

# Executive summary

## Why we undertook the evaluation

The **purpose of the evaluation** was to assess the extent to which, and how, GPSDD has contributed to its stated outcomes and goals. The two **objectives for the evaluation** were to:

- Assess progress and implementation by assessing the relevance and effectiveness of GPSDD.
- Identify lessons learned and make recommendations for the future role and work of GPSDD.

As such, the **primary audiences** for the evaluation are the GPSDD Secretariat, the GPSDD Board, the Funders Group and the Evaluation Committee. The **secondary audiences** for the evaluation are GPSDD partners – namely global and national CSOs, governments and the private sector.

## Introducing GPSDD and its role within the data for development ecosystem

In 2014, a year before world leaders adopted the SDGs, the United Nations Secretary-General’s Independent Expert Advisory Group (IEAG) on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development highlighted the need for the creation of a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD) as part of their report, *A World that Counts*.<sup>1</sup> GPSDD was created to tackle a set of formidable challenges: to mobilise and coordinate as many initiatives and institutions as possible to achieve the vision set out in *A World that Counts*, and to harness the potential of new technologies for sustainable and equitable development.

During the first five years of its operation, GPSDD’s theory of change and action has undergone multiple iterations. Each iteration involves a more confident and clearer articulation of GPSDD’s vision and value proposition. GPSDD’s overarching goal as set out in the 2019–23 strategy is to drive better decisions and better lives for all by facilitating the production, sharing and use of better data. GPSDD intends to achieve this goal through two related objectives: 1) more and better data is used to achieve the SDGs, and 2) more and better data is used to monitor the SDGs. Four intermediate results (IR1.1–1.3, IR2.1) are expected to contribute to the achievement of these objectives. Given the facilitative nature of GPSDD’s work, the change pathways from outputs to outcomes are dependent on a combination of mutually reinforcing and sometimes overlapping activities categorised as levers of change (supporting changemakers, creating incentives and developing learnings) and contributions from partners (skills, data, knowledge, resources).

Over the past five years, the partnership’s initial focus on data production and data gaps has given way to an emphasis on data use and how best to utilise data for sense-making and decision making.<sup>2</sup> In the same vein, GPSDD gradually shifted its attention from addressing complex technical problems, to issues that demanded a combination of technical expertise, advocacy and communication skills. One facet of GPSDD’s model, which has remained constant throughout the different iterations of its agenda, concerns its open and intensively participatory approach to collaboration.

**Based on our review, GPSDD’s strategy appears to have been both broad and flexible enough to accommodate the needs and interests of the diverse target groups represented among its partners.** Evidence from a desk-based mapping exercise, KIIs, and a partner survey clearly demonstrated that partners from a full range of sectors – academia/research, CSO/NGO, for-profit, government, multilateral – recognised the value of their contributions as delivered through the activities and outputs.

**GPSDD occupies a unique place among global data for development actors, which has enabled the partnership to work with its peers in a complementary way.** There is strong evidence from KIIs, triangulated by the results of a desk-based complementarity analysis, that GPSDD has established a niche for itself within the web of global actors.

<sup>1</sup> IEAG (November 2014). *A World that Counts: Mobilising the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development*

<sup>2</sup> GPSDD (September 2020). *A Global Movement for Better Data & Better Lives*

Stakeholders from three of GPSDD's partners (PARIS21, United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and CEPEI<sup>3</sup>) were interviewed and they identified GPSDD's unique value in its function as a network to bring together organisations within the ecosystem which were not previously connected, particularly new or emerging data sources and technologies, and established or institutionalised stakeholders. GPSDD's involvement in the World Data Forum, both in terms of convening key actors, and in agenda setting, was cited as an example of the partnership leveraging its niche effectively.

### GPSDD's contribution to the data for development ecosystem

**GPSDD has made the biggest contribution to the way in which data is used to *achieve the SDGs* through helping partners utilise data in support of decision making (IR1.1); through the routine use of earth and satellite data in several countries under the ARDC and use of telecoms data as a result of the Ghana national data roadmap process.** Other outcomes among those examined<sup>4</sup> which have contributed to this intermediate result include the Inclusive Data Charter (IDC) initiative, co-established by GPSDD, which is contributing to increased availability of disaggregated data and a peer exchange between LAC and African countries which contributed to increased use of administrative data.

Important contributions made by GPSDD are evident in creating a global movement promoting responsible data use, building public trust, and showcasing pathways to success (IR1.2), including through advocacy and engagement among the group of IDC champions (including 11 global organisations), advocacy and engagement with the global Bern network resulting in a more inclusive strategic agenda, and the transition from ARDC to Digital Earth Africa (DEA) representing a step towards fostering a global movement. While GPSDD has made the fewest contributions to embedding standards of interoperability into global frameworks (IR1.3), the data interoperability guide<sup>5</sup> supported by GPSDD is an important step towards achieving this, and specific country-level results to which it has contributed include supporting the Ministry of Health in Kenya adopting as official policy an interoperability framework, and within its support to the National Data Reporting Platform and the Data Quality Assurance Framework in Ghana. Many of these IR1.2 and IR1.3 contributions are at country or regional level and are steps towards meeting the global or 'at scale' ambition of the intermediate results and are therefore considered to have made a smaller contribution (compared to IR1.1) to the way in which data is used to *achieve* the SDGs relative to the global or at scale ambition of these intermediate results. Initiatives such as the work of the GPSDD/UNSC Collaborative on SDG Data Interoperability have the potential, together with more policy advocacy, to better showcase results and accelerate progress towards this ambition.

**GPSDD has made several 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, and initiatives like the National Data Reporting platform in Ghana.** Outcomes contributing to the use of timely and robust data for SDGs monitoring (IR2.1) include ARDC use cases (e.g. monitoring water quality, monitoring changes in mangrove swamps, monitoring crop performance and deforestation) and capability of the National Administrative Department of Statistics of Colombia (DANE) to measure SDG indicator 11.3.1<sup>6</sup> using geospatial data because of GPSDD brokering. GPSDD support to strengthening SDG monitoring through development of the National Data Reporting Platform and the Data Quality Assurance Framework in Ghana, in addition to project work to increase the availability of quality data, has also contributed to IR2.1. Initiatives such as Digital Earth Africa (DEA) into which the ARDC has transitioned, alongside other new ways of expanding country coverage, have the potential to scale the use of data for SDG monitoring.

**Among the outcomes examined, there were two examples where the contribution from GPSDD led to a different outcome than identified in the outcome harvest.** The evaluation examined GPSDD's work with DFID and UNICEF as

<sup>3</sup> Centro de Pensamiento Estratégico Internacional: CEPEI is a think tank that works to promote dialogue, debate, knowledge and multi-stakeholder participation in global agendas on sustainable development.

<sup>4</sup> Using Outcome Harvesting the evaluation team identified a list of 41 potential outcomes/interim changes of which we examined a sample of 23 in greater detail.

<sup>5</sup> Collaborative on SDG Data Interoperability (October 2018). *Data Interoperability: A Practitioner's Guide to Joining up Data in the Development Sector*.

<sup>6</sup> Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate.

IDC champions and found that the two identified outcomes (DFID published a new disability strategy, UNICEF adjusted its priorities as a result of being an IDC champion) were not directly attributable to them having signed up to the IDC. Instead, signing up to the IDC has enabled DFID and UNICEF to signal the importance of inclusive data and emphasise relevant aspects of their work.

**The evaluation evidence has demonstrated that all three levers of change play an important role in achieving results, and there is evidence among some outcomes of an effective interaction of all three – which builds on GPSDD’s consistent and agile approach in very complex environments.** GPSDD’s work on supporting changemakers is most evident, with 13 of 14<sup>7</sup> outcomes demonstrating evidence of support that fits within this lever of change – in particular related to its convening power. The creating incentives lever is least evident with evidence of support related to this lever in eight outcomes. Support which fits within the developing learnings lever was evident in nine outcomes. Among the outcomes examined, the ARDC and the Ghana national data roadmap show evidence of all three levers being used. For example, under the ARDC, GPSDD’s approach to *supporting changemakers* was key to identifying and working with the correct institutional champions and in developing the capacity of users within these institutions, whilst GPSDD’s advocacy and engagement skills helped *create incentives* for government institutions to buy in to the ARDC, and the DEA has been able to leverage ARDC achievements and learning (*developing learnings*).

**The ARDC and the Ghana Roadmap Process have been the most important contributions made by GPSDD to the data for development ecosystem because of the level and scale of results achieved.** Whilst many of GPSDD’s interventions are too recent to expect to have contributed to impact-level change, there is evidence that both the ARDC and the Ghana Roadmap process are contributing to change at the level of GPSDD’s strategic objectives.

**Several respondents said that GPSDD could potentially have done more in the way of providing follow-up support.** For example, several respondents highlighted that although the Ghana–Kenya peer exchange itself had been effectively organised, leading to improved collaboration, they felt that more thought could have been given to following up on the commitments and action plans made at the end of the event. Similarly, respondents involved in the peer exchange between LAC and African countries said that more could have been done to monitor the alliances that emerged from the peer exchange.

**Respondents identified lessons learned from the ARDC’s transition into DEA which highlight the potential importance of initiatives graduating from GPSDD support in the right way.** The evaluation has highlighted that, since the transition, African stakeholders believe they have been given less opportunity to contribute to, and influence, the project; primarily because of differences in organisational priorities and culture. According to one of these respondents, the DEA appears to have treated product development as a purely technical issue and is not investing sufficiently in knowledge transfer and localisation and is therefore not contributing to the building of national systems or capacities.

**We have interpreted the convergence of enabling factors, or the package<sup>8</sup>, as GPSDD’s ability to build the foundations for and then place, the right<sup>9</sup> message or insight, in a timely fashion, by the right means while deploying the right partner strength or contribution.<sup>10</sup>** GPSDD builds the enabling environment for this moment by helping establish the right level of interest and the right mix of stakeholders in a network. It effectively provides a multifaceted response in a complex and rapidly evolving sector.

**The Secretariat has been highly effective in advancing GPSDD’s objectives. The Secretariat structure is agile, highly aligned to GPSDD’s shared values and has evolved as needs have arisen. Now, respondents request a further adaptation of the Secretariat’s operating model to align with the demand for scale-up in the current strategy.** The

<sup>7</sup> This includes only the outcomes which: a) were achieved during the lifetime of the current GPSDD strategy (in which the three levers of change are documented), b) demonstrate meaningful contributions to intermediate results, and c) GPSDD made a meaningful contribution towards.

<sup>8</sup> The how and why GPSDD contributed with other actors.

<sup>9</sup> Several respondents used the word ‘right’ when interviewed for the outcome harvest and the organisational assessment.

<sup>10</sup> This assumes that partners make contributions in one of four ways: (a) **Bring data**: a variety of types of data (mobile, satellite, etc.) as well as datasets, (b) **Bring skills**: technical expertise on tools, methodologies, and systems that builds capacity, (c) **Share knowledge**: information in a variety of forms (papers, webinars, discussions, etc.) that support individual and collective learning, and (d) **Bring resources**: primarily financial investments, but also includes time and personnel investments to a defined data objective.

7S organisational assessment and the survey provide evidence<sup>11</sup> that GPSDD's credibility has been established. It occupies an important niche where it has access to resources and people that few in its ecosystem can match.

**The most important factor determining the effectiveness of GPSDD and partner engagements is the open, responsive, collaborative and professional approach which GPSDD adopts – which is one of the packages of factors indicated above.** Respondents working on ARDC-related outcomes highlighted GPSDD's willingness to invest time and effort in capacity building while others in Kenya and Ghana said their engagement with GPSDD was enabled by the enthusiasm and energy of GPSDD staff. Respondents who had been involved in the Ghana-Kenya peer exchange pointed towards the importance of GPSDD staff being based in-country as a part of this. Some believe there are opportunities for other initiatives (e.g. DEA) to learn lessons from this approach – to help provide greater opportunities for collaboration with African stakeholders.

**GPSDD partners reported that there is a need for GPSDD to both scale up and to refresh its strategy, and to leverage connections in countries where it is harder to engage, to optimize the equitability of GPSDD's work.** Several respondents interviewed mentioned that GPSDD should scale up and do more of the same. Specifically mentioned was that GPSDD should continue to use its network and to scale up influencing, convening and knowledge sharing and also the coordination of data for development actors. Across several interviews including with country partners, and members of GPSDD's governance structures, respondents mentioned that the current GPSDD strategy still does not focus enough on working with partners who have the 'weakest' levels of capacity or capability in using data for development.

**GPSDD's ability to leverage partnerships, adopt an advisory role and catalyse change was brought to the fore during the pandemic in 2020. GPSDD adopted a new model which allowed an unprecedented delivery at scale and speed across African countries for the Data for Now programme.** During this time, two key findings (agility of the Secretariat and need for scale-up) from the evaluation's organisational assessment were validated unexpectedly when the Covid-19 pandemic hit. GPSDD's work in partnerships with UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) on Data for Now demonstrated it is possible for GPSDD to deliver multiple new partnerships, at speed and in many different contexts, which meet demand. As yet, these new partnerships and their results have not been independently evaluated, nevertheless emerging evidence<sup>12</sup> suggests GPSDD with partners has supported the development of datahubs, participated in peer-to-peer exchanges and supported capacity building. Further, there is evidence that in a substantial number of the new countries GPSDD has worked successfully through the UN Resident Coordinator. This has emerged as a new and successful model to be added to GPSDD's mechanisms for engaging a broad range of stakeholders, across several contexts simultaneously. GPSDD believe that between April and October 2020 the "speed and scale of delivery was unprecedented".<sup>13</sup>

**GPSDD's governance structures are, in the main, highly effective. Respondents state that the Board is a strong, robust function and the Secretariat is very effective and highly respected. Respondents are however actively looking for how the Secretariat can secure greater involvement from the TAG, collectively and individually.** Findings validate that the political capital housed in the TAG, is underused. It is seen as part of the original governance model/in need of updating. The TAG is a group of expert individuals who have agreed to devote time to supporting GPSDD's work in different ways.

**There are new and emerging challenges for GPSDD's governance as it achieves greater scale and impact: it needs a graduation strategy; there are trade-offs relating to efficiency vs style and approach, efficiency vs inclusivity in partnership and the application of ethics and principles in partnership.** GPSDD's Board and Secretariat's ability to convene and sustain collaborating competitors is highly valued. As the Secretariat hones its value proposition, generates funding to support scale-up and is more effective in achieving scale through institutional linkages (regional to country) and influence, its governance structures need to keep pace.

**GPSDD's regional and global-level initiatives have consistently been supported and facilitated by GPSDD's ability to convene space for multisectoral, multi-stakeholder partnerships at the national level especially through the**

<sup>11</sup> Itad presentation of preliminary analysis paper in June 2020 and survey respondent assessment of GPSDD's organisational effectiveness.

<sup>12</sup> Reports, data stories and board learning papers provided by Secretariat to Itad team.

<sup>13</sup> Covid-19 Response Board Learning paper

**country roadmap processes.** This linkage is not only unidirectional – there is also evidence that GPSDD’s regional initiatives reinforce country-level initiatives. Across multiple countries (Senegal, Sierra Leone, Ghana) there is an established change pathway that has emerged starting with engagement at a country level that leads to country-level relationships and governance structures that then provide a basis for that country’s engagement in GPSDD’s regional and global activities, particularly regarding the ARDC.

### How GPSDD can build on progress in the future

This evaluation concludes positively about the role and effectiveness of GPSDD within the complex global system in spite of challenges. It seeks to respond to the surge of demand from interviewees for GPSDD to scale up, validated by a healthy and resilient organisational performance. As a partnership originating from the SDG discussions and with an influential Board and wider network, many could argue that GPSDD has an obligation and responsibility to do what is within its power to progress action over the next nine years.

Naturally, any scale-up comes with risks, however, the scale-up envisaged for GPSDD is one grounded emphatically in its shared values and institutional agility; a source of great internal strength for the Secretariat, reflected in its networks and partnerships. The scale-up would build on the current structure and not necessarily incur significant additional headcount. It would be catalysed by organically matching demand and supply within its networks and partners, for example, at the global level aligning action through a newly devised policy advocacy agenda amongst other initiatives. 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. Three clusters of conclusions and recommendations emerge from the evaluative evidence presented above.

Cluster 1: Extending and scaling up contributions.	Cluster 2: Mobilising the network for scale-up.	Cluster 3: Documenting and applying learning.
<p>Policy advocacy is a good route to achieving change. Scale up level of ambition on policy advocacy work. Adopt a deliberate and concerted approach to policy advocacy that is both a pathway and an outcome.</p>	<p>Mobilising external data communities and the wider GPSDD network is critical to scale up. Scale by adopting new, cost effective ways of expanding country coverage by drawing on GPSDD’s core networking and brokering strengths.</p>	<p>Creating effective sustainable solutions is critical to scaling up. Document and apply learning in support of the policy advocacy agenda, scaling up country level results, improving the sustainability of interventions and making it possible for partners to self-serve.</p>
<p>GPSDD has made important contributions to all intermediate results set out in its current strategy – which is relevant and highly aligned to national, regional and global objectives. GPSDD is making important steps towards achieving a global or ‘at scale’ ambition, though this has not yet been achieved and the current strategy lacks specificity about how it will be achieved. The interplay between the levers of change and partner contributions within the ToC is clear, though there is scope to clarify the role of policy advocacy in bringing about change between the intermediate result and objective levels within the ToC.</p>	<p>A key strength and added value of GPSDD within the data for development sector lies in its ability to work on strategic objectives across the national, regional and global levels and the potential to transfer lessons emerging from activities on one level to others. Many of the countries with whom GPSDD has had a broad-based and sustained engagement have capable institutions and evident political will for reform. In addition to managing multiple models of engagement, a challenge for GPSDD going forward will be to find ways of reaching institutions in countries where this capability and political will is less evident to help ensure they are not left behind.</p>	<p>The Secretariat has established a niche for itself and leverages value for those working in the ecosystem because of its complementarity. It has the potential to generate learning at scale from this complementarity, not only about the technical initiatives it has supported, but also about the way it supports them. There is the potential for GPSDD to better leverage its niche at the global and regional levels to support the ecosystem to sustain progress already made and move towards global solutions for data use. There is a risk that, if interventions or initiatives do not ‘graduate’ from GPSDD in the right way, then the longer-term impact of GPSDD’s efforts could be diminished.</p>



Cluster 1: Extending and scaling up contributions.	Cluster 2: Mobilising the network for scale-up.	Cluster 3: Documenting and applying learning.
<p><b>Recommendation 1:</b> Update the ToC to reflect policy advocacy as a critical mechanism for scale up at the regional and global level, then develop and implement a deliberate policy advocacy agenda with specific outcomes.</p> <p><b>Recommendation 2:</b> Mobilise the GPSDD network in support of the policy advocacy agenda.</p> <p><b>Recommendation 3:</b> Make (bounded) adjustments to the structure of the Secretariat to ensure it is properly aligned with the policy advocacy agenda and any associated strategy updates.</p>	<p><b>Recommendation 4:</b> Emphasise GPSDD’s ability to leverage partnerships, adopt an advisory role and catalyse change (e.g. through work like Data for Now).</p> <p><b>Recommendation 5:</b> Place an intentional focus on expanding institutional partnerships with organisations who have a country presence and a local comparative advantage that aligns with GPSDD’s multi-stakeholder brokering.</p>	<p><b>Recommendation 6:</b> The Secretariat could consider ways to maintain and communicate a high-level mapping of partner initiatives against GPSDD’s objectives.</p> <p><b>Recommendation 7:</b> Reflect on evidence and learning generated by the Secretariat to date and document the Secretariat’s most current understanding of how change happens with reference to the current ToC.</p> <p><b>Recommendation 8:</b> Prepare a how-to guide on brokering, convening and supporting effective multi-stakeholder collaborations within the data for development ecosystem.</p> <p><b>Recommendation 9:</b> Amplify the voices of DEA African stakeholders and help DEA management adopt a more responsive and collaborative approach.</p>