanges – DPI enables data to be created, shared, and used for the public good. It is the scaffolding that allows countries to maximize the benefits of the data era while mitigating the risks. Countries that have adopted a DPI approach have dramatically accelerated digital inclusion – expanding both its reach and value – and, in doing so, have generated new data about people and communities historically excluded.

2

Holistic approaches to trusted data sharing offer the chance to broaden the value of data for a variety of social and economic needs.

Emerging models – whether driven by governments, data trusts, or communities fostering shared protocols – demonstrate an opportunity to unlock datasets that have remained underutilized, siloed, or inaccessible. And, by combining this data in new ways and enabling responsible data sharing, these approaches can surface insights that were previously hidden. Such holistic approaches emerge only when rules, tools, institutions, and practices work together.

A holistic approach includes:

- ***Policy, laws, and regulation (rules):*** Strong policies and legal frameworks that safeguard rights and set clear standards.
- ***Technology architecture (tools):*** Foundational digital infrastructure and systems – such as digital ID and data exchange – that allow data to be shared securely and responsibly.
- ***Robust and well-resourced institutions:*** Capable, accountable bodies – including civic organizations – to oversee governance, ensure compliance, and build a culture of data literacy.
- ***Practices:*** The norms and behaviors that build trust and encourage collaboration.

AI has created the demand to get data ecosystems right.

AI is poised to become the next great dividing line between those who benefit and those who are left behind. Contextually relevant AI models rely on high-quality data – often drawn from administrative systems or regulated sectors like healthcare – yet such data remains scarce in many regions. The rapid rise of AI has created an urgent demand for robust data ecosystems, making the design of inclusive, well-governed systems more critical than ever.

Designing the path forward

Turning data into value for people is a complex and evolving challenge – one that carries real risks but even greater possibilities.

Realizing this potential requires more than good intentions; it requires a nuanced understanding of data ecosystems and a credible pathway to coordinated action. Advancing this work will hinge on generating deeper insights across a range of critical areas and questions (as below), curating stronger evidence, and translating these into actionable guidance.

- Few established frameworks and models – whether integrated national data exchange systems, data trusts, or personal data wallets – exist to guide countries in designing impactful, financially viable strategies. *For example, what are the right incentives for key stakeholders at a national, regional, and global level to invest in and share data?*
- Features that empower people – such as transparency mechanisms, redressal channels, and user-facing credentials – are often deprioritized in the rush to digitize government operations, largely given that practical insights and resources to support their implementation are limited. This absence can undermine public trust, which in turn hampers adoption and meaningful use. *For example, in what ways can actors effectively secure, nurture, and maintain public trust in data ecosystems?*

- Technical knowledge gaps continue to persist, but the deeper challenge remains institutional capability – ensuring the rules and tools of data sharing align. Without the right technical architectures and support, the effort of coordination across agencies and borders can be prohibitively difficult. *For example, how can countries adopt participatory policymaking processes that effectively draw in expertise and perspectives beyond the public sector to ensure governments can keep up with rapidly evolving technology while safeguarding people's interests?*
- Funders and global institutions have provided lasting support for foundational digital systems like ID and payments, but a broader, integrated vision for data sharing has yet to receive comparable backing. *For example, how can global actors better tailor their support to each country's needs and circumstances, ensuring that global best practices are adapted and applied in ways that fit diverse socio-economic contexts?*
- While data exchange is a critical layer of a country's DPI, trusted data sharing is accelerating beyond the public sector. Data spaces, data trusts, and open transaction networks are models which private and hybrid entities are using to test different forms of governance, technology, and community building to unlock and securely share data. *For example, what bold solutions and key levers of change are needed to scale trusted and inclusive data-sharing efforts?*

OUR FIVE-YEAR FOCUS



The rules, tools, institutions, and practices, that together, make up inclusive and trusted data ecosystems.

DIAL advances inclusive and trusted data ecosystems where data is shared, governed, and used to create value for people, progress, and prosperity.

Data can – and should – serve people, ensuring participation, agency, choice, and trust.

Data can be a catalyst for progress, driving innovation, building strong societies, and enabling resiliency and future readiness.

Data can drive prosperity across nations and borders, stimulating inclusive economic growth and opportunity.

