



PROJECT: YOUTH ACTION BRIDGE

EU–AU Governance Assessment Framework for Institutional Transparency and Human Dignity

Executive Summary

This policy framework presents a comprehensive mechanism for assessing and strengthening institutional transparency and accountability in EU–AU cooperation projects. Developed through the AU–EU Youth Advocacy Bridge initiative, implemented by Svjetski Savez Mladih Jugoistočna Europa (SSM JIE, Croatia) in partnership with SPES Institute for Humanity and AI (Ethiopia), this framework reflects comparative research conducted in maternal health governance and value-based education across both continents.

The framework introduces **five core governance indicators** through which public and educational institutions can assess how policy commitments translate into transparent and participatory practice. These indicators explicitly account for the impact of technological advancement on democratic participation and institutional accountability. The framework emerges from Activity 1 (Targeted Comparative Analysis engaging 18 youth researchers from marginalized backgrounds) and is operationalized through Activity 2 (Cross-Continental Capacity Building in Zagreb, November 2025), which equipped youth advocates with practical assessment competencies.

Research findings demonstrate that while European and African institutions share aspirations for accountability and citizen inclusion, operational realities differ significantly. European systems demonstrate structural maturity in transparency mechanisms and data accessibility; however, formal consultation structures remain underutilized in civic practice. African institutions, particularly in Ethiopia, exhibit strong community-based ethical foundations and participatory enthusiasm, yet face challenges in procedural consistency, technical capacity for data collection, and institutional autonomy. Technology governance emerges as a critical factor influencing youth participation and institutional responsiveness across both regions.

This framework bridges these differences by providing youth advocates, policymakers, and civil society organizations with practical tools to monitor institutional performance, identify accountability gaps, and advocate for evidence-based reforms that advance both technical capacity and human dignity in governance.

1. Background and Rationale

Good governance represents the foundation of sustainable development and democratic legitimacy, yet institutional accountability remains fragmented across regions and sectors. In European contexts, governance frameworks benefit from stable regulatory systems, legal oversight mechanisms, and established information-access protocols. Conversely, African institutions operate within complex environments characterized by resource constraints, centralized decision-making structures, and cultural diversity that require nuanced approaches to accountability.

This divergence presents a dual challenge for AU–EU cooperation: harmonizing technical governance standards while safeguarding ethical and human-centered values. Additionally, rapid technological advancement—from artificial intelligence to digital governance platforms—introduces new dimensions of institutional accountability that traditional governance frameworks inadequately address. Technology can democratize participation through accessible digital platforms, yet simultaneously create new barriers through digital divides and algorithmic opacity.

The AU–EU Youth Advocacy Bridge project directly addresses this challenge through youth-led governance assessment. The project's Activity 1 engaged 18 youth researchers (40% from marginalized backgrounds) in conducting a Targeted Comparative Analysis of maternal health governance in Croatia and Ethiopia. Through structured working groups, expert consultations, and evidence-based scenario analysis, youth researchers identified recurring governance gaps: restricted access to disaggregated budget information, inconsistent policy enforcement, limited youth participation mechanisms, and emerging concerns regarding digital governance transparency.

The project's Activity 2 (Cross-Continental Capacity Building delivered in Zagreb, November 7–9, 2025) equipped 10 youth advocates and organizational representatives with advanced competencies in governance monitoring and institutional accountability. The three-day training integrated critical modules on governance foundations, ethical governance in the digital age, value-based education as a case study for institutional reform, and co-creation of practical assessment frameworks. Participants examined how international standards translate into institutional practice, identified accountability gaps linked to technological implementation, and developed youth-led monitoring methodologies.

The present framework operationalizes these learning outcomes, providing a policy-oriented assessment tool grounded in comparative EU–AU experience and informed by direct youth participation. It reflects the commitment articulated in the EU Youth Action Plan to connect young people across continents, encourage collaboration, and enable youth to influence policy at all governance levels.

2. Purpose and Objectives

This governance assessment framework serves as a structured yet flexible mechanism enabling AU–EU institutions to evaluate institutional performance against five core accountability dimensions. The framework is designed specifically for youth advocates, civil society organizations, educational institutions, and policymakers seeking evidence-based approaches to governance reform.

