Mobile Data for Sustainable Development Regional Workshop
February 20 – 21, 2019, Nairobi, Kenya. Venue: (TBC)

Background

The launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015 has put the spotlight on data to establish whether or not progress is being made. However, timely and relevant data that can help decision makers and other leaders better understand the current state of play for the 2030 Agenda is in short supply. Too many governments, companies, investors, multilateral institutions, and civil society organisations do not have the data they need to make the right decisions to drive progress on the SDGs.

This lack has increased interest in other sources of data like satellite and mobile data that can offer more timely insights, complement official statistics, and plug data gaps in ways that help change-makers across the world achieve better progress.

According to the 2018 GSMA report "The Mobile Economy, Sub-Saharan Africa," the number of mobile internet subscribers in the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region has quadrupled since the start of this decade; the technology is the only available platform for the majority of the population to get online. Unique mobile subscriber penetration in Sub-Saharan Africa stood at 44% at the end of 2017, still well below the global average of 66%. The subscriber base in the region totaled 444 million, equivalent to around 9% of subscribers globally. The report anticipates regional subscriber base will grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.8% for the period 2017–2022, more than double the global growth rate over the same period. The penetration rate is forecast to reach the 50% level by the end of 2023, and 52% by 2025. Smartphone adoption is helping to drive strong growth in data traffic across the region and in the process, generating big data that is held by private sector companies. Mobile data could complement official statistics and other data sources, while plugging data gaps in tracking specific SDGs indicators, given the projection that a significant chunk of the population in SSA will still be left out of mobile data in the near future.

Despite the great potential of mobile data to support the delivery of the sustainable development agenda across the region, access to the data remains a great challenge due to real or perceived barriers. These include but are not limited to:

1. Absence of policy and legal frameworks that define protocols for unlocking and sharing the data.
2. Citizen's privacy and data security concerns that create uncertainties for private sector mobile companies willing to share their data.
3. Limited knowledge of what specific types of data held by mobile data companies could be applied for development.

Although time and resources have been invested over the last few years and great progress made in experimenting with this type of data, the disincentives for mobile companies to share their data often far outweigh the incentives. With dotted pilots across the world, there's limited technological knowledge and infrastructure for mining the data; let alone partnership models that could make this conveniently possible for many governments and private sector firms. Debates linger on whether those willing to use this type of data should be granted full access to for example anonymised call detail records datasets, or mobile companies should keep their data and grant limited access via tools that mine the data and only derive useful insights for development planning and decision-making. Often, there are limited conversations around these issues between the demand and supply in ways that can help overcome the barriers quicker.

The increased demand for timely monitoring of the SDGs presents a great opportunity to connect both demand and supply in order to foster learning that can inspire collaboration and scaling up through

public-private partnerships. The two-day regional mobile data workshop will seek to achieve this and will be co-hosted by the Government of Kenya through the Office of the Deputy President, the Ministry of ICT, the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), the Communications Authority of Kenya (CA); and Safaricom Kenya Limited.

Structure of the Workshop

The first day will focus on sharing of existing tools and methodologies used to leverage mobile data for development and discussing technical lessons learned on what works, what does not, and potential opportunities. The second day will focus on enabling environment, partnership frameworks for unlocking mobile data to track specific SDGs indicators in practice at the country-level, and the modalities of sharing learning at the national, regional and global levels.

Objectives and expected outcomes of the convening

Objectives:
1. Convene key actors, innovators, and initiatives with technical expertise in the use of mobile data for sustainable development with country level demand to facilitate learning and explore ways to work together.
2. Identify opportunities for a better enabling environment at the country through engagements on partnership frameworks and models for public-private unlocking and sharing of mobile data for timely monitoring of specific SDGs indicators.
3. Explore opportunities to foster collaboration among different actors in ways that equip change-makers (government officials, researchers, mobile data producers, politicians, civil society and technology partners) with the right technical expertise, infrastructure, tools and methodologies for unlocking and effectively using privately held mobile data for policy and decision making.

Expected Outcomes:
1. A number of partner governments express increased interest to enter into public-private partnerships that test promising pilots in the use of privately held mobile data for policy and decision-making in the real world; and are supported over time by GPSDD partners to do so.
2. Partnership frameworks and models (policy, legal, regulatory, commercial and sustainable business models) are clearly identified and articulated to guide private sector companies, governments, and non-profits in ways to collaborate in the use of mobile data to track specific SDGs at the country level.
3. A collaborative on privately held data including mobile data is established to connect national, regional and global actors, facilitate peer exchanges and learning, and test new methods that fill data gaps and make data more-timely to overcome stubborn barriers to scale.
4. A workshop report capturing deliberations and making concrete recommendations.

Participants

Participants will be drawn from GPSDD partner governments, private sector and civil society among others. Other national, regional, and global partners and participants expected include:
- Representatives from Ministries of ICT, National Statistical Offices, and mobile sector regulators from the governments of Sierra Leone, Senegal, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Tanzania, and Kenya
- UN Global Pulse Lab Kampala
- GSM Association (GSMA)
- SDSN
- The Open Algorithms Project (OPAL)
- Digital Impact Alliance (DIAL)
- The Africa Centre for Statistics at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

- Africa Development Bank (AFDB)
- New York State University GovLab
- The Ghana Statistical Services (GSS), Vodaphone Ghana and Flowminder partnership
- Orange West Africa, MTN, Africell
- Country level initiatives (Esoko, Viamo, Yeesal AgriHub, Living Goods, etc)
- Research and academia from partner countries.