OUR RESPONSE



Over the coming years, we will apply our proven business model to realize our five-year focus: that data creates value for people, progress, and prosperity.

Our business model takes a two-fold approach.

First, our strategic activities provide a framework for engaging with complex projects that have defined goals, deliverables, and timelines. Throughout this work, we continuously capture knowledge and practical learnings, which we translate into actionable insights and resources that others can use and apply.

Second, the insights emerging from these projects often reveal larger opportunities for high-impact initiatives that extend well beyond the original scope. When these moments to pursue transformative change arise, we act boldly to seize them.

Strategic activities

The driving engine of our everyday work is comprised of three strategic activities; each is designed to respond to real world needs and challenges, while reinforcing the others. This creates an integrated approach where the whole is far greater than the sum of its parts.

1. Driving country and regional level learning and action.

We work alongside country partners across Africa to co-create the policies, strategies, and institutional mechanisms needed to unlock and translate the benefits of data into tangible public outcomes. Our hands-on, country-driven approach supports strategy and policy development as well as design and pilot implementation through use cases, while assisting with institutionalization, identifying impact metrics, and scaling proven models. In

turn, our targeted efforts help countries' bridge the gap between policy and practice, meeting them where they are and driving measurable impact.

2. Shaping global policy dialogue and practices.

We build political will, drive critical conversations on emerging issues, and advocate for best practices informed by our country-level work and regional engagement. Through convening, communities of practice, and peer learning and exchange, we create trusted spaces where diverse stakeholders delve into topics such as critical data safeguards, responsible data governance, and inclusive data practices. Our efforts advance collective knowledge, build capacity, and foster collaborative solutions to shared challenges, while ensuring that global cooperation and best practices are shaped by and responsive to local strengths, partnerships, and priorities – driving African-led development across the continent.

3. Developing practical insights and resources.

We draw on learnings across our work – at a country, regional, and global level – to develop tested, trustworthy tools and research-backed, actionable resources. These products help policymakers, funders, and development actors navigate the complexities of building trusted and inclusive data ecosystems, such as design choices, policy implications, and diverse trade-offs – among other critical considerations. As a result, we equip leaders and decision makers with the knowledge and tools to make thoughtful, evidence-based decisions and implement good practices.

Breakthrough initiatives

Breakthrough initiatives are accelerators and high-impact opportunities – if we get them right, they can make the path to a positive digital future faster, less expensive, and / or more efficient.

We draw directly from our deep expertise and wealth of experience to identify

these outsized opportunities and organize our efforts to best support their implementation. Through our strategic activities, we actively look for levers of change that can overcome systemic barriers and unlock greater impact for more people, in more places. Often, this means bridging the lessons learned at a local level with the big ideas shaping the world – turning small insights into global momentum.

In some instances, we might play the role of “anchor” – acting as the primary driver, fundraising for the idea, and putting together the plan. Other times, we might leverage our widely connected position to be a “instigator and motivator” – advocating for the vision and bringing together the right players to bring it to life.

