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Pros and Cons of Public–Sector Data Sharing Partnerships: Lessons from a Climate Resilience Collaboration in South Africa

Data sharing partnerships are increasingly recognised as essential for addressing complex societal challenges such as climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. In 2025, a collaboration between the South African Environmental Observation Network (SAEON) and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) provided a practical example of both the opportunities and challenges associated with data sharing between institutions serving different mandates and stakeholder groups.

The experience highlights several advantages of data sharing partnerships. These include improved access to previously siloed datasets, enhanced evidence-based decision-making, reduced duplication of effort, and the creation of innovative use cases that neither organisation could have developed independently. The collaboration has enabled the development of municipal climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction applications, demonstrating the potential for shared data to generate tangible public value and strengthen community resilience.

At the same time, the process revealed common challenges associated with cross-sector data sharing. Legal and regulatory compliance requirements, differing organisational priorities, concerns around data governance and ownership, and the time required to negotiate mutually acceptable agreements can significantly delay implementation. Building trust between partners and establishing clear accountability mechanisms proved critical to overcoming these barriers.

This case study demonstrates that while data sharing partnerships require substantial investment in governance, legal frameworks, and stakeholder engagement, the benefits can outweigh the costs when aligned around a shared public-interest objective. The lessons learned provide insights for both public and private sector organisations seeking to establish trusted data-sharing ecosystems that balance innovation, risk management, and societal impact.

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