Primary objectives include:

- **Strengthen institutional accountability and transparency** within maternal health, education, and allied social sectors through youth-led monitoring mechanisms informed by practical assessment indicators
- **Facilitate cross-regional learning and policy harmonization** by enabling systematic comparison of governance practices, identification of transferable good practices, and evidence-based dialogue between European and African institutional actors
- **Integrate ethical and human-centered dimensions into governance assessment** by anchoring institutional transparency in principles of human dignity, recognizing that every person possesses intrinsic worth and has rights to information, meaningful participation, and institutional responsiveness
- **Empower youth and community actors as agents of policy accountability** by providing practical tools enabling young people to monitor government and institutional decisions, document governance gaps, and advocate for institutional reforms that advance democratic participation
- **Address technology governance as an integral accountability dimension** by examining how digital advancement and AI implementation affect institutional transparency, citizen access to information, and youth participation in democratic processes

3. The Five Governance Indicators

3.1 Budget Transparency

Definition: Public access to accurate, timely, and disaggregated financial information regarding institutional resource allocation, expenditure tracking, and financial accountability mechanisms.

Assessment Rationale: Budget transparency determines institutional credibility and enables evidence-based advocacy. Citizens and youth cannot assess institutional performance without understanding resource flows, spending priorities, and financial responsiveness to policy commitments. Additionally, technology increasingly mediates budget transparency—through open-data platforms, digital disclosure systems, and algorithmic budget analysis tools.

European Context (Croatia): Croatian institutions have achieved relatively advanced budget transparency through national open-data platforms (e.g., FINA system), EU procurement

transparency requirements, and central government budget publication standards. However, transparency remains concentrated at national level; local municipal budgets and discretionary allocations by education and health officials often lack public accessibility. Digital systems for budget tracking exist but require technical literacy for meaningful citizen analysis.

African Context (Ethiopia): Ethiopian budget structures are typically published in aggregate form, with limited disaggregation by program, region, or beneficiary category. Budget information is often delayed (released months after expenditure), limiting real-time monitoring capacity. While some health and education institutions maintain financial records, systematic public disclosure mechanisms remain underdeveloped. Digital budget platforms are nascent, and internet connectivity limitations restrict citizen access to digital systems.

Assessment Scoring (0–5 Scale):

Score	Criteria
0	No public budget information available; financial records not accessible to citizens or civil society
1	Aggregate budget figures published irregularly; no disaggregation by program/region; significant delays in disclosure
2	Basic budget information published annually; minimal disaggregation; limited accessibility for non-technical users
3	Regular budget disclosure (annual/quarterly); moderate disaggregation; accessible through government websites; some digital platforms available
4	Comprehensive disaggregated budget information published regularly; open-data platforms accessible; user-friendly formats for citizens; timely updates
5	Real-time budget tracking; full disaggregation; multiple accessible formats (digital, print, community languages); public feedback mechanisms; participatory budget review processes

Technology Governance Dimension:

Technology enhances budget transparency through automated open-data portals, blockchain-based expenditure tracking, and citizen-accessible budget analysis tools. However, technology also introduces opacity risks: algorithmic budget categorization may obscure actual spending patterns; digital divides may exclude citizens without internet access; data protection concerns may restrict financial disclosure. Youth advocates must assess whether digital budget systems democratize or restrict transparency.

Practical Monitoring Questions for Youth Advocates:

- Is detailed budget information publicly available in accessible formats?
- What disaggregation levels are provided (institution, program, region, beneficiary demographic)?
- How timely is budget publication relative to actual expenditure?
- Are digital budget platforms user-friendly and accessible to non-technical citizens?

- Do budget systems enable youth participation in budget reviews or feedback?
- How are algorithmic tools (if used) validated to ensure accurate budget categorization?

3.2 Data Quality and Timeliness

Definition: Availability of reliable, accurate, and timely data regarding institutional performance, service delivery, and governance outcomes; coupled with institutional capacity to collect, analyze, and disseminate data supporting evidence-based policy decisions.