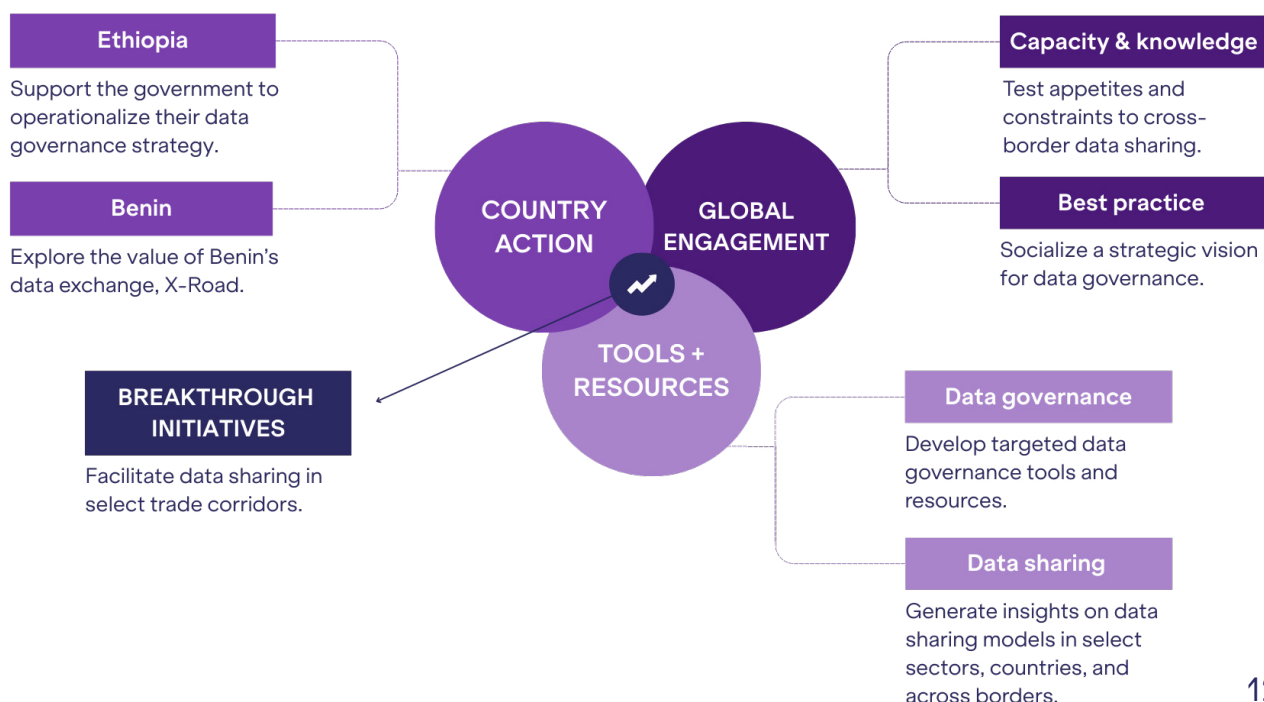
In both instances, we leverage our organizational agility, skilled staff, broad network, and diverse areas of work to envision and advance bold solutions.

Business model in practice

In this extraordinary era of global change, our work seeks to uncover new potential and pathways while exploring answers to pressing questions and solutions to persistent barriers.

Rather than outlining a fixed plan for this five-year period, we will reflect each year on internal and external learnings, adapt to shifting contexts, and apply our well-honed business model accordingly. This allows us to remain agile, responsive, and ready to rise to the moment.

For year one, below is an example of how our efforts might look across our business model.



Looking ahead

Recognizing that there is a pressing need for richer insights, actionable guidance, and well-documented models for collaboration across stakeholders and borders, in year one and beyond, we will also pursue the following examples of strategic activities.

Capture and share examples of established frameworks and models to guide countries in designing impactful, financially viable strategies.

This includes:

- Advancing prioritized data sharing mechanisms in Ethiopia through targeted use cases.
- Researching sustainable models for DPI implementation, including pricing strategies.
- Shaping a national DPI safeguards framework in Nigeria grounded in context and adoption needs.
- Testing sustainable data sharing models that meet the needs of local climate responders.
- Documenting key factors that make national data ecosystems AI-ready.

Develop practical insights and resources that support the implementation of features that empower people, such as transparency mechanisms, redressal channels, and user-facing credentials.

This includes:

- Exploring diverse approaches and mechanisms for consent.
- Strengthening actionable examples and documentation of effective safeguards in practice within resources and guidance.

Foster learning and exchange to strengthen institutional knowledge, build capability, and promote best practices that ensure data-sharing rules and tools align and support collaboration across agencies and borders.

This includes:

- Refining and scaling approaches that facilitate participatory engagement and alignment across government for people-first DPI and data strategies – such as the DPI roadmap facilitation process.
- Building and nurturing an engaged pan-African community of data leaders to share insights and coordinate efforts on trusted data sharing, for example through the Africa Data Leadership Initiative (ADLI).

Support dialogue and engagement across funders and global institutions towards a broader, integrated vision for trusted data sharing and a clear pathway to collective action.

This includes:

- Advancing the global metrics framework to understand progress on data and people's trust.
- Supporting the successful delivery of the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi, ensuring inclusion and relevance in global governance and the need to solve for data scarcity.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Our vision is a world where data and digital technology serves people, society, and our planet.

IMPACT

People meaningfully participate in and benefit from the digital world — enhancing their individual well-being, economic opportunity, and social inclusion.

