

Data for Development

An Action Plan to Monitor the Sustainable Development Goals
And Fulfill the Hopes of the Data Revolution



April 17, 2015

About this paper: In October 2014, UN Secretary General commissioned a report by the Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development (IEAG) to review and highlight opportunities and challenges the world is facing to improve data crucial for sustaining development. In their report, *A World That Counts*, the IAEG made five key recommendations and suggested an analysis of the investments needed and costs for improving the statistical systems of countries and monitoring the SDGs.

Data for Development: A Needs Assessment for SDG Monitoring and Statistical Capacity Development estimates that the IDA-eligible countries will need to spend \$1 billion a year to upgrade their statistical systems and carry out regular data collection for the SDGs¹. The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) has coordinated this report with inputs from many expert groups. Combined with other studies and discussions that have taken place in the last twelve months around the topic of the data revolution and SDG monitoring, we have a wealth of information to guide us. It is now time to move to implementation. The first step is to assure the financing needed to measure and monitor the Sustainable Development Goals and leverage the opportunities that are offered by the data revolution.

This paper builds on the studies noted above. Focusing on the needs of low-income countries, it offers three messages to guide policy decisions in the coming period: 1) build stronger national statistical systems; 2) revitalize financing for statistics; and 3) embrace the data revolution.

FROM MDGs TO SDGs –THE EXPANDING ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT DATA:

The Millennium Development Goals guided global development efforts from 2000 to 2015. They also drew attention to the need for reliable data for setting goals and measuring progress. Now the world's governments, looking ahead fifteen years, are negotiating a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs will continue the fight against extreme poverty, adding the challenges of ensuring more equitable development and environmental sustainability. Crucial to their success will be good governance informed by strong statistical systems that can measure and incentivize progress across all the goals. Timely, disaggregated data will be needed to be certain that no one is left behind.

Monitoring of the SDGs will require substantial additional investment in order to consolidate gains made during the MDG era and to develop reliable, high-quality data on a range of new subjects, such as climate risk mitigation or inequality, ensuring that no groups are excluded, and with an unprecedented level of detail.

A World That Counts

National Statistical Systems have seen rapid advances over the past ten years; with improved use of National Strategies for the Development of Statistics, and more regular census and survey-based data collection. International donors and the UN agencies have been crucial to these improvements, but to respond to the SDG agenda greater assistance is required.

A data revolution is under way. It will affect donors and developing countries. The unprecedented rate of innovation in data collection techniques and technologies and the capacity to distribute data widely and freely has expanded the horizon of possible sources and uses of data. The adoption of the SDGs presents a strategic opportunity to build on the momentum of the data revolution and demonstrate the central role of data in eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development.

The Financing for Development Conference hosted in Addis Ababa in July will be the key forum to secure the necessary means to meet the challenge of the SDGs. With clear commitments from member states,

international financial institutions, and the private sector, the FFD Conference could lay the ground for a meaningful partnership for development data, backed up by adequate resources.

BUILDING STRONG NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEMS

The advent of the MDGs in 2000 drew attention to many gaps in the statistical record. In 2003, PARIS21 formed a task team to examine ways to improve support to the statistical systems of developing countries for monitoring development goals. They found national statistical systems characterised by “under-funding, reliance on donor support, particularly for household surveys, and very weak administrative data systems.” More than ten years later, much progress has been made. Over 100 countries produced national strategies for the development of statistics (NSDSs).ⁱⁱ National data archives have been established in about half of the IDA countries.ⁱⁱⁱ The frequency and coordination of internationally sponsored surveys has improved. Ninety-three percent of the world’s population was enumerated during the 2010 census round. However, as recognized by the UN Secretary General’s Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution, national statistical systems are still beset by challenges.^{iv}

Many national statistical offices lack sufficient capacity and funding, and remain vulnerable to political and interest group influence (including by donors). Data quality should be protected and improved by strengthening NSOs, and ensuring they are functionally autonomous, independent of sector ministries and political influence.

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At the 46th Session of the UN Statistical Commission and the Intergovernmental Negotiation on Post-2015^v, governments agreed that strong national statistical offices and cross-governmental statistical systems are needed for monitoring the goals. Stronger, open data systems will also improve decision-making, program design, and service delivery, as well as transparency and accountability to citizens. To realize the opportunities of the data revolution, governments need to embark on comprehensive programs of modernisation that bolster administrative data collection across all ministries, encourage greater frequency and disaggregation of data, and encourage the adoption of new methods, such as geospatial monitoring to track social and environmental dimensions of the goals, as well as boosting statistical capacity and literacy within both government and civil society.

