COUNTRY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data

2021-2023

Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data

INTRODUCTION

The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (the Global Partnership) was created in 2015 to put the power of data at the service of the newly agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Our mission is to address the world's most urgent problems with effective data to drive good decision-making. Our goal is to drive better decisions and better lives for all by facilitating the production, sharing, and use of better data.

Our challenges are global and so is our ambition. We make connections between national, regional and global players to bring all voices and experiences to bear in creating data systems that work for all. To be truly effective, data must be accessible, interoperable and inclusive. Our systems and approaches must mirror this if we are to build the system we need to achieve the world we want.

Six years on from our creation, more than 280 partners are actively involved in our network, catalyzing, and sharing progress that has improved lives around the world. Bringing together organizations from different sectors to support each other and achieve impact together is the reason why

we were founded. It remains at the heart of our offer. We are proud that **nearly 80% of our partners are very engaged with our work, and more than 80% feel a sense of pride in belonging to the network**.

Itad's recent **evaluation** of our work concluded:

"GPSDD has made the biggest contribution to the way in which data is used to achieve the SDGs through helping partners utilize data in support of decision making... [The Global Partnership] has made a number of notable contributions to the way data is used to monitor the SDGs, including through using satellite and earth observations data to monitor environmental indicators in several countries."

This country engagement strategy sets out how we will build on the evaluation findings and from our own learning to increase the scale of our impact through our work with countries, increasing data use to accelerate progress on the SDGs.

> **In essence, GPSDD needs to continue to do the work it does at the country level and smartly integrate new networks and partnerships to scale results.**
>
> **- Itad Evaluation, 2021**

OUR COUNTRY-LEVEL MODEL & IMPACT

We work with governmental and non-governmental partners to increase the use of data to accelerate progress on the SDGs at the country level. Research suggests there are four issues which present the biggest barriers to data use by governments:

- **Lack of access to data** that is reliable, granular, and timely enough to provide the information needed for policy.[5]
- **Lack of skills, technical infrastructure, and institutional capacity** to process and use available data to provide insights.[6]
- **Lack of incentives** or understanding driving use of data, resourcing of data, or culture of data use.[7]
- **Lack of trust** among public or decision makers.[8]

To tackle access to data, and the skills, infrastructure, and capacity to process that data, we broker partnerships between governments and companies, academic institutions, and NGOs to match the demand for data with the supply of products and tools to meet that demand, and the knowledge and skills to use it. Through our 70+ partnerships, we have brought new methods, new tools and new products to our government partners, and facilitated mutually beneficial partnerships to build capacity and strengthen systems.

To create incentives and build trust, we work intensively within countries to broker partnerships across government. Our work creating data collaboratives and governance mechanisms that are jointly led by statistics offices and line ministries has created new relationships between producers and users in government—building trust, increasing demand for data and developing systems for the long-term. We build and maintain strong political relationships, strengthening understanding and incentives for data use through communications and advocacy.

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[1] See "Good Practices and Barriers in the Use of Data for Policy and Advocacy On Ageing in Asia-Pacific", UNFPA, 2016 and "Comparative analysis of country-level enablers, barriers and recommendations to strengthen institutional capacity for evidence uptake in decision-making", Meike J. Schleiff, Alice Kuan & Abdul Ghaffar, 2020.

[2] See "Good Practices and Barriers in the Use of Data for Policy and Advocacy On Ageing in Asia-Pacific", UNFPA, 2016 and Using Data To Improve Policy Decisions, Pew Trust, 2018.

[3] See "Good Practices and Barriers in the Use of Data for Policy and Advocacy On Ageing in Asia-Pacific", UNFPA, 2016 and "Comparative analysis of country-level enablers, barriers and recommendations to strengthen institutional capacity for evidence uptake in decision-making", Meike J. Schleiff, Alice Kuan & Abdul Ghaffar, 2020.

[4] See "Data & Policy: A new venue to study and explore policy-data interaction", Stefaan G. Verhulst, Zeynep Engin, Jon Crowcroft, 2019.

Over the last five years, our focus on brokering partnerships to improve the production and use of data at the country level has had some notable successes:

- The Government of Senegal is **using satellite data to allocate drought-resistant crops to farmers**, increasing the effectiveness of their climate adaptation policy and use of resources.
- The Government of Nigeria has a **COVID-19 data hub**, used by the Presidential Task Force to bring timely data to the heart of pandemic response.
- The Government of Ghana is **using insights from anonymized telecommunications data** to track the impact of lockdown measures introduced to curb the pandemic.
- The Government of Sierra Leone has used data to inform policies on 'radical inclusion' for education, overturning the ban on pregnant girls in school and investing in girls' education.

Woman in Accra, Ghana on her phone. Credit: Jordi Perdigó

Over time, we have scaled up from the original seven 'roadmap' countries in Africa and Latin America. Our engagement now spans 33 countries across different levels, as of the end of 2020. In these countries we are working with more than 100 technical partners, including global corporations, local civil society organizations, national small and medium-sized enterprises, UN agencies, and governments. Responding to what countries need, partnerships have focused on:

- Increasing the timeliness of data, particularly improving decision-making on the environment, agriculture, food security, and water management.
- Increasing inclusiveness of data, particularly on education, disability, citizen engagement, and gender.

A farmer in Indonesia holding a tablet while inspecting produce. Credit: AEKToton, Shutterstock

During 2020, in response to demand, we undertook a rapid scaleup to meet the urgent needs for data to support the COVID-19 pandemic response. The evaluation notes:

"GPSDD's ability to leverage partnerships, adopt an advisory role and catalyze change was brought to the fore during the pandemic in 2020."

The evaluation highlights the Global Partnership's ability to convene groups of partners around a common challenge or objective as critical to our success to date. We partnered with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), UN offices in countries, alongside a group of committed technical partners who deployed their resources (financial and technical) to provide tools, platforms, data, analytics, capacity, and other support to complement government efforts in combating COVID-19.

In response to demand from across Africa, we aggregated the data priorities for pandemic response into four key areas:
1. **Understanding populations and vulnerabilities,**
2. **Mapping health infrastructure to deliver an effective response,**
3. **Virus tracking and forecasting, and**
4. **Monitoring the economic impact of the pandemic.**

We were able to quickly mobilize new technical partners and deploy their offers to where they were needed most, brokering over 30 partnerships in 20 countries to support action on the pandemic.

We are now looking to build on these successes and increase the scale of our country coverage. Our global reach means we can make connections between countries, institutions, and sectors that no one else can make, with an approach to partnership that builds lasting relationships and impact. Our roots in the SDGs give us a laser focus on data that drives progress for people and the planet. And our unique network means we can bring together the key players to build a just and robust data system that supports human progress.

OUR STRATEGY FOR SCALE

Our brokering and advisory work over the last six years has led to increased data production and use by governments to support the SDGs. To scale up this foundation in a sustainable way and accelerate progress towards the SDGs, we need to build on our success, focus on the elements of our model that are the most complementary to others' work and that are most critical to outcomes, and understand where others are better positioned to take the lead.

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR OUR WORK

As we scale up, we are guided by four key building blocks. These are distilled from our experience of the last five years and our commitment to the SDGs.

1. **Focusing on data use and evidence-based decisions to drive progress on the SDGs.**
Our work and partnerships must demonstrate clear value and impact to our government partners through the production and analysis of data that is used to make decisions which affect people's lives for the better.

2. **Driven by country needs.**
Our work is primarily driven by deep engagement with countries and extensive contextual knowledge. This helps to surface country-led priorities in processes, initiatives or sectors, in line with existing plans. We align our work, partnerships, and any solutions offered to government priorities and don't impose solutions on countries. We are transparent with government partners to ensure that expectations are clear, and they understand what we are able to deliver.

3. **Adding value for our partners.**
We do not compete with our partners nor deliver products or services that they are able to deliver. Instead, we act as a catalyst, convenor, and facilitator. We bring a wealth of information about contexts, markets, and the landscape of data innovations. We combine this with the networking and political skills to increase the collective impact of our partners,by combining their activities and increasing political support for data within countries.

4. **Guided by ethical and collaborative partnership principles.**
Together with our network of more than 280 partners we have developed a set of **partnership principles** which ensure our approach is rooted in a strong ethical framework and high standards.

ACTIONS FOR SCALEUP

The evaluation revealed two elements that are central to how our country work has achieved impact:

- **Our ability to aggregate the priorities of our government partners to expose common needs, and then broker packages of support to meet these common needs.** We did this in the **Africa Regional Data Cube** (ARDC) and during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has contributed to tackling specific challenges across a number of countries simultaneously, helping to overcome barriers to data access and increase the availability of skills, technical infrastructure, and capacity.
- **Deep engagement in some countries has contributed to increased data use across a range of issues,** strengthening data systems at the national level. An example of this is our longstanding partnership with the Government of Ghana. This has helped us to create incentives for data use and build trust across a range of countries.

In response to these insights, we are looking to increase the scale of our impact in two ways. First, we will focus on increasing our impact as an aggregator, bringing together partners to solve specific common challenges in a large number of countries. Second, we will build on our success through depth of engagement, focusing on delivering impact in more countries through replicating our approach with partner networks. These approaches are outlined in more detail below.

An enumerator surveying two people in Ghana. Credit: Jordi Perdigó

Aggregation: brokering partnerships at scale

As part of our strategy for scale, we will replicate this approach across more issue areas, identifying common challenges from our government partners and convening our technical partners around collective objectives. This will allow us to facilitate partnership brokering at scale and to reach a large number of countries. This will support countries in overcoming two of the key barriers to data use: access to data and access to skills and technical infrastructure.

We will group our work into two core programs, 'Data for Now' and 'Data for Equity', focused on the twin challenges of timely and inclusive data. Within these broad programs, there will be discrete initiatives focused on specific sectoral challenges, which will mobilize commitments from technical partners, unlocking data, tools, and capacity development opportunities to increase the use of data to improve policy in specific areas. These include Data for Climate Action, the **Inclusive Data Charter**, and **Data for Resilience and Recovery in Africa**. Ultimately, we hope to have initiatives covering all of the SDGs.

Data initiatives will achieve impact through the following steps:

1. Identifying where there are shared needs in a particular sector, to clearly define where there is demand for access to data, tools, and infrastructures or capacity support.

2. Outreach to technical partners who have relevant data, products, or services to support and define the partnership offers available.

3. Brokering partnerships between governments and technical partners in line with the Global Partnership partnership principles to meet demands and contribute to achievement of SDGs.

4. Developing communications, advocacy, and learning products and opportunities to scale impact, influence product development, and grow the initiatives.

The programs will enable us to increase the number of technical partners involved in the Global Partnership, to increase the number of partnerships we are able to broker at country level and to shape the development of new products and services in response to needs. They will:

- Increase our capacity for brokering at country level, as technical partners who have made commitments can be quickly matched with government partners to address specific needs and priorities.
- Increase the value we can offer to technical partners by offering clear pathways to policy impact and strong communications products.
- Create opportunities for shared learning around common challenges.
- Develop feedback loops to technical partners, identifying needs that are not being addressed and encouraging innovation to solve common challenges.

To deliver these programs, we work closely with partners who share our objectives and approach, including: the UNECA, the United Nations Statistics Division, Sightsavers, the United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and others. In future we could scale further through relationships with sector-level partnerships such as the NDC Partnership, supporting their work by bringing in technical partners who can work with governments on sector-specific challenges.

Our learning will focus on testing approaches to outreach and developing the value proposition for technical partners and on exploring the most efficient modalities for brokering partnerships at scale, possibly including some elements of automation, and working through other networks. We will monitor our own resource inputs and the impacts we achieve in terms of number of countries reached, number of partnerships brokered and impact of those partnerships on the use of data for decision-making.

Two-year objective

Broker 25 partnerships which increase the use of data for decision making in 20 countries over two years.

Depth: advice and support on systems strengthening

The evaluation finds that a second key element of our success has been deep engagement on country systems: increasing the incentives for data use, and focusing on governance and institutional frameworks that build trust. This is necessarily a labour-intensive process. There are currently seven countries where we engage at this depth. We hope that through working with partners to replicate the approach we can increase the scale of our impact by increasing the number of countries without significantly increasing our headcount.

In order to scale through replication, we have streamlined and systematized our approach to choosing where we work and how we work, building from the most successful elements of our experience to date. We have also learned from others, in particular the idea of the 'Data Value Chain' developed by Open Data Watch.[5]

Choosing where to work: The process starts with an approach from a government who wants to work with GPSDD, usually as a result of having attended an event or learnt about our work from peers. In deciding if we can respond to a given request, we will be considering the country and the partnership context, and the Global Partnership's own resources and capacity.

- From the government side, we will look for interest and strong commitment from senior political leadership, clarity on development priorities that require data and commitment to working in partnership with different stakeholders.
- To carry out the work effectively, we will be looking to build a long-term, sustainable relationship with an established and respected institution aligned with our values and approach, with a strong interest in data that minimizes our exposure to political cycles, and with individual focal point(s) who can take the lead on driving work forward. This could be a government department or National Statistical Office (NSO), the UN office in the country, or a local think tank or non-governmental organization.
- We will also consider if there are sufficient resources within the the Global Partnership team to maintain the relationship and finances to support activities.

Changing how we work: Where these conditions exist, we will work with partners to broker partnerships that contribute to strengthening across the data system and, in doing so, unlock data production and use to accelerate progress on the SDGs. We bring together the technical, institutional, and political in a way that is adaptive to local contexts and always focused on outcomes.

