

The power of data makes Yariwo Kitiyo come alive. Yariwo is a leading specialist in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) at Esri Eastern Africa where she focuses on spatial analysis and providing geographical solutions. GIS is a computer system designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage and display all kinds of spatial or geographical data. Yariwo says she fell in love with it as soon as she first saw the tool, “It is through location analytics that we can analyze big data to unlock patterns and understand behaviour for informed decision making. Just think of any challenge from gender equity, emergency response, transportation and market segmentation among others all these have a location component to them.”

Using data effectively is one of Yariwo’s focuses. Recently, Yariwo has been working on using data to examine gender equity in Kenya. Her belief is that gender-differentiated statistics should look at more than what women’s contributions have been to society but also clearly outline major gendered issues that policymakers can address. It is through this work that gender inequality can finally be tackled and women’s rights can move forward.

Yariwo has chosen to move the conversation forward by co-founding Women In GIS Kenya, an initiative that creates the space for sustainable mentorship of women in data, science and spatial analytics as well as leverages the power of data analysis for gender equity. Women in GIS Kenya frequently work in partnership to organize mentorship and training programs for in universities. They have partnered with the Kenya Space Agency, Africa Media Hub, Esri Eastern Africa, Pathways International and the University of Nairobi. Yariwo stresses the importance of working with university students, “I am convinced that building an effective talent pool in universities is a smart investment into the future.” After learning technical skills the students are then challenged to come up with practical solutions to the newly found issues within their county.

For Yariwo, data has no real value if it does not lead to actionable solutions. What can be frustrating as a data analyst, is realising that your data is not being seen by the right people. She explains, “It’s quite interesting because even for our technical events, it’s mind-blowing how you will get really great technical people in a room and then no policymaker. It’s a very big gap that you are trying to find a workaround... where we can bring together tech people and policymakers.” To address this gap, Women In GIS organize technical sessions that include input from senior-level government officials. Additionally, in 2020, there will be frequent breakfast meeting sessions where the sole purpose will be bringing the data analysis to policymakers.

Yariwo is excited to be using an open-sourced platform called Tableau for analytics and visualizing data. The idea of the public being able to access vital data is invigorating to her. Her dream is simple, “I would want to transform data presentation and dissemination from extensive PDFs to comprehensive dashboards. I want a future that is accustomed to data presentation in a user-friendly format that can be consumed by the common ‘mwanainchi’ [average person].” As she works on completing her Masters in GIS and Remote Sensing at the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, her career’s future seems linked to that of the future of

data analysis in Kenya. “Data rockstars’ are the missing link we so urgently need for open governance and policy change,” Yariwo emphasizes. Not only is she a data rockstar herself, but Yariwo is also ensuring that the future generation of Kenyans will not be lacking them.