REVITALIZING FINANCING FOR STATISTICS

International assistance will be crucial to support countries’ modernisation efforts. The study prepared by SDSN, ODW, and a broad coalition of data for development experts estimates that a total of US\$1 billion per annum will be required to enable 77 of the world’s lower-income countries to put in place statistical systems capable of supporting and measuring the SDGs.

We recommend ... a new funding stream and innovative financing mechanisms to support the data revolution for sustainable development.

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We focus our analysis on 77 countries that currently qualify for concessional borrowing through the International Development Association (IDA) and are therefore likely to be in need of external assistance, and we cost a selection of core statistical products that will be essential for monitoring the social, economic

and environmental dimensions of the SDGs. These products include surveys, census, civil registration and vital statistics systems, education management information systems, and select economic and environmental statistics, inclusive of geospatial data. We also allow an overhead for human resource investments and policy and legislative reforms based on current and planned expenditures.

The estimates provided in this study are conservative. We have not included the costs of monitoring and evaluation systems in each sector, which will be needed for effective program design. Nor do we look at the costs of modernization over time. New methods of data collection and analysis based on new technologies may replace or reduce the cost of traditional methods, but they will require additional investments. Should they become available, countries may realize savings or they may seize the opportunity to go beyond the basic functionality assumed here. We also recognize that other investments in the data ecosystem will be essential to underpin a more fully developed culture of statistical literacy, and for a more sophisticated government approach to data analytics, visualization, and communication. This study is focused on the core components of an effective national monitoring system and the resources required bringing low and lower-middle income countries up to this basic level.

To meet the \$1 billion per annum requirement, donors will need to maintain current contributions to statistics, of approximately US\$300 million per annum, and go further, leveraging up to US\$ 200 million more in official development assistance (ODA) to support country efforts. For their part, developing countries

This is the “data revolution”: the opportunity to improve the data that are essential for decision making, accountability, and solving development challenges.

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must commit to make up the rest, mobilizing domestic resources to fund their statistical development plans.^{vi} Positively, we have observed an increase in recent years in domestic allocation of funds to statistical data plans. Donors should ease countries’ access to funding by creating a new funding stream to support the data revolution for development.

Resources must also be better coordinated. Donors should align their contributions behind national strategies for the development of statistics, which highlight key priority investments. To ensure maximum coordination and coherence, this funding stream could be a multi-donor trust fund, administered by the World Bank but governed by a broad range of stakeholders, including the UN. This fund should seek to align with similar endeavours, such as the WHO and WB Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Scaling-Up Investment Plan, but also direct resources towards underfunded areas, such as gender statistics and management information systems in the education and health sectors. The fund should also seek to drive improvements in monitoring over time and to foster innovation.

EMBRACING THE DATA REVOLUTION

As highlighted by the Secretary General’s IEAG, new data collection and monitoring technologies are rapidly becoming available. These innovations will dramatically advance national statistical offices’ and the international communities’ ability to monitor the impact of development programs and will in form the way they are designed and implemented. High-resolution satellite imagery, mobile devices, biometric data, and crowd-sourced citizen reporting will change official data collection processes and the operation of programs they monitor. Take for example, satellite imagery. The cost of high-resolution image acquisition is falling while the availability of images and capacity for automated processing are increasing. There are many applications for earth observation data: predicting harvests, disaster response, and food security situations; monitoring geographic patterns and likely transmission corridors of diseases that have geospatial determinants; measuring population density and the spread of new settlements; and mapping and planning transportation infrastructure.

Similarly, many surveys are now being conducted on digital mobile platforms. ^{vii} This practice reduces the time and cost for data collection, improves accuracy, simplifies collection of GIS and image data, streamlines

The burgeoning “data revolution” movement should seize on the opportunity to strengthen national statistical systems in the region from the ground up, focusing on underlying political economy issues that the slowed progress on data for decades.

Delivering on the Data Revolution in Sub-Saharan Africa ^x

integration with other information streams, and opens up the possibility of incorporating micro-chip based sensors into survey processes. Innovation is not just about adopting new technologies. Many countries are also innovating by expanding the use and impact of data through open data. Others are innovating in setting up partnerships for groups with different skill sets to work together from research to data production towards a common goal. These and other innovations will drive new approaches to achieving the SDGs, from pinpointing specific communities and households for health initiatives to integrating real-time monitoring of natural resources into allocation schemes and tracking government and donor investments. In spite of initial upfront costs for software, hardware or training, such innovations have huge potential to lower the cost of SDG monitoring over time.

A CALL FOR ACTION

Since May 2013 when the High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda called for a data revolution, there has been an outpouring of reviews, studies, and blog posts. The Secretary General’s IEAG, *A World That Counts*, issued at the end of 2014 is the most comprehensive. There has also been follow up work led by the UN statistical community as well as donor-supported special studies, such as the PARIS21 review of the status of the data revolution in developing countries. ^{viii} The most recent contribution is the SDSN-coordinated Needs Assessment

There is much energy and enthusiasm among stakeholders for a data revolution in support of development, and in particular, to support SDG monitoring. Now is the time to build on the work done and chart a path for action. These are the critical players who must take responsibility for making the development data agenda attainable:

- 0 The United Nations should lead the development of standards for new indicators and coordinate the monitoring of the SDGs. As the convener of the UN Statistical Commission it should advocate for principles of equity and data privacy and propose statistical and technical standards to encourage innovation and facilitate openness and information exchange.
- 0 The World Bank should be encouraged to establish new funding or re-purpose existing sources for the development data agenda, governed by a broad coalition of actors, working in partnership. The World Bank has demonstrated its ability to manage multi-donor trust funds for statistical capacity building. The World Bank working with other donors (traditional and new ones) should help with channeling funding to developing countries and provide a mechanism for better coordination among the donors with varied interests. The new funding stream should also be prepared to provide resources for critical data gaps not covered elsewhere.
- 0 Countries must prioritize improvements to their national statistical systems. Well-articulated plans accompanied by realistic budgets are needed to enlist domestic support and to coordinate with donors. As full partners in the international statistical system, they should define their own

development plans and advocate for innovative approaches to producing statistics that meet their needs.

- 0 Regional entities should prioritize and encourage improvements in data and statistics, as demonstrated by the recent Africa Data Consensus.^{ix}
- 0 International agencies, think tanks, NGOs, donors, and others who have been instrumental in the work of the development data agenda so far can add value through knowledge, resources, and partnerships. It is important to strengthen the involvement of these stakeholders and harness their interest and know-how for the future.

A World That Counts recommends the creation of a World Forum on sustainable development data to kickstart national, regional, and global actions and look for ways to better coordinate them, an idea that has been endorsed by many of stakeholders and key players. The World Forum could bring together the critical ecosystem to share ideas and experiences for data improvements, innovation, advocacy and technology transfer. Such a gathering could mark the beginning of a new global partnership for development data to make the data revolution a sustainable revolution for all.

Prepared by SDSN and Open Data Watch with inputs from ODI, PARIS21, UN Foundation, and The World Bank.

Notes

ⁱEspey, J. et al. (2015). *Data for Development: A Needs Assessment for SDG Monitoring and Statistical Capacity Development*. Available at <http://unsdsn.org/resources/publications/a-needs-assessment-for-sdg-monitoring-and-statistical-capacity-development/>

ⁱⁱ National Strategies for the Development of Statistics are available at <http://www.paris21.org/nsds-status>

ⁱⁱⁱ Accelerated Data Program Central Catalogue is available at <http://adp.ihsn.org/survey-catalogs>

^{iv} Independent Expert Advisory Group on Data Revolution for Sustainable Development (2014). *A World That Counts: Mobilising the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development*. Available at <http://www.undatarevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/A-World-That-Counts2.pdf>.

^v During SGN Session 3, March 2015. See Chair's summary at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/sdgsandtargets>

^{vi} Espey, J. et al. (2015).

^{vii} SDSN (2015). *Indicators and a Monitoring Framework for the SDGs*, SDSN Report. USA and Paris. Available at <http://unsdsn.org/>

^{viii} PARIS21 (2014), "Road Map for a country-led data revolution." Available at <http://datarevolution.paris21.org/sites/default/files/Road%20Map%20draft%200.pdf>.

^{ix} High Level Conference on the Data Revolution, AU-ECA Conference of Ministers (2015). *Africa Data Consensus*. Available at http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/page_attachments/final_adc_-_english.pdf.

^x Center for Global Development and The African Population and Health Research Center (2014). *Delivering on the Data Revolution in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Available at <http://www.cgdev.org/publication/delivering-data-revolution-sub-saharan-africa-0>