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Background document
Available in English only

Items for decision: Data and indicators for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Collaborative on Citizen Data

Terms of Reference

Prepared by Collaborative on Citizen Data

Background

Citizen¹ contributions to data, broadly defined as the engagement of citizens in multiple processes in the data value chain, is increasingly recognized as critical to helping overcome many data challenges of our times. In particular in the context of the 2030 Agenda's underlying principle to ensure that no one is left behind, citizen contributions to data helps fill critical data gaps for groups suffering from marginalization and increase the extent to which their experiences are reflected in statistics. In addition, some citizen contributions to data initiatives further advance important values such as fairness, inclusiveness, openness and transparency in statistics and public policy.

Citizen contributions to data could happen at different levels – local, national, regional or global. The engagement of citizens can be organized by different stakeholders - scientists, community leaders or platforms, civil society organisations (CSOs), or individual citizens. Their engagement can contribute to various stages of the data value chain and serve different objectives and contribute to data and policy.

The official statistical community also increasingly recognizes the importance of non-state actors in contributing to the inclusiveness of the produced statistics. Some national statistical offices (NSOs) have actively initiated citizen contributions to data; some of which have already integrated Citizen-generated data (CGD) into their statistical production. Also, for data collection such as censuses and surveys, NSOs often partner with CSOs, representatives of marginalized population groups, national human rights institutions and others, to ensure the inclusiveness of methodology and the policy relevance of data collected.

Unleashing the full potential of citizens for data, however, faces many challenges. These, for example, include the lack of trust between the state and non-state actors, concerns about the quality and sustainability of data collected by non-state actors, and the statistical capacity of CSOs. In this context, the United Nations Statistics Division organized [an Expert Group Meeting on Harnessing data by citizens for public policy and SDG monitoring: a conceptual framework](#) in November 2022. The meeting was attended by representatives from NSOs, CSOs, academia and other national, regional and international organisations. It was agreed in the meeting that the development of a framework would be an important next step to help conceptualize the different ways citizens can contribute to data and support the formulation of action points for the community to move forward. The meeting also agreed to establish a Collaborative as a platform for collaboration and exchange of experiences and to advance the work in this area.

Establishing a conceptual framework on citizen contributions to data was further requested by the 54th Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission in Feb-March 2023. The Commission “stressed the need to develop a conceptual framework on CGD and supported the establishment of the Collaborative on Citizen Data to provide a space to share knowledge and experiences, foster collaboration across different communities, identify conceptual and methodological gaps and capacity needs, and inform the development of guidance, including on quality assurance”.²

¹ The term "Citizen" here refers to individuals in a society without implying any connotation related to citizenship and the legal status associated with a person's country of residence.

² UN Statistical Commission, Report on the 54th session, E/2023/24*-E/CN.3/2023/37*, Decision 54/102, paragraph (h).

In April 2023, the Collaborative was launched officially at the 4th United Nations World Data Forum in Hangzhou, China, when the initiative was also acknowledged at a very high level by the United Nations Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General.

In September 2023, the second [Expert Group Meeting](#) was carried out in Copenhagen that further discussed the role of the Collaborative in implementing the conceptual framework on citizen data. The recommendations from the Expert Group Meeting are reflected in this document.

Objective

A Collaborative on Citizen Data is established, in response to the recommendations from the above-mentioned UN Expert Meeting and the decision of the 54th Session of the UN Statistical Commission, to foster systematic collaboration among civil society, national statistical systems, academia and other relevant stakeholders to advance the sustainable coordination, production and use of citizen data for impact.³ More specifically, the Collaborative will (a) develop the conceptual framework and the roadmap for citizen data; (b) lead the implementation of the framework, with activities identified by the roadmap⁴; and (c) serve as venue for a community of sharing and learning exchange.

Structure of the Collaborative

Members

The Collaborative is committed to bring together all stakeholders within the national data ecosystem, including CSOs that are engaged in data production and/or data use, human rights institutions, research institutions, public and private institutions which can partner with/support NSOs in driving inclusive data processes, development partners (donors), NSOs, line ministries that are part of the national statistical system as data producers and/or data users for policymaking, and regional and international organisations.