Assessment Rationale: Evidence-based policymaking requires high-quality data collected through rigorous methodologies. Poor data quality—including inconsistent definitions, incomplete coverage, methodological bias, or falsified reporting—undermines institutional learning and enables governance failures. Data timeliness is equally critical: annual data releases provide insufficient basis for responsive institutional management. Additionally, digital data systems introduce new quality challenges including algorithmic bias, data privacy conflicts, and the risk of digital systems perpetuating historical inequities.

European Context (Croatia): Croatian health and education institutions maintain quarterly reporting systems aligned with EU statistical standards. Data collection methodologies are documented and relatively consistent across institutions. However, data often remains concentrated in technical formats inaccessible to ordinary citizens; data disaggregation by demographic characteristics (gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geographic location) remains incomplete; and systematic youth outcome tracking is underdeveloped. Digital health and education management systems exist but operate in silos, limiting integrated analysis.

African Context (Ethiopia): Ethiopian data collection often relies on annual cycles aligned with donor reporting requirements rather than institutional management needs. Data quality challenges include inconsistent definitions across regions, incomplete coverage (particularly in rural areas), limited technical capacity for data analysis, and weak data validation mechanisms. Health and education data are frequently collected through paper-based systems, creating delays and transcription errors. Digital data systems are expanding but face infrastructure constraints; internet connectivity limitations restrict access; and data security concerns may limit sharing among institutions.

Assessment Scoring (0–5 Scale):

Score	Criteria
0	Minimal data collection; no systematic reporting; data quality not verified; no public data access
1	Irregular data collection; annual cycles only; significant quality gaps; limited verification; minimal public access
2	Regular annual data collection; basic quality assurance; some disaggregation; delayed public release (6+ months lag)
3	Quarterly or more frequent collection; documented methodologies; moderate disaggregation; timely release (1–3 months lag); accessible online

4	Regular collection (quarterly or more frequent); rigorous quality assurance; comprehensive disaggregation; rapid release (within 1 month); multiple accessible formats
5	Real-time or near-real-time data collection; independent data quality verification; complete disaggregation including youth outcomes; immediate public access; participatory data interpretation

Technology Governance Dimension:

Digital data systems accelerate data collection, enable real-time monitoring, and facilitate citizen access through interactive dashboards. However, technology introduces new risks: algorithmic bias in data analysis may reproduce existing inequities; digital divides may exclude citizens without technological literacy; automated systems may obscure data limitations; and cybersecurity vulnerabilities may compromise data integrity. Youth advocates must assess whether technology democratizes data access or concentrates analytical power with technical elites.

Practical Monitoring Questions for Youth Advocates:

- What data collection frequency enables institutional responsiveness?
- Are data definitions consistent across regions and time periods?
- What demographic disaggregation is provided (age, gender, rural/urban, socioeconomic status)?
- How is data quality verified and validated?
- Is data publicly accessible, and in what formats?
- Do youth have meaningful access to and understanding of institutional data?
- If digital systems are used, are they transparent regarding methodologies and limitations?
- Are there mechanisms for citizens to identify data errors or gaps?

3.3 Policy Enforcement

Definition: Consistent implementation of policy commitments through institutional mechanisms, including internal compliance systems, inter-institutional coordination, performance monitoring, and accountability for non-compliance.

Assessment Rationale: Well-designed policies without consistent enforcement remain rhetorical commitments. Policy implementation requires sustained institutional capacity, clear accountability mechanisms, inter-departmental coordination, and responsiveness to implementation barriers. Technology increasingly mediates policy enforcement through digital compliance monitoring, automated enforcement systems, and digital audit trails. However, automated enforcement may lack human judgment; digital systems may prioritize easily measurable outputs over meaningful outcomes; and technology may obscure implementation barriers requiring contextual understanding.

European Context (Croatia): Croatian institutions typically demonstrate formal policy compliance through documented procedures, audit systems, and regulatory oversight. However, civic engagement remains underdeveloped: policies formally adopted are inconsistently implemented in practice; inter-institutional coordination is often fragmented; and implementation barriers affecting marginalized populations are inadequately addressed. Digital compliance systems exist but may prioritize administrative metrics over substantive policy outcomes. Youth consultation requirements are mandated but frequently implemented as token participation rather than meaningful influence.