GOAL

Advanced adoption of inclusive and trusted data ecosystems where data is shared, governed, and used to create value for people, progress, and prosperity.

RESULTS

Governments, funders, and development actors employ insights, knowledge, and tools to advance positive, sustainable, and inclusive digital transformation.

1

Proven models that bolster inclusive and trusted data ecosystems are more widely available and accessible.

2

Capacity is enhanced across people, institutions, and organizations driving inclusive and trusted data ecosystems.

3

Momentum is catalyzed at local, national, regional, and global levels - politically, financially, and institutionally - to enable inclusive and trusted data ecosystems.

APPROACH

We partner with countries to co-create the policies, strategies, and institutional mechanisms that unlock and govern data for public good.

We develop practical tools and resources that help decision makers navigate complexity and strengthen their inclusive and trusted data ecosystems.

We shape global policy dialogue and best practice to maximize the value of data in trusted and inclusive ways.

We identify and activate levers of change to overcome systemic barriers and unlock greater impact for more people.

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING



Recognizing that driving meaningful change is difficult and rarely linear, we have a custom approach to monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) that we put into practice across our business model. This approach is grounded in learning as part of our DNA.

We continuously gather evidence and insights to strengthen our theory of change and understand the outcomes that matter most: whether data is being used to create progress and prosperity for people and they experience greater agency, trust, and benefit from how data is used.

We take a complexity-aware and systems-thinking perspective, acknowledging the dynamic environments in which we work and the interconnected roles of governments, funders, and communities.

And, because we apply adaptive management, learning is not an afterthought but an ongoing cycle, helping us adjust projects and programs in real time, improving decision-making, and enhancing our overall contribution to the digital ecosystem.

What success looks like

Through our efforts over the coming years, we will know we have been successful when governments, funders, and development actors:

1. **Apply our practical insights-driven models, tools, and frameworks** to responsibly expand opportunities for trusted data use in the countries where we work.
2. **Adopt and adapt good data governance practices** shaped by our insights, resources, and shared knowledge that enable people to participate fully, exercise agency and choice, and have trust in how their data is used.
3. **Collaborate with us to launch breakthrough initiatives** that unlock data's potential to drive progress and prosperity for people and communities.

ABOUT THE DIGITAL IMPACT ALLIANCE (DIAL)



We are a global nonprofit reimagining how data and digital technology can drive bold solutions to the world's most pressing challenges – from accelerating sustainable economic growth and inclusive opportunity to mitigating the effects of climate change.

Since 2014, we have focused our efforts on unlocking Africa's digital potential to create lasting impact – helping countries turn intent into real outcomes for people and communities.

Our team of nearly 30 spans Africa, Switzerland, India, and the U.S., bringing together policy specialists, technologists, researchers, and strategists united by a common vision: a digital future where data works for everyone.

Our values

At the heart of our work are qualities that define not just what we do, but who we are. These values guide how we think, act, and collaborate to drive lasting impact.

We act locally and engage globally.

We stay close to the needs and realities within countries and across borders, while bringing the strength of global networks, resources, and perspectives to every challenge we take on.

We are a trusted partner.

We know trust is an essential component to achieving success. And, even more so, we know it is not simply gained but nurtured and reinforced over time. We strive to be trusted in all that we do – both as individuals and collectively as the Digital Impact Alliance. This includes working transparently and holding ourselves accountable to our partners, funders, and all those working towards a positive digital future to maintain that trust.

We are a learning organization.

