



# How the inclusive data landscape has evolved:

Key insights & learnings from the Inclusive Data Charter



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## Overview

Since launching in 2018, the Inclusive Data Charter (IDC) has worked to advance the availability and use of inclusive data to ensure no one is left behind. The IDC's purpose is to forge a multi-stakeholder community of development actors committed to improving the inclusiveness of their data.

Over the last five years, the initiative has secured commitments from more than 30 Champions - government ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs); multilateral organizations; and non-governmental and civil society organizations - to improve their data's timeliness, comprehensiveness, and disaggregation.

At the same time, the inclusive data landscape has evolved as the data revolution for sustainable development (data revolution) and Leave No One Behind (LNOB) agendas have matured. Calls for critical reflection on how data can be used to address inequalities and center the voices of marginalized and underrepresented communities have grown. Post-COVID, questions around the ethical and inclusive governance of data, intersectionality, and data values, among others, have come to the fore.

To mark its fifth anniversary, in 2023, the IDC's Secretariat commissioned Athena Infonomics and DataReady to undertake a strategic review of the initiative. The review aimed to identify how the IDC can better foster action on inclusive data in the future, considering the evolving and changing contexts of the data revolution, the LNOB agenda, and the conception of inclusive data itself.

The review is framed by seven trends that have shaped the LNOB agenda and data revolution communities in recent years, including intersectionality, inclusive data systems, inclusive data governance, the impact of COVID-19, digital inclusion, the rise in collection and use of citizen-generated data (CGD), and the development of human rights-based approaches (HRBA) to data collection and use. While these trends help to shape and frame the findings set out within this report, it is also important to note the continued importance of data disaggregation to the inclusive data agenda too.

This report provides a snapshot of the key Insights and findings from the five year IDC strategic review undertaken in 2023. A mixed-methods approach consisting of a review of more than 70 documents, a series of 28 semi-structured interviews, and an open survey responded to by 65 individuals was adopted to complete the review. This summary document aims to share insights and learnings with others working in the data and inclusion sector.

# Inclusive data between 2015 - 2023: Trends, progress and evolution

## 2015 - 2018: Setting the LNOB and inclusive data agendas

**“[LNOB] is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its [SDGs]. It represents the unequivocal commitment of all UN Member States to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and humanity as a whole.”<sup>1</sup>**

This pledge, made by UN Member States at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) held in September 2015, represented a first-of-its-kind, cross-cutting commitment to end discrimination and reduce inequality globally. The commitment was institutionalized across the UN system by the UN System Chief Executive Board for Coordination (CEB) in 2016.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) created the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDGs) to “develop and implement the global indicator framework for the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.”<sup>3</sup>

A key component of the IAEG-SDGs’ mandate was to compile tools and resources for countries’ national statistics offices (NSOs), multilateral agencies, and other SDG custodian entities to disaggregate SDG-related data. This mandate recognized that, “improving data disaggregation is fundamental for the full implementation of the SDG indicator framework to fulfill the ambition of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”<sup>4</sup>

Early work on data disaggregation for the SDGs centered on the need for disaggregated data at a national level: (i) to be able to identify vulnerable groups or populations that are most likely to be left behind, understand the factors that keep them in or move them out of that position; and, (ii) to report on the indicators for these groups to monitor their progress in achieving the development targets and goals.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UN. 2023. *Leave No One Behind*. Online at:

<https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind>, accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>2</sup> UN. 2016. *Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development*. Online at:

[https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/imported\\_files/CEB%20equality%20framework-A4-web-rev3.pdf](https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/imported_files/CEB%20equality%20framework-A4-web-rev3.pdf), accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>3</sup> UN. 2023. *IAEG-SDGs*. Online at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/>, accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>4</sup> UN. 2023. *IAEG-SDGs: Data Disaggregation for the SDG indicators*. Online at:

<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/disaggregation/>, accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Asian Development Bank & UN Statistics Division. 2021. *Practical Guidebook on Data Disaggregation for the Sustainable Development Goals*. Online at:

## 2018 – 2023: The launch and growth of the IDC

The IDC was launched at a side event during the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2018. Ten founding Champions<sup>6</sup> endorsed the Charter at its inception and shared their action plans. The initiative’s founding document<sup>7</sup> stated that:

**“In order to live up to the promise inherent within the SDGs, to “Leave No One Behind,” we need timely, comprehensive, and disaggregated data, to better understand the situation of the poorest and most marginalized.”<sup>8</sup>**

The Charter followed up on this stipulation with a commitment supported by five principles. The commitment affirms that:

**“We, a global network of governments, NGOs, philanthropists, and businesses, commit to improve and strengthen data disaggregation by signing up to this Charter. Between now and 2030, we will work to improve the quality, quantity, financing and availability of inclusive and disaggregated data as well as the capacity and capability to produce and use it, in accordance with internationally accepted standards and ongoing processes under the auspices of the United Nations.”<sup>9</sup>**

The five Principles that form the backbone of the initiative include that:

1. All populations must be included in the data;
2. All data should, wherever possible, be disaggregated to accurately describe all populations;
3. Data should be drawn from all available sources;
4. Those responsible for the collection of data and the production of statistics must be accountable; and
5. Human and technical capacity to collect, analyze, and use disaggregated data must be improved, including through adequate and sustainable financing.<sup>10</sup>

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<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/698116/guidebook-data-disaggregation-sdgs.pdf>, accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>6</sup> These founding champions included: the ONS, FCDO (then DFID), Sightsavers and The Global Partnership as the four co-sponsors; together with: GSS, DANE, the Philippine Statistics Authority, HelpAge International, Data2X, UNFPA, UNICEF and Development Initiatives.

<sup>7</sup> IDC. 2018. *Everybody Counts: A commitment to ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit and measurement of social and economic progress*. Online at:

[https://www.data4sdgs.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/IDC\\_onepager\\_Final.pdf](https://www.data4sdgs.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/IDC_onepager_Final.pdf), accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

## Trends that have shaped the LNOB and data revolution communities

As the IDC network has grown, several trends across the LNOB and data revolution communities have resulted in a significant increase in how the notion of ‘inclusive data’ is perceived and interpreted. Over the course of this review, seven interrelated trends were repeatedly referred to by respondents to the survey and interviewees alike. The seven trends include intersectionality, inclusive data systems, inclusive data governance, the impact of COVID-19, digital inclusion, the rise in the collection and use of CGD, and the development of HRBAs for data collection and use.

Intersectionality has become a major theme within the LNOB and data revolution communities in recent years. In response to the emergence of this theme, the IDC Secretariat produced a series of tools and knowledge products unpacking intersectional approaches to data in 2021.<sup>11</sup> The package states that “intersectional approaches to data examine the multi-dimensionality of identity and its impacts and foster positive social transformation.”<sup>12</sup> Intersectional approaches emphasize the intersections of privilege and marginalization that people experience as a result of their race, socioeconomic class, gender, religion, ability, sexual identity, and other contextually relevant characteristics.<sup>13</sup> From an inclusive data perspective, several interviewees spoken to as part of this assessment noted the value of intersectionality in informing the generation of more inclusive policies but also highlighted how challenging and expensive it can be to collect the qualitative and highly disaggregated data needed to establish a rich enough picture of vulnerable groups’ intersectional identities.<sup>14</sup>

Linked to this, the need to build inclusive data systems has also become a significant theme in recent years. As the data revolution has evolved, the focus has shifted from exclusively considering inclusive data needs at the data collection and publication phases of the value chain to considering how the uptake and impact phases can also be more inclusive.<sup>15</sup> As part of this shift, inclusive data governance has also risen in prominence as an area of action. The Global Partnership’s Data Values Project<sup>16</sup> (DVP) was launched in 2021 reflecting

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<sup>11</sup> IDC. 2021. *Unpacking Intersectional Approaches to Data*. Online at: <https://www.data4sdqs.org/resources/unpacking-intersectional-approaches-data>, accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> UN. [Undated]. *Digital Inclusion*. Online at: [https://www.un.org/teenvoy/sites/www.un.org.teenvoy/files/general/Definition\\_Digital-Inclusion.pdf](https://www.un.org/teenvoy/sites/www.un.org.teenvoy/files/general/Definition_Digital-Inclusion.pdf), accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Government, Multilateral and CSO respondents.

<sup>15</sup> ODW & Data2X. 2018. *The Data Value Chain: Executive Summary*. Online at: <https://opendatawatch.com/reference/the-data-value-chain-executive-summary/>, accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>16</sup> The Global Partnership. 2023. *Data Values Project*. Online at: <https://www.data4sdqs.org/datavaluesproject>, accessed 4 October 2023.

recognition that “far too many people remain excluded from or invisible in data while others are harmed by their inclusion in it.”<sup>17</sup> In 2022, it launched the #DataValues Manifesto<sup>18</sup> to rally the data revolution community around the idea that, “we must build data systems that help and empower people, instead of harming them.”<sup>19</sup>

In turn, the DVP’s launch was largely the result of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on policymakers’ and individuals’ understanding that digital technologies and data about vulnerable people and communities can be used to oppress as well as empower.

COVID-19 had a significant impact on the inclusive data community. The pandemic caused significant delays to data collection and production - especially in what was meant to be a census year for many countries. NSOs and other data collecting entities had to rapidly adapt to the new realities of lockdowns and limited mobility; both for the general public and enumerators. A recent study<sup>20</sup> found that in many countries there was very limited COVID-19 data disaggregated by demographic characteristics other than age. The data relied upon in the study indicates that only a few countries provided COVID-19 data with breakdowns by race or ethnicity (5 countries), disability (5 countries), socio-economic status (4 countries), or the impact of COVID-19 on individuals with pre-existing health conditions (16 countries). Most of the countries reporting disaggregated data belong to the high-income category, while low-income countries had the least amount of disaggregated data available. These trends were also captured and documented within *An Unequal Pandemic: Insights from Communities and Civil Society* produced by The Global Partnership in 2021.<sup>21</sup>

The survey conducted as part of this strategic review reinforces the view that COVID-19 had an overwhelmingly negative impact on the availability of inclusive data. Most respondents (90%) found COVID-19 to have had a negative impact on the LNOB agenda. However, at the same time, respondents (56%) also felt that there was a significant opportunity post-COVID to advocate for the importance of inclusive data.

A further impact of COVID-19 was the proliferation of digital data collection methods and innovation in using non-traditional data sources by NSOs and other data-collecting entities.

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<sup>17</sup> The Global Partnership. 2022. *Reimagining Data and Power: A roadmap for putting values at the heart of data*. Online at:

<https://www.data4sdgs.org/reimagining-data-and-power-roadmap-putting-values-heart-data>, accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>18</sup> The Global Partnership. 2022. *#DataValues Manifesto*. Online at:

<https://www.data4sdgs.org/datavaluesproject/manifesto-demanding-fair-data-future>, accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Grantz, K. et al. 2020. *The use of mobile phone data to inform analysis of COVID-19 pandemic epidemiology*. Nature Communications 11, Article number 4961. Online at:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-020-18190-5>, accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>21</sup> The Global Partnership. 2021. *An Unequal Pandemic: Insights from Communities and Civil Society*. Online at:

<https://www.data4sdgs.org/resources/unequal-pandemic-insights-communities-and-civil-society>, accessed 23 October 2023.

However, reliance on digital tools to collect data, while efficient in the main, exacerbated challenges in reaching left-behind groups, reflecting the inter-relationship between inclusive data and digital inclusion. Digital inclusion occurs iteratively as individuals gain access to more and more digital devices and interfaces. Digital inclusion shifts the focus away from 'data' as the area of inclusion or exclusion. Instead, it focuses on how - and by whom - data is produced, analyzed, stored, and shared via digital means. As more data are digitized, more services are provided through digital channels, and more processes and decisions become automated, digital inclusion will become more prominent within the LNOB agenda. This recognition is reflected in the prominence given to digital transformation within Our Common Agenda,<sup>22</sup> launched by the UN Secretary-General in 2021, and the process of producing a Global Digital Compact<sup>23</sup> that it set in motion.

A further trend noted across interviews was the heightened appreciation of the value of CGD in helping to fill data gaps and supply disaggregated data on vulnerable groups. Interviewees from across stakeholder groups pointed to improved methodologies and willingness within national statistical systems to leverage the potential of CGD.

Finally, multiple interviewees referenced the development of a human rights-based approach to data framework<sup>24</sup> by the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and its incorporation into the UNSC's updated *Handbook on the Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems*<sup>25</sup> as an important development that has further strengthened impetus for inclusive data.

While these trends help to shape and frame the findings discussed later in this report, it is also important to note the continued importance of disaggregation to the inclusive data agenda. This was noted by the majority of interviewees spoken to as part of this assessment.

## Key review findings

These findings are primarily based on interview data but are complemented by survey responses and insights from the document review where appropriate.

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<sup>22</sup> UN. 2021. *Our Common Agenda*. Online at: [https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common\\_Agenda\\_Report\\_English.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf), accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>23</sup> UN. 2023. *Global Digital Compact*. Online at: <https://www.un.org/techenvoy/global-digital-compact#:~:text=The%20Common%20Agenda%20proposes%20a,roots%20organizations%2C%20academia%2C%20and%20individuals>, accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>24</sup> OHCHR. 2018. *A Human Rights-Based Approach to Data*. Online at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/HRIndicators/GuidanceNoteonApproachtoData.pdf>, accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>25</sup> UN. 2022. *The Handbook on Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems (4th Ed)*. Online at: <https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/handbook/index.cshhtml>, accessed 4 October 2023.

## The continued relevance of the IDC's Vision and Principles

***There is general consensus that the IDC's Vision and Principles were very relevant when the initiative was first launched.***

Many of the founding Champions spoken to as part of this review noted that at its launch, the IDC very much reflected where the LNOB and statistics community were working out how to meet the disaggregation needs of the SDGs. Many interviewees also noted that the initiative filled a gap that existed between the need for advocacy in particular areas of inclusion and non-discrimination and the technical work involved in ensuring that data on the conditions of the most vulnerable were available to policymakers. In this way, the IDC was seen as complementary to the official efforts to produce inclusive data led by the IAEG-SDGs at the time.

***There is a general consensus that the Vision and Principles remain relevant. However, opinions are divided over the degree to which their current phrasing adequately reflects the evolution of inclusive data in recent years.***

Across all interviews, all seven themes mentioned in the previous part - intersectionality, inclusive data systems, inclusive data governance, the impact of COVID-19, digital inclusion, the rise in collection and use of CGD, and the development of an HRBA to data collection and use - were raised to greater or lesser degrees by respondents. For some respondents, the Charter's Vision and Principles provide adequate flexibility in interpretation to cover these developments implicitly. For others, however, there is a desire to see recent trends more clearly and explicitly referenced in the Charter.

Numerous examples of how IDC membership had helped catalyze change within Champion institutions, and sometimes across countries, were shared from Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and Senegal, all of whom have used the IDC principles to strengthen tools, frameworks, and processes across their national statistical systems.

In Ghana, the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) pushed for the legislature to change the Statistics Law in Ghana to include a Code of Ethics and Data Quality Assurance Framework. Membership of the IDC helped to strengthen the argument that these tools were necessary for GSS to effectively and responsibly achieve its mandate.

In Kenya, the IDC's Vision and Principles have helped to bring stakeholders together on issues of inclusive data. This has had a catalytic effect in the country. For example, there are now discussions about the need for data focal points to be embedded across the government. As a result of the national-level coordination that IDC membership has facilitated, inclusive data will be part of their terms of reference.

In many instances, IDC membership itself has become engrained and institutionalized within Champions' organizations. For numerous countries, this has happened as a result of the institutionalization of IDC Action Plans within strategic plans. In Senegal, for instance,



commitments to the IDC will be integrated into the forthcoming 2024 - 2028 National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS). Similarly, DANE's Action Plan has also been integrated into the NSDS in Colombia.

## SA2: The evolution of the notion of 'inclusive data'

**There is broad recognition among interviewees and survey respondents that inclusive data now encompasses more than 'disaggregation' and includes the seven themes of: intersectionality, inclusive data systems, inclusive data governance, the impact of COVID-19, digital inclusion, the rise in collection and use of CGD, and the development of a HRBA to data collection and use.**

**Despite the evolution of the notion of inclusive data in recent years, many interviewees continue to recognize the value and importance of capacity building and data disaggregation as being pivotal to inclusive data.**

When asked to select all options that they agreed with, survey respondents took a broad approach, with most selecting multiple options as their answer as Figure 1 demonstrates.

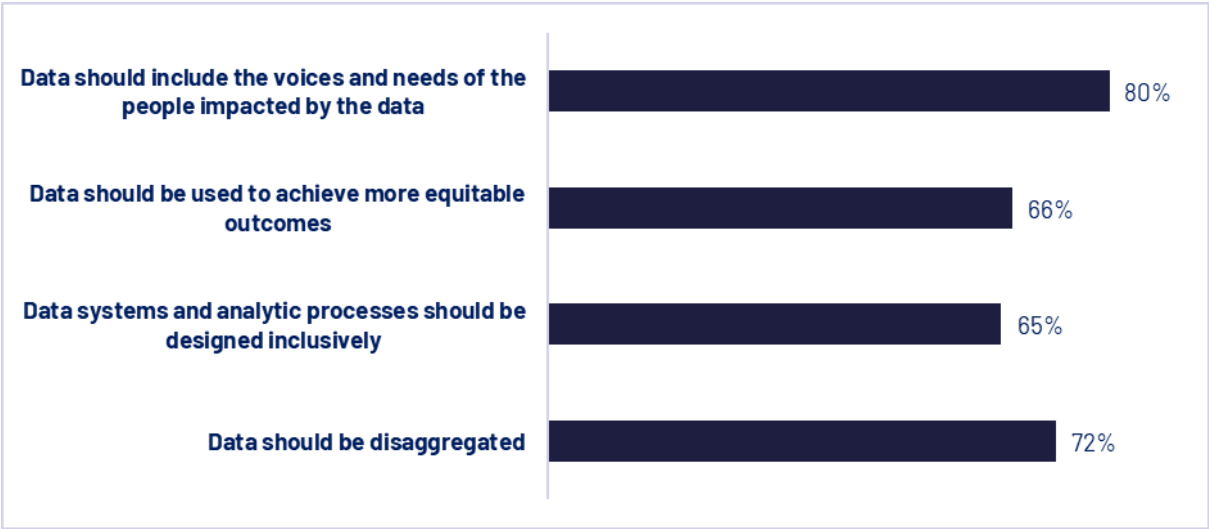


Figure 1: Survey responses to the question: "What does inclusive data mean to you?"

The vast majority of interviewees agreed:

**"In the beginning [of the SDGs], the [inclusive data] agenda was about data disaggregation and making sure that NSOs had data on marginalized groups. It was less focused on inclusion in terms of collecting data in ways that better represented people. In the beginning, we weren't even talking about inclusive data, just disaggregation. Now we talk about collecting data**

**together with people, governing it together, using it together - being inclusive across the whole value chain.”<sup>26</sup>**

For some respondents, inclusive data and the broader concept of ‘inclusion’ are inseparable. CBM Global, an NGO working on disability rights, for instance focuses on establishing the preconditions necessary for inclusivity for people with disabilities alongside its work on inclusive data. These preconditions encompass accessibility aspects like sign language, braille, accessible transport, bathrooms, and digital inclusion.

For some, ‘inclusion’ is a multi-layered concept. As the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) described their process: at the base layer, there is a need to collect granular data on basic characteristics such as age and sex. Thereafter, still at the collection stage, focus shifts to collecting data on other characteristics of vulnerability - education, sexuality, socio-economic development level, etc. Taken together, these data are the enablers of intersectional approaches. At the next level, the question of how to use this data arises, which can be very challenging. Analyzing data requires capacity and resources that are not always present. Thereafter, activities to disseminate data to the right audiences for advocacy, decision-making, etc. take place, all the while trying to ensure that people represented in the data are part of the process.

While there has been a significant and tangible evolution in the notion of inclusive data in recent years, many survey respondents and interviewees noted that the foundational needs of data disaggregation and supporting capacity development remain central to work on inclusive data.

## **The continued relevance and coherence of inclusive data in the broader LNOB policy space**

***There is a strong sense among interviewees and survey respondents alike that inclusive data is central to the LNOB agenda and has become more of a priority in recent years.***

Survey respondents overwhelmingly believe that inclusive data remains central to the LNOB agenda and that the need for inclusive data has become more of a priority in recent years, as Figures 2 and 3 indicate.

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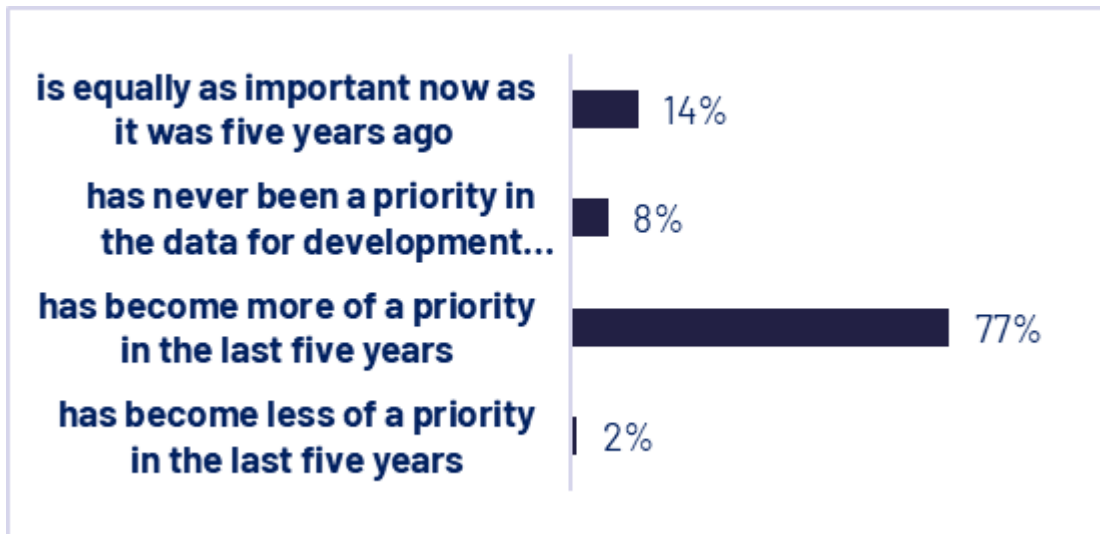


Figure 2: Survey responses to a question about prioritization of inclusive data

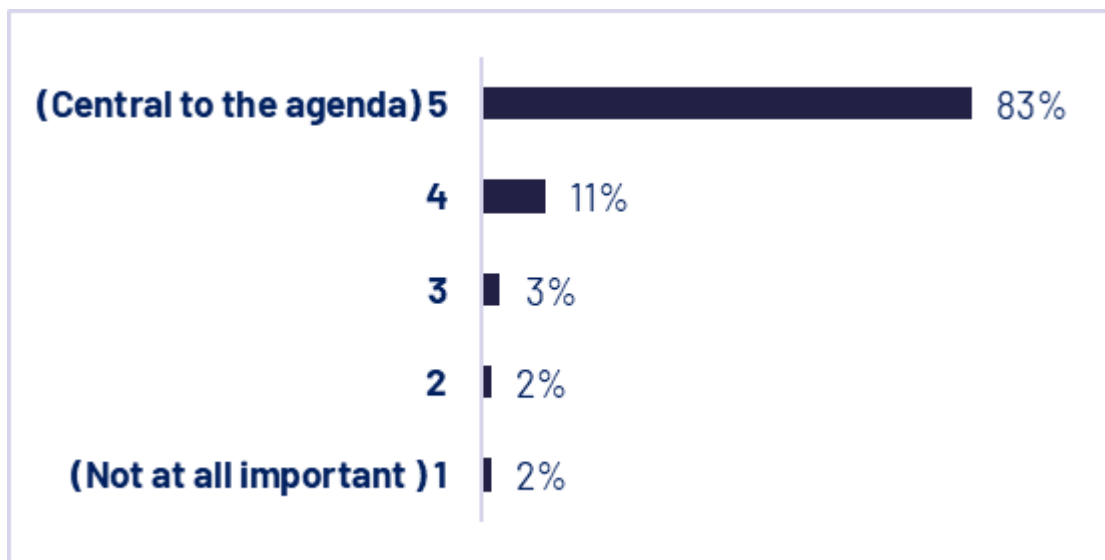


Figure 3: Survey responses to the question: "How important do you think inclusive data is to the LNOB agenda?"

In some countries, inclusion as a political issue - and inclusive data - within national-level policy discussions has also become more prominent in recent years. Colombia is a good example of the interlinkage between inclusive data and broader LNOB objectives. In Colombia, inclusion has become one of the defining elements of Colombian policymaking. From the Colombian NSO's - DANE - point of view, this means working with vulnerable groups to empower them with the ability to generate and use statistics about themselves so they are better able to represent themselves and their needs when engaging with policy processes - be it around health or education service delivery, or economic activities such as

negotiating mining or logging concessions. To this end, DANE has been working with an indigenous community, the Kankuamo People, to support the development of their own indigenous statistical system.

***Notwithstanding the continued relevance of inclusive data as part of the LNOB agenda, there are limitations to the ability of formal policy processes to include intentionally excluded groups.***

As part of this review, the authors spoke to several individuals representing communities that have historically faced, and continue to face, intentional exclusion. For activists and representatives of such groups, the language of official policy processes, such as the LNOB agenda, hold little weight. For individuals representing constituencies that are intentionally marginalized by governments, inclusion and representation in data systems is often linked explicitly to their fundamental human rights, in particular the right to life and the right to dignity.

## Become an IDC Champion

If you represent a National Statistics Office, Minister or Government, civil society, international organization, academia, or other sector looking to join the Inclusive Data Charter and would like to find out more, please contact Tichafara Chisaka, IDC Program Manager, [tchisaka@sightsavers.org](mailto:tchisaka@sightsavers.org), and Karen Bett, Senior Policy Manager, [kbett@data4sdgs.org](mailto:kbett@data4sdgs.org).

## Learn more about the IDC

To learn more about the Inclusive Data Charter, visit our [webpage](#) and follow the hashtag #IDCdata4all on LinkedIn, X, Facebook, and YouTube.

You can read more about what's next for the [IDC in this summary blog](#).

## Acknowledgements

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