African Context (Ethiopia): Ethiopian policy implementation faces distinct challenges: limited inter-institutional coordination at federal and regional levels; insufficient audit systems and compliance verification; weak capacity for sustained implementation amid resource constraints; and implementation decisions often concentrated in central authorities with limited local responsiveness. However, implementation frequently reflects ethical commitments and community accountability values. Digital systems for policy monitoring are nascent; implementation often relies on in-person verification and community-based accountability mechanisms.

Assessment Scoring (0–5 Scale):

Score	Criteria
0	Policies adopted but minimally implemented; no systematic monitoring; inconsistent compliance; no accountability for non-implementation
1	Limited policy implementation; occasional monitoring; significant compliance gaps; accountability unclear
2	Partial policy implementation; annual monitoring; moderate compliance gaps; accountability mechanisms present but limited enforcement
3	Consistent policy implementation across most areas; regular monitoring (quarterly); documented compliance; clear accountability procedures
4	Systematic implementation with rigorous monitoring; inter-institutional coordination; rapid response to implementation barriers; documented accountability actions
5	Full policy implementation; real-time monitoring; proactive inter-institutional coordination; youth and community feedback integrated into implementation; transparent accountability mechanisms

Technology Governance Dimension:

Digital systems enable automated compliance monitoring, real-time policy tracking, and transparent documentation of implementation decisions. However, technology introduces risks: algorithmic enforcement may penalize officials without understanding contextual barriers; digital audit systems may prioritize easily measurable metrics; automated systems may obscure implementation complexity; and technology may restrict decision-making flexibility required for contextual responsiveness. Youth advocates must examine whether technology enforces policy uniformly or perpetuates inequitable implementation.

Practical Monitoring Questions for Youth Advocates:

- Are policy commitments consistently implemented across all institutional levels?
 - What monitoring systems verify policy implementation?
 - Are inter-departmental coordination mechanisms in place?
 - How are implementation barriers identified and addressed?
 - What accountability mechanisms exist for non-compliance?
 - Do youth and community members have access to implementation data?
 - If technology is used for compliance monitoring, are metrics transparent and meaningful?
 - Are implementation decisions documented and publicly accessible?
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3.4 Independent institutional authority

Definition: Meaningful decision-making authority at local and institutional levels; organizational autonomy regarding resource allocation, personnel, and program design; and mechanisms enabling responsive governance reflecting local contexts and constituency needs.

Assessment Rationale: Centralized decision-making creates accountability gaps and limits institutional responsiveness. Local and institutional-level authority fosters innovation, contextual appropriateness, and accountability to local constituencies. However, decentralization without adequate capacity-building and resources may create new inequities. Technology affects institutional authority through digital systems enabling central monitoring and control, or alternatively, through distributed digital platforms empowering local decision-making.

European Context (Croatia): Croatian institutions operate within established legal frameworks granting municipal and school-level decision-making authority. However, centralized fiscal policies and national standards often constrain institutional autonomy; decisions regarding curricular content, hiring, and budget allocation are frequently constrained by national regulations. Digital systems increasingly enable central monitoring and control of local institutions, potentially limiting perceived autonomy even where formal authority exists.

African Context (Ethiopia): Ethiopian education and health systems reflect hierarchical structures with significant central authority concentrated in federal ministries. Regional and local institutions have limited autonomy regarding budget allocation, personnel decisions, and program design. However, decision-making frequently incorporates community consultation and local stakeholder input through traditional accountability mechanisms. Over-centralization limits responsiveness and innovation; simultaneously, insufficient local capacity and resources constrain meaningful decentralization.

Assessment Scoring (0–5 Scale):

Score	Criteria
0	Minimal local autonomy; centralized control; decisions made without local input
1	Limited local authority; significant central constraints; local input advisory only
2	Moderate local autonomy; discretion within national parameters; local input considered in some decisions
3	Substantial local authority; meaningful resource allocation autonomy; local decision-making on program design; consistent stakeholder consultation
4	Strong institutional autonomy; significant control over budget and staffing; local responsiveness to community priorities; participatory governance mechanisms
5	Maximum meaningful autonomy; full control over core decisions; community co-governance; transparent decision-making; mechanisms for accountability to local constituencies

Technology Governance Dimension:

Digital systems can support institutional autonomy through distributed information systems, participatory planning platforms, and community feedback mechanisms. Conversely, technology may enable centralized surveillance and control through digital monitoring systems that concentrate decision-making authority at higher levels. Youth advocates must assess whether technology strengthens local autonomy or centralizes institutional control.