To ensure broader representation and engagement, the Collaborative will leverage on existing networks such as the [Major Group and Other Stakeholders](#), the network of human rights institutions and the citizen science community.

Members are expected to:

- Commit to and deliver on the collaborative effort and dedicate the necessary time and resources to help achieve the objectives of the Collaborative
- Participate actively and contribute their skills, knowledge, and ideas to the Collaborative's activities and discussions
- Take responsibility for their roles and tasks within the Collaborative within agreed timelines, and maintaining a high standard of work
- Share information, knowledge, lessons learned, and resources

³ Report of the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Harnessing data by citizens for public policy and SDG monitoring: a conceptual framework, 10-11 November 2022, Bangkok, Thailand. Available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/meetings/harnessing-data-by-citizens-for-public-policy-and-SDG-monitoring/CDG_EGM_report_final_public.pdf

⁴ The draft Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data is also a background document to the 55th Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission.

- Collaborative members that represent their communities are responsible to consult with those they represent within their respective networks.

Members will be invited through bi-annual membership drives, following information sessions organized by the Collaborative. Interested parties are also encouraged to reach out to the Secretariat for consideration for membership in the Collaborative.

Steering Committee

The Collaborative will be guided by a Steering Committee that will set the overall strategic direction including the objectives and priorities, monitor and review progress, ensure the activities and outputs meet the required standards, oversee or be directly involved in communicating with stakeholders and provide guidance and advice to various workstreams under the Collaborative. The Steering Committee members are expected to make substantive advisory, technical and financial contribution to the Collaborative. Members of the Steering Committee and their respective roles are:

- United Nations Statistics Division: co-leads the work of the Collaborative. UNSD maintains connections with national statistical offices and national statistical systems, and reports to and consult with the UN Statistical Commission on advancements made in this area and further steps needed. UNSD is currently carrying out the technical work on CGD and is also providing financial support in preparing for the launch of the Collaborative. UNSD will also serve as secretariat of the Collaborative, supporting its work and establishing and maintaining its website.
- UN Women: co-leads the work of the Collaborative. UN Women is rooted in a history of advocacy and grassroots engagement – one of the many reasons why CGD has always been important as a tool for the advancement of its work to achieve gender equality. As part of UN Women’s global gender data programme, Women Count, UN Women would be providing technical and financial support towards the effective and efficient work of the Collaborative.
- The International Civil Society Centre supports international civil society organisations (ICSOs) to maximise their impact for a sustainable and more equitable world. The Centre is owned by 15 of the largest ICSOs who work across environmental, human rights, social justice and humanitarian issues. The Centre hosts the Leave No One Behind partnership, bringing together nearly 100 organisations across 9 countries, comprising ICSOs, national CSOs, civic platforms and think tanks. The platform aims to make the voices of marginalised groups heard and count in the implementation of the SDGs, relying on the use of community-driven data. The Centre and its LNOB partnership will act as multiplier of CSO voices in the work of the initiative, facilitating CSO perspectives and best-case inputs. It will engage in joint fundraising activities, leveraging contacts from their own network, and will actively promote the work of the collaborative at key global events and with their network of international partners.
- Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data- The Global Partnership is a network of over 700 private sector, academic and civil society organizations, and governments. Between 2017 and 2020, the Global Partnership through a CGD task team brought its members together to advance the conversation on CGD by guidance tools on how to make the most of CGD, and provide a forum for sharing experiences and learning. For the collaborative, the Global Partnership will draw on its network of NSOs, Ministries, CSOs and academia to advance the work of the collaborative. It will bring best practices from the in-country CGD work. The Global Partnership will also engage in joint fundraising for the work of the collaborative as well as create spaces to amplify the work of the collaborative.

- The Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) is the national human rights institution of Denmark. It works in collaboration with rightsholder groups to develop tools that facilitