

# Data Science Champions Network in Africa

## Terms of Reference

### 1. Background

In November 2023, the UN Regional Hub for Africa, with partners from the Office for National Statistics and US Census Bureau, hosted a workshop to determine the maturity of NSOs in the use of big data and administrative data. Delegates from Namibia, Tanzania, Zanzibar, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Somalia and Zimbabwe attended the workshop.

Through the discussions, the organisers elicited the need for an African data science network as delegates expressed the lack of a community, and although they were trying to champion the use of data science at their NSO, they felt isolated. Hence, the notion for the Data Science Champions Network in Africa was initiated.

### 2. Aims and Objectives

Developing a Data Science community for official statistics across Africa aims to ensure that those who participate feel *inspired* and *supported* in their data science journeys. The Data Science Champions Network will achieve this by providing members with a forum where they can:

- Discuss developments in data science and how they may be applied in the production of official statistics (specific to Africa)
- Get peer review of proposed methodology
- Learn from the experience of others
- Ask questions and for advice when required
- Showcase successful projects
- Build up a network of people interested in data science

The two-way flow of information will also enable the UN Regional Hub for Africa and other stakeholders to understand the current big data research underway, the challenges being encountered and the big data / data science capability gaps at NSOs. This information will help to inform the ongoing development of the work plan for the UN Regional Hub, and other partners.

### 3. Approach

**Meetings:** The Data Science Champion Network will meet virtually on a quarterly basis, during the months of February, May, August, and November each year. Opportunities will be sought for in-person meetings of the Network, where suitable projects can be identified and funding is available.

**Members:** All African NSOs are in scope to be invited into the Data Science Champions Network. Please see section (5) for more on the membership types, plus the information held in the Annex which outlines roles and responsibilities.

Experts and stakeholders will also be invited to participate and share advice, guidance and support with the NSO members. Invitations will be extended to:

- UK Data Science Campus International Development team
- US Census Bureau International Programmes Unit
- Paris 21
- African Union
- African Development Bank
- Other stakeholders who can provide expert advice and guidance such as academics and other NSOs

**Out of scope:** The UN Regional Hub, experts and stakeholders will not be expected to work with NSOs or act as technical advisors for big data / data science projects **beyond** the quarterly meetings. This includes resolving any data access issues that may be pertinent to a particular NSO. Such work may only proceed where a formal MoU agreement is established between the NSO and partner.

#### 4. Expected Outcomes

Members of the Data Science Champions Network can expect the following outcomes, through participation:

- Peer support for developing data science capabilities and overcoming the challenges to implementing big data and data science into official statistics
- Strengthened relationships between other NSOs and stakeholders
- Better communication between needs and activities
- Better awareness of the Regional Hub's website and resources

#### 5. How to become a Network member

The Data Science Champions Network will consist of representatives from different NSOs across Africa. The member must be part of an NSO team, that is working with or considering working with big data and data science at the NSO. There may be more than one member, and more than one Champion, per NSO.

There are two membership types:

**Champions:** The Champion role should be held by team leads but is open to any staff who is able to commit to actively championing data science across their NSO, as per the roles and responsibilities.

**Practitioners:** The Practitioner role is for staff who are not able to commit to the responsibilities of the Champion role, due to inexperience, current job role, other commitments, etc.

Champions and Practitioners of the network have equal opportunity to attend meetings and participate in the network. More information on the roles and responsibilities can be found in the Annex.

**Get in touch** - If you are a member of a team embarking on big data and data science at an African NSO and you would like to become a Data Science Champion or Practitioner, please email [regionalhubforafrica@un.org](mailto:regionalhubforafrica@un.org)

## **Annex - Roles and Responsibilities**

**Data Science Champions** – *must be part of an NSO team that is working with big data / data science at the NSO*

1. Share knowledge of data science methods, research and good practice by regularly participating at network meetings and by communicating meeting outcomes across their department.
2. Help other members understand the current data science work taking place at their NSO, including how big data / data science methods are being implemented. This includes helping others in their NSO understand the current big data / data science work being researched or implemented at other African NSOs.
3. Champion and promote the use of appropriate data science methods and software packages.
4. Identify gaps in their own data science capability and the capability of others at their NSO; identify the training required and commit to ensuring its delivery.
5. Help promote data science guidance and training at their NSO.
6. Keep abreast of new developments in data science methods to maintain their own development.
7. Build the Data Science Champion role into their personal objectives, if possible.

**Data Science Practitioners** – *must be part of an NSO team that is working with, or considering working with, big data / data science at the NSO*

1. Share knowledge of data science methods, research and good practice through participating at network meetings.
2. Use appropriate data science methods and software packages in their own work.
3. Identify gaps in their own data science capability, identify the training required to fill these and commit to undertaking it.
4. Keep abreast of new developments in data science methods to help identify opportunities for personal development, as well as for the Network.
5. Build the Data Science Practitioner role into their personal objectives, if possible.

## **UN Regional Hub for Africa**

1. Act as a Data Science Champion.
2. Organise and facilitate network meetings.
3. Manage the network membership list(s) and mailing list(s).
4. Champion and advertise the network across African NSOs.
5. Facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practice across the Network.

## **Other stakeholders e.g., ONS UK, Paris 21, US Census Bureau**

1. Act as a Data Science Champion.
2. Attend network meetings.
3. Share knowledge and best practice