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[5]   See The Data Values Chain: Moving from Production to Impact, Prepared by Data2x for Open Data Watch, 2019.

Bring together data producers and users and define priorities together	**1.1 Define priorities together:** The focal point in the identified lead institution initiates a process, supported by our secretariat, to define priorities through multi-stakeholder engagements and scoping work, aligning closely with SDG priorities and governance processes, and with reference to where the Global Partnership can offer support through data programs.
	1.2 Agree the governance framework: Based on these priorities, we will either embed the work within an existing governance mechanism or work with partners to create a new country steering group, collaborative, or task team to guide implementation and ensure buy-in from all relevant institutions throughout. This will typically be co-convened by a representative from the NSO and from the relevant line ministry or department to ensure data producers and users are represented. A letter of commitment will be prepared, outlining the priorities and commitments of the government partner.
Build partnerships based on clear roles and objectives	**2.1 Bring in relevant technical partners:** Once the policy priorities and the consequent data needs have been identified, the Global Partnership will gauge interest from our roster of technical partners within the different data programs. We will then bring in those who have expressed interest in engaging. Efforts will also be made to bring in national partners with relevant resources or skills to ensure that the work strengthens the national data ecosystem. Discussions will be had with the government focal point and wider stakeholders in-country: to ensure alignment of objectives and approach, key barriers and opportunities, and to consider program sustainability and exit strategies.
	2.2 Agree resourcing: Our expectations are that technical partners will meet their own costs as their contribution to the partnership. They will benefit from opportunities to increase the impact of things they are doing already or from the development of new partnerships to extend their reach. Where small amounts of funding are the prerequisite for catalyzing significant new partnerships and where we believe that these will lead to sustainable programs in the longer term, the Global Partnership will, on a case-by-case basis, consider part-funding the costs of technical partners to a reasonable extent, subject to availability of resources, our specific role and costs, the needs of the government partners, and scope and duration of the project or initiative.

Build partnerships based on clear roles and objectives (continued)	**2.3 Develop the plan:** A written plan, based on the Global Partnership templates and one or two-year objectives, will be developed and agreed upon by all partners. This will align with the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics and other country plans and will form the basis for project planning and monitoring. The plan will be informed by our ecosystem maturity matrix and interoperability guidelines. It will also be informed by the Data Value Chain produced by Open Data Watch and by the latest research and evidence in this developing field to ensure that projects contribute to the strengthening of the system as a whole.
	2.4 Project management and oversight: The focal point, guided by the agreed governance committee, will take leadership in project management and monitoring over the duration of the agreement, coordinating across different work areas in order to support the development of the whole system. The Global Partnership will play a supporting and convening role to bring in other technical partners as needed, will create linkages between countries for shared learning, and troubleshoot as needed.
Develop learning and policy advocacy as a route to scale and sustainability	**3.1 Political support:** We will undertake continued political engagement to secure high-level support for data use at sector or system level, with opportunities for highlighting progress at international forums, in-country events and other communications and advocacy moments.
	3.2 Learning and knowledge sharing: The Global Partnership will create linkages between national, regional, and global activities to scale up the impact of work in individual countries, through learning activities, knowledge sharing events and products, policy advocacy and communications, as relevant.
Ensure clarity on next steps	At the end of the planning period, the Global Partnership leadership, technical partners, and the country steering committee will discuss the future relationship and any further agreed objectives or activities. In rare cases, we might withdraw from a country if the conditions no longer exist for successful partnerships. Where objectives have been met and our involvement is no longer needed to sustain progress, we will look to maintain engagement so other countries and partners can learn from successful experiences and benefit from policy advocacy initiatives.

Working with partners, we will accelerate progress on the SDGs and strengthen the data systems upon which effective policy making depends. Our learning focus will be on understanding where the Global Partnership's resources need to be deployed to most effectively replicate our model and what level of effort is required in different contexts to achieve sustained results.

Two-year objective

Work with partners to strengthen data systems in 12 countries.

CONCLUSION

The country engagement strategy builds on evidence from Itad's evaluation of the Global Partnership, and from five years of practice. This strategy will guide our ongoing work in increasing the use of data for decision making, driving the use of evidence for policy making to accelerate progress on the SDGs, reducing inequality and protecting the planet.

We will continue to assess our impact and learning as we go. This strategy will evolve over time as we learn and understand how we can be most effective at catalyzing partnerships that lead to sustained impact. We look forward to working together with partners to achieve our collective ambition.

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