

Making Data Comprehensible: Mapping Young African Statisticians and Data Scientists

A new YASA study is building an evidence base on where young statisticians are, what they do, and how Africa can better use their skills to turn data into action.

Across Africa, the demand for timely, reliable data has never been higher—from tracking progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to delivering on Africa’s Agenda 2063. Yet, traditional data systems can be slow and costly, while rapid advances in technology are creating new opportunities to generate insights faster and at scale. Young people with skills in statistics and data science are well placed to help close this gap—if their expertise can be identified, supported, and meaningfully engaged.

However, the pipeline remains limited. With tertiary enrolment in Sub-Saharan Africa still low, the continent has a relatively small pool of graduates trained in statistics and data science. At the same time, there is no comprehensive picture of where young African statisticians are located, the institutions and sectors they work in, or the roles they play in generating and translating data for decision-making. This makes it harder for governments, National Statistics Offices, universities, and partners to design initiatives that connect data needs with available talent.

Making Data Comprehensible – Phase I: Mapping YAS in Africa and Their Role is a new research project led by the Young African Statisticians Association (YASA). The study will virtually map and estimate the population of Young African Statisticians (YAS) and data scientists (aged 18–35), including those living and working on the continent and in the diaspora. It is part of a broader YASA initiative to strengthen data comprehension by promoting quality skills and modern techniques—including artificial intelligence and machine learning—among young statisticians.

What the study will do

- Map and estimate the geographic, demographic, and professional distribution of Young African Statisticians in Africa and the diaspora.
- Assess how YAS are contributing to statistical and data science initiatives linked to Africa’s development goals.
- Synthesize the potential of YAS as key drivers of Africa’s statistical development.
- Inform strategies and programs that strengthen the role of YAS in Africa’s digital and development agenda.

The research will use a cross-sectional, online mixed-methods survey—combining structured questions with open-ended responses to capture both measurable trends and lived experiences. YASA will reach participants through professional networks, universities, National Statistics Offices, online platforms, and diaspora communities, with snowball sharing

encouraged to broaden reach. The study is designed to achieve wide regional representation, with an overall target sample of approximately 480 respondents.

Why this matters The findings will help decision-makers understand the “missing link” between available young statistical talent and the growing demand for data expertise. Governments and partners can use the results to plan investments in tertiary training, statistical literacy, and youth employment pathways. Universities and training institutions can strengthen or tailor programs in statistics, data science, and related fields. For YASA, the evidence will support advocacy, targeted capacity-building, and stronger platforms for young statisticians to contribute to evidence-based policy and development.

As an online multi-country study, ethical review was obtained through a recognized Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participation is voluntary, with informed consent and clear safeguards for confidentiality and data security.

Get involved If you are a young African statistician or data scientist—or you work with communities of young data professionals—YASA welcomes your support in sharing this initiative and helping the study reach diverse respondents across Africa and the diaspora. Follow YASA channels for updates on the study launch, data collection, and key findings from Phase I of *Making Data Comprehensible*.

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