Chapter 9
Corporate Data Responsibility in East Africa:
Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice

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ABSTRACT

East Africa's rapid digital connectivity growth without proper regulatory frameworks, notably in data protection, places regulatory obligations on technology actors. The chapter uses corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate digital responsibility (CDR) to examine how firms handle data privacy and ethical issues in the digital world. The research uses various case studies to illuminate the practical obstacles of data responsibility solutions. The lack of specific CSR and CDR techniques remains a major implementation gap despite actors' awareness and efforts to create complete policies. This emphasizes the need for context-specific guidelines to connect policy

development and real-world application to ensure that the growing digital economy aligns with human rights and state goals.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter elucidates the profound implications of rapid digitalization and the exponential growth in internet usage on global socio-economic landscapes and human rights frameworks. In the face of such unprecedented digital expansion, highlighted by the increase from 1 billion to 4.9 billion internet users within 15 years, the necessity for a concerted, multi-stakeholder approach to managing the emergent risks—ranging from privacy breaches to cyberattacks—becomes paramount (Casella & Formenti, 2018). This necessity is underscored by António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's Digital Economy Report 2021, where he calls for collaborative efforts to address the potential for abuse and misuse of data by various actors, underlining the consequential nature of data usage not only for economic and trade development but also for human rights, peace, and security (Casella & Formenti, 2018). Simultaneously, the chapter reveals a striking discrepancy in global internet access, with a significant digital divide between developed and developing nations, where approximately 2.9 billion people, predominantly in the latter, remain offline. This gap not only underscores inequalities but also signifies a vast, untapped potential for economic growth and digital value creation in the global South, necessitating substantial investments to achieve Sustainable Development Goal number 9: affordable, reliable, and sustainable internet for all by 2030 (Hasan & Tucci, 2010).

Investments in the African ICT industry, particularly highlighted by the involvement of the private sector, African governments, international consortia, and notably, China, under its Belt and Road Initiative, underscore the global interest in developing Africa's digital infrastructure (Corrigan, 2020). Yet, this interest and the accompanying investments are not without controversy. Skepticism regarding the motivations behind these investments and their potential impacts—encompassing environmental, social, and governance considerations—points to a complex interplay of opportunities and risks, including the potential for telecommunication monopolies, mass surveillance, and data misuse. In light of these dynamics, the imperative for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Digital Responsibility (CDR) emerges as critical frameworks for managing the societal impacts of digitalization (Peltola et al., 2021). These frameworks advocate for a holistic approach to corporate accountability, extending beyond economic impacts to encompass environmental and societal considerations, with CDR specifically addressing the ethical challenges posed by the digital age (Herden et al., 2021). The evolving chapter on CDR, distinct

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