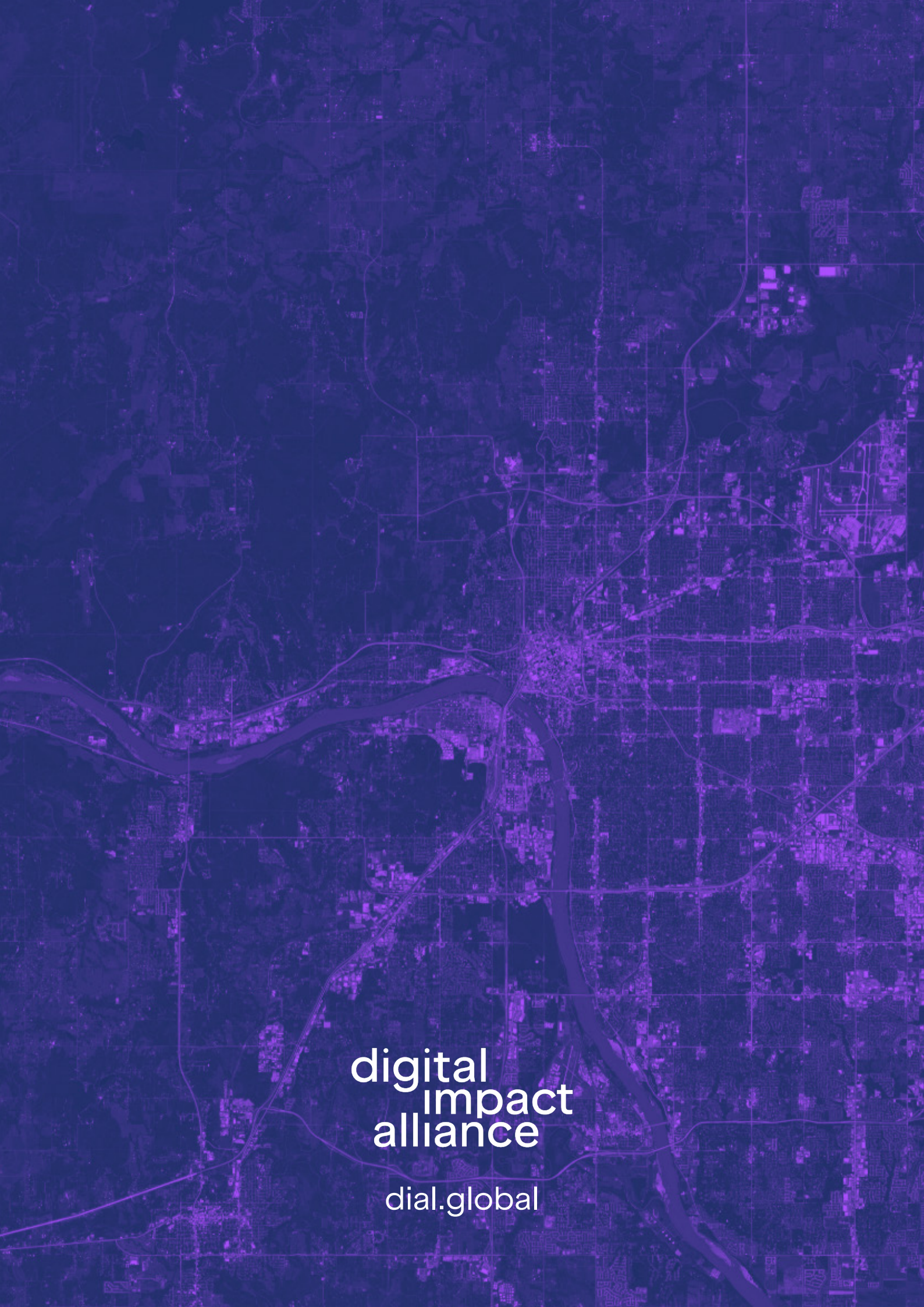
We learn in everything we do, capturing insights across all our work and sharing those openly with our partners, funders, and the wider community alike. Just as importantly, we internalize those lessons – turning knowledge into practice so that we, and those we work with, grow stronger over time.

We are big picture thinkers.

We are always looking beyond individual projects to envision the broader transformation we want to help catalyze. We thrive on tackling complex challenges and identifying the strategic levers, partnerships, and investments that can unlock scalable, inclusive impact. Our work is guided by a long-term vision: not just solving for today, but shaping the conditions for a more equitable digital future.

We put people at the heart of everything we do.

We are as passionate about realizing a positive digital future for others as we are about shaping it for ourselves. We remain firmly rooted in the belief that data and digital technology can deliver meaningful outcomes for everyone – if people are put at the center, every step of the way.

An aerial photograph of a city, likely in South America, showing a river winding through the urban landscape. The city is characterized by a dense grid of buildings and streets, with some green spaces interspersed. The river is a prominent feature, flowing from the upper left towards the bottom right of the frame. The overall color palette is dominated by the dark, muted tones of the city and the river, with some lighter areas representing open spaces or different types of vegetation.

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