

Data for Now: Inception Workshop

Summary, December 2019

Introduction

The **Data for Now** initiative aims to increase the use of robust methods and tools that improve the timeliness, coverage, and quality of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) data through collaboration and partnership, technical and capacity support, and information sharing.

The initiative was launched by UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, in September 2019, and is co-led by a Data for Now core team consisting of the United Nations Statistics Division, the World Bank, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

In order to address gaps in timely data that provide information on the SDGs, the core team hosted a two-day inception workshop in Kigali in November 2019 that aimed to achieve the following objectives in the first eight countries to be part of the Data for Now initiative:

- Identify national priority needs and challenges
- Define areas of learning and experimentation to be pursued in every country
- Review possible solutions and identify data assets, infrastructures and training that can facilitate adoption and sustained use
- Agree next steps, including division of responsibilities, timelines and deliverables by country for 2020

In addition to the representatives of the eight pioneer country partners (Bangladesh, Colombia, Ghana, Mongolia, Nepal, Paraguay, Rwanda, Senegal), nearly 50 other stakeholders attended the workshop. These included representatives from data providers, regulators, industry associations, experts, analysts, multilaterals, donors, and more. This initial set of participants were able to narrow down priorities and begin forming partnerships around concrete objectives. We will continue to mobilize resources and increase engagement from all interested stakeholders, expanding our ambition and our scope from 2020 onwards.

The workshop generated media coverage in Rwanda's top daily newspaper, the *New Times*: [*Do Countries Rely on Wrong Data to Make Decisions?*](#)

Priority themes

The workshop was structured around four parallel thematic sessions. The selection of themes was based on consultations with the country partners before the workshop, to capture their policy priorities. For each theme, the workshop identified specific data outcomes that the country partners hope to achieve as part of the Data for Now initiative.

1. Land use

More timely data on land use, including for agriculture and water management, has been identified as a priority by Mongolia, Paraguay, Rwanda and Senegal. A host of existing earth observations data sources and platforms have been identified to meet the need for more timely data on land use, and training has been identified as a priority for all countries. During the session countries narrowed in on areas where more timely data and insights could generate positive impact:

- Estimating crop yields in Mongolia
- Building data-driven water management systems in Paraguay
- Improving land management statistics using high-resolution imagery in Rwanda
- Strengthening land management systems for food security in Senegal

2. Poverty

For many countries, more timely and more geographically disaggregated poverty data is critical for allocating resources, in particular in response to the growing trend towards decentralization of government budgets. In this session, representatives from Bangladesh, Colombia and Nepal discussed new methods and the conditions required to produce regular poverty estimates in between survey rounds. All three country participants focused on the following:

- Small-area poverty estimates disaggregated by poverty type and population group
- Small-area income estimates

3. Human mobility

Understanding patterns of movement is an area where new data sources have proved particularly valuable. Many relevant case studies were highlighted during this session, and the need for knowledge-sharing from existing programs was highly important for participants as they developed their own programs of work. The priority outcomes for timely data emerging from this session were quite diverse:

- Domestic tourism estimates in Nepal
- Urban-rural migration in Nepal
- Flood monitoring in Paraguay
- Transport monitoring in Rwanda

4. Education

In contrast to other thematic areas, the discussions in the Education session revolved strongly around traditional data sources (e.g. administrative data, surveys and census rounds). While education data exists in many instances, there are persistent issues such as inconsistencies in timeliness, data quality and interoperability. There are great opportunities to bring some of these discussions into wider pieces of work on strengthening administrative data systems and enabling better data-sharing between different government departments. Session participants focused on the following outcomes:

- Digitization of administrative data systems in Bangladesh
- Strengthening administrative data systems in Colombia

- Access to education data for disabled persons in Ghana

Next steps

The Data for Now core team will continue to work with country partners to deliver on the priority outcomes identified, and to share learning among partners and more broadly. In addition, we will be producing a range of materials to inform country partnerships that will also be relevant to the wider data community.

Delivering on country objectives

The primary aim of Data for Now is to facilitate progress on timely data at the national level. A number of specific outcomes were agreed, with the aim of having initial results to showcase at the UN World Data Forum in October 2020. To move this forward, the core team will support country partners on the following priority actions:

- **Program roadmaps**

Country partners identified a range of necessary conditions to deliver on the priority outcomes. These included access to data, technology and infrastructure, training, and legal or regulatory reform, among others. The core team will work with countries to develop program roadmaps, identifying what needs to be done and in what order, to serve as a basis for planning specific interventions and partnerships.

- **Grouping priorities**

A number of countries shared similar objectives. Where this is the case, Data for Now can help to bring them together to learn from each other, and to create wider partnerships to share methods, capacity development and training. This was particularly the case for the work on timely poverty estimates.

- **Governance bodies**

The first step for all country partners, as identified in preliminary program roadmaps, is establishing a governance body to oversee the delivery of the priority outcomes. This will serve as a basis for inter-departmental coordination, stakeholder feedback and political buy-in. Governance bodies will serve as primary points of contact for taking the work forward.

Data for Now resources

During the workshop, it became clear that we can play a useful role in producing background materials and developing learning that can inform both the Data for Now partnership and the wider community interested in timely data. These will be used by the teams involved in country partnerships, but also made widely available. Key issues raised in this first phase were:

- **Defining “timeliness”**

Timely data can mean many different things. The appropriate interval between data points will depend on a number of considerations, including the robustness of methodologies, the availability of data, the costs of increasing timeliness versus the needs of the decision making cycle and the expected speed of change over time. We hope to enable partners to develop answers to these questions and the

appropriate level of ambition (for example, monitoring versus forecasting) with careful consideration of the different options.

- **Landscape analysis**

Each year, more earth observations satellites are launched and new platforms for data access and analysis are developed. There's a range of temporal coverage, spatial resolution, geographies, cost, bandwidth requirements, training needs, stakeholders and applications – these form a dizzying array of opportunities for partnerships. Of top importance for the country partners, and others seeking to develop new initiatives in this area, is a regularly updated landscape analysis that will help prioritize partnerships and identify existing programs to scale.

- **Partnership models**

Creating successful partnerships means developing shared objectives and delivering clarity on what each stakeholder is expected to contribute. The non-country partners at the initial workshop pointed in particular to the need for clarity on expectations, regard for incentives, and the importance of knowledge sharing to develop and maintain strong partnerships. Greater understanding of existing experiences and knowledge sharing between country partners can help to facilitate the development of mutually beneficial and sustainable partnerships, and we will be holding convenings and producing materials to share our learning on partnership models as the initiative develops.

The Data for Now core team will be working intensively with partners throughout 2020, and will be presenting the first wave of results and learning from the initiative at the World Data Forum in Switzerland in October 2020.

Annex 1: Workshop participants

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| African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS) |
| Agence Nationale de Statistique et de la Démographie (ANSD, Senegal) |
| Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) |
| Center of Excellence in Data Science (ACE-DS) |
| Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, Nepal) |
| Centro de Pensamiento Estratégico Internacional (Cepei) |
| Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE, Colombia) |
| Department for International Development (DFID, UK) |
| Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) |
| Dirección General de Estadística, Encuestas y Censos (DGEEC, Paraguay) |
| Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) |
| Flowminder/University of Southampton |
| Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) |
| Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) |
| Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD) |
| Google Earth |
| GSM Association (GSMA) |
| Humanitarian Open StreetMap (HOT) |
| Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) |
| National Institute of Statistics Rwanda (NISR) |
| National Statistical Office of Mongolia |
| Office for National Statistics (ONS, UK) |
| Overseas Development Institute (ODI) |
| Planet, Inc. |
| Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development (RCMRD) |
| Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA) |
| SDG Center for Africa |
| Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) |
| Twaweza |
| United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) |
| United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) |
| United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) |
| United Nations Global Pulse Lab Kampala (UNGP) |
| United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) |
| United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) |
| World Bank |