Practical Monitoring Questions for Youth Advocates:

- What decisions are made at local versus central institutional levels?
 - Do local institutions have meaningful control over budget allocation?
 - Can local institutions adapt programs to community priorities?
 - Are personnel decisions made locally or centrally?
 - Do local institutions have capacity (training, resources) to exercise autonomy?
 - Are community members and youth included in local decision-making?
 - If technology is used for institutional management, does it enable or constrain local autonomy?
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3.5 Citizen Participation

Definition: Meaningful involvement of community members, youth, and marginalized populations in institutional decisions affecting them; mechanisms enabling informed participation; and institutional responsiveness to citizen input.

Assessment Rationale: Democratic legitimacy requires genuine citizen participation, not token consultation. Meaningful participation requires accessible information, inclusive processes accommodating diverse voices, institutional commitment to integrating citizen feedback, and mechanisms enabling citizens to hold institutions accountable. Technology can democratize participation through digital consultation platforms and youth engagement tools. However, technology may create new barriers through digital divides, algorithmic visibility affecting whose voices are heard, and digital participation structures privileging technical voices over lived experience.

European Context (Croatia): Croatian institutions maintain formal consultation mechanisms, including education councils, health committees, and community forums. However, participation rates remain low; working-class and rural constituencies are underrepresented; youth participation is minimal despite legal requirements; and institutional responsiveness to citizen input is inconsistent. Digital consultation platforms exist but have modest adoption; online participation may reproduce inequities favoring digitally literate populations.

African Context (Ethiopia): Ethiopian institutions display strong enthusiasm for community participation, reflecting cultural traditions of collective decision-making and community accountability. However, participation is frequently constrained by limited awareness of formal mechanisms, time and resource barriers for marginalized populations, and inadequate institutional processes for integrating community input into final decisions. Traditional participation mechanisms (community meetings, elder consultation) are robust but not systematized; digital participation tools are minimal; and participation of youth and women remains limited despite participation enthusiasm.

Assessment Scoring (0–5 Scale):

Score	Criteria
0	No citizen participation mechanisms; closed decision-making; no community input
1	Minimal participation mechanisms; limited outreach; participation advisory only
2	Participation mechanisms exist; moderate outreach; feedback collected but not systematically integrated; limited youth/marginalized population involvement
3	Regular participation processes; diverse stakeholder engagement; feedback documented and considered; some youth participation; some institutional responsiveness
4	Robust participation mechanisms; inclusive outreach (rural, marginalized, youth); documented feedback integration; institutional commitment to citizen input; participatory monitoring

5	Co-governance structures with genuine community decision-making authority; diverse and continuous participation; real-time feedback integration; youth and marginalized populations fully included; accountability mechanisms for institutional responsiveness
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Technology Governance Dimension: Digital platforms can expand participation by reducing geographic barriers, enabling asynchronous engagement, and providing accessibility features. However, technology may exclude populations lacking digital access, literacy, or connectivity; algorithmic systems may amplify certain voices while silencing others; and digital participation may substitute for in-person accountability. Youth advocates must assess whether technology democratizes participation or creates new exclusions.

Practical Monitoring Questions for Youth Advocates:

- What participation mechanisms exist for citizens to influence institutional decisions?
- Are participation processes accessible to marginalized populations (rural, low-income, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities)?
- Are youth meaningfully included in participation processes?
- How is citizen feedback documented and integrated into decisions?
- Are institutions transparent regarding how citizen input affected final decisions?
- If digital participation platforms are used, who has access and what barriers exist?
- Are participation processes ongoing or limited to specific decisions?
- Do institutions communicate outcomes to participants?

4. Comparative Insights: Croatia and Ethiopia

4.1 Transparency and Access to Information

Croatia benefits from stronger legal frameworks for information access, including Freedom of Information legislation, EU transparency requirements, and established government websites. Budget reports, policy documents, and institutional data are regularly published. However, accessibility remains stratified: technical formats exclude ordinary citizens; data disaggregation is incomplete; and digital systems require technological literacy. Information exists but requires advocacy capacity to interpret and utilize effectively.

Ethiopia's challenge is not primarily intent but technical capacity and institutional infrastructure. National commitment to transparency is evident in policy frameworks and multi-stakeholder dialogues. However, systematic disclosure mechanisms are underdeveloped; institutional capacity for consistent data collection is limited by resources; and internet connectivity constrains digital access. Traditional accountability mechanisms—community meetings, elder consultation, institutional testimonies—remain robust and trusted. Scaling transparency requires building institutional capacity rather than importing European technological systems.

4.2 Policy Implementation

Both Croatian and Ethiopian systems face implementation gaps, though for distinct reasons. Croatian institutions demonstrate formal compliance and audit systems; however, implementation often prioritizes administrative metrics over substantive outcomes; civic engagement is limited; and marginalized populations experience inconsistent policy application. Implementation is procedurally mature but substantively limited.

Ethiopian implementation frequently reflects ethical values and community accountability; however, insufficient inter-institutional coordination, limited audit capacity, and resource constraints create inconsistency. Implementation is substantively committed but procedurally underdeveloped. Technology offers potential for both systems: digital monitoring could accelerate Croatian substantive implementation and Ethiopian procedural development. However, technology alone cannot address the distinct implementation barriers each system faces.

4.3 Citizen and Youth Engagement

Ethiopia demonstrates higher enthusiasm for participatory governance and community-led reform. Youth populations are engaged and motivated; community traditions support collective accountability; and participatory momentum exists. However, participation lacks structural inclusion mechanisms; youth consultation is often informal; and systemic barriers limit sustained engagement.

Croatia offers established institutional mechanisms for participation; however, civic participation rates are low; youth involvement is minimal despite mandates; and participatory processes often function as token consultation rather than genuine influence. Institutional structures exist but lack participatory culture.

4.4 Technology Governance: A Crosscutting Challenge

Both regions face emerging accountability challenges regarding technology deployment. In Croatia, digital systems are increasingly embedded in governance but lack transparency regarding algorithmic decision-making and data use. In Ethiopia, technology implementation may introduce new accountability gaps if systems are deployed without addressing existing capacity constraints.

Youth advocates across both regions identify **technology governance and democratic participation** as emerging priorities requiring governance framework attention. Youth recognize that artificial intelligence, data analytics, and digital platforms are reshaping institutional accountability but are insufficiently addressed in traditional governance frameworks.

5. Linking Governance and Human Dignity

The principle of **human dignity**—that every person possesses intrinsic worth and deserves respect—is both ethical and institutional. Transparent governance honors the person's right to information; participatory governance respects the person's capacity for self-determination; and accountable governance prevents institutional abuse of power.

Human dignity in governance translates into practical principles:

- **Right to Information:** Citizens deserve access to information regarding institutional decisions affecting them, in formats they can understand and utilize.
- **Right to Participation:** Citizens possess intrinsic capacity for meaningful engagement in decisions affecting them, not token consultation.
- **Right to Accountability:** Citizens deserve institutional responsiveness and mechanisms to hold institutions accountable for decisions and commitments.
- **Right to Respect for Context:** Citizens and communities possess contextual knowledge and cultural values warranting institutional respect, not imposition of external standards.

The AU–EU Youth Advocacy Bridge project operationalizes these principles through youth-led governance assessment. Young people themselves conduct institutional monitoring, identify governance gaps, and advocate for reforms. This approach honors youth human dignity by recognizing their capacity for leadership and their right to shape policies affecting them.

Value-based education approaches examined during Activity 2 trainings (comprehensive sexuality education, value-based curricula in Ethiopian schools) demonstrate how institutional respect for human dignity translates into responsive, culturally-informed governance. When education reflects community values while maintaining ethical commitments to inclusivity and evidence-based approaches, governance strengthens. When institutions impose external models without community participation, governance legitimacy erodes.

6. Methodological Approach

This framework was developed through the following rigorous methodology:

Evidence Gathering (Activity 1): 18 youth researchers from Croatia and Ethiopia (40% from marginalized backgrounds) conducted structured analysis of maternal health governance. Sessions engaged youth in document review of budget reports, policy frameworks, and governance assessments; facilitated working groups identifying context-specific accountability gaps; and expert consultations with political advocacy practitioners and civil society actors.

Capacity Building (Activity 2):

Cross-continental trainings in Zagreb and Addi Ababa (November 7–9, 2025) equipped 10 youth advocates with advanced assessment competencies. Three-day training modules integrated governance foundations, ethical governance in the digital age, comparative institutional analysis, and practical framework development.

Indicator Development:

Five governance indicators were operationalized through:

- Document analysis from government, civil society, and international governance frameworks
- Stakeholder consultations with policymakers, educators, health officials, and youth leaders
- Scoring matrices enabling consistent evaluation (0–5 scales)
- Cross-validation by governance experts from both regions
- Integration of youth feedback regarding practical usability

Thematic Integration: Technology governance and democratic participation were embedded across all five indicators rather than treated as separate dimensions, reflecting Activity 2 training emphasis on how digital advancement reshapes institutional accountability and youth participation pathways.

7. Key Findings from Comparative Analysis

7.1 Institutional Accountability Remains Uneven

Both European and African institutions display accountability strengths in specific areas and gaps in others. Croatia demonstrates advanced budget transparency and formal oversight mechanisms; however, civic engagement is underdeveloped and implementation focuses on procedural compliance rather than substantive outcomes. Ethiopia demonstrates strong community-based accountability values and participatory enthusiasm; however, systematic transparency mechanisms and inter-institutional coordination are underdeveloped. Neither region provides comprehensive accountability across all five indicators.

7.2 Transparency Is a Shared Value but Practiced Differently

Both regions recognize transparency as essential to institutional legitimacy. European institutions emphasize formal information disclosure and legal compliance; African institutions emphasize moral responsibility and community accountability. These approaches are complementary: formal systems provide structure and consistency, while community approaches provide legitimacy and ethical grounding. Effective governance integrates both perspectives.

7.3 Youth Participation Emerges as a Governance Pillar

Activity 1 and Activity 2 findings demonstrate youth capacity to identify governance gaps, propose evidence-based solutions, and advocate effectively. Youth perspectives differ meaningfully from adult stakeholders, particularly regarding technology governance and democratic participation. Youth expect institutions to be responsive and accountable; they recognize governance failures affecting their futures; and they possess specific insights into how technology affects their participation.

7.4 Technology Governance Requires Explicit Attention

Traditional governance frameworks inadequately address technology's impact on institutional accountability. Digital systems can democratize transparency and participation; however, they introduce new accountability gaps through algorithmic opacity, digital divides, and concentrated information power. Activity 2 training identified technology governance as a priority requiring explicit governance framework attention.

7.5 Marginalized Populations Experience Distinct Governance Gaps

Activity 1 engagement with youth from marginalized backgrounds revealed specific accountability challenges: limited information access, constrained participation opportunities, and policies inadequately addressing marginalized population needs. Governance frameworks must explicitly address equity dimensions; the five indicators must be assessed with disaggregation by demographic characteristics.

8. Policy Recommendations

8.1 Institutionalize the Governance Indicators

AU and EU institutions should formally integrate the five governance indicators into program design, implementation monitoring, and evaluation frameworks. Indicators should become standard assessment tools in education, health, and allied social sectors.

Implementation Steps:

- Develop indicator scoring guidance and training for institutional staff
- Integrate indicators into program monitoring frameworks
- Require annual institutional assessments using indicator matrices
- Establish benchmarks and improvement targets

8.2 Establish Governance Monitoring Networks

Create formal networks of youth advocates, civil society organizations, and institutional partners to conduct ongoing governance monitoring using the assessment framework. Networks should operate at municipal, regional, and national levels.

Implementation Steps:

- Train governance monitors from youth and civil society organizations
- Establish regular monitoring schedules and reporting protocols
- Create platforms for sharing monitoring findings and recommendations
- Enable direct communication between monitors and institutional decision-makers

8.3 Support Institutional Autonomy Within Accountability Structures

For decentralized systems (Croatia) and systems implementing decentralization (Ethiopia), ensure that local institutional authority is accompanied by accountability mechanisms, capacity support, and participatory governance structures.

Implementation Steps:

- Provide capacity-building support enabling local institutions to exercise autonomy effectively
- Establish transparent mechanisms for local decision-making
- Require participatory processes for resource allocation and program design
- Create accountability mechanisms linking local institutions to stakeholders and higher-level authorities

8.4 Promote Inclusive Participation Mechanisms

Institutions should systematically remove barriers to citizen participation, particularly for marginalized populations and youth. Participation mechanisms should move beyond consultation toward co-governance structures.

Implementation Steps:

- Conduct stakeholder mapping identifying excluded populations
- Design participation mechanisms specifically addressing barriers (language, time, location, accessibility)
- Allocate resources enabling participation (transportation, childcare, communication technology)
- Establish mechanisms ensuring institutional responsiveness to citizen input
- Create youth-specific participation structures recognizing youth unique perspectives and barriers

8.5 Develop Technology Governance Frameworks

Given the centrality of technology to institutional accountability, explicit technology governance frameworks should be developed addressing:

- **Transparency:** Algorithmic decision-making should be documented and subject to independent verification
- **Equity:** Digital systems should not exclude populations lacking technological access or literacy
- **Data Protection:** Personal data collected through digital systems should be protected rigorously
- **Democratic Values:** Technology should enhance rather than constrain citizen participation

Implementation Steps:

- Audit existing digital systems for governance implications
- Establish technology governance standards for new systems
- Create mechanisms for public monitoring of algorithmic decision-making
- Ensure digital literacy support for citizens accessing digital systems
- Develop data protection frameworks ensuring accountability for data use

8.6 Strengthen Data Quality and Accessibility

Institutions should prioritize data quality improvement and public accessibility:

Implementation Steps:

- Standardize data definitions across regions and time periods
- Increase collection frequency enabling real-time institutional responsiveness
- Enhance disaggregation enabling analysis of equity dimensions
- Develop accessible data formats (dashboards, community languages, non-technical presentations)
- Establish independent data quality verification mechanisms

8.7 Integrate Governance Frameworks into Civic Education

Value-based education approaches and governance frameworks should be integrated into formal and non-formal civic education, enabling youth to understand institutional accountability and develop governance literacy.

Implementation Steps:

- Develop civic education curricula addressing governance principles and assessment methodologies
- Train educators in governance concepts and youth-centered pedagogy
- Create opportunities for youth to apply governance frameworks through school-based monitoring
- Recognize youth governance monitoring in formal education systems

9. Conclusion

The EU–AU Governance Assessment Framework represents more than a technical monitoring tool. It is a bridge connecting continents, governance approaches, and generations. The framework aligns administrative efficiency with ethical purpose, ensuring that development cooperation advances human dignity alongside technical capacity.

This framework emerges from genuine AU–EU partnership grounded in the principle that young people themselves are equipped to assess institutional accountability and advocate for reform. The Youth Advocacy Bridge project demonstrates that youth from both continents can conduct rigorous governance research, identify context-specific accountability gaps, develop evidence-based recommendations, and communicate findings to institutional decision-makers.

The five governance indicators—**Budget Transparency, Data Quality and Timeliness, Policy Enforcement, Independent Institutional Authority, and Citizen Participation**—provide concrete tools enabling youth advocates and civil society organizations to monitor institutional performance. By examining how technology shapes each indicator, the framework addresses emerging accountability challenges.

The comparative insights from Croatia and Ethiopia reveal that governance reform requires neither wholesale adoption of European models nor resistance to evidence-based standards. Rather, effective governance integrates formal transparency systems with community accountability values; combines procedural consistency with contextual responsiveness; and ensures that young people and marginalized populations have meaningful influence on institutional decisions.

Implemented through the AU–EU Youth Advocacy Bridge and affiliated governance networks, this framework can transform governance culture from within. When young people are recognized as governance monitors and advocates, when institutions are held accountable through transparent assessment, and when technology enhances rather than constrains democratic participation, governance advances human dignity. Transparency and accountability become habits embedded in both institutions and people—a foundation for sustainable, just, and participatory societies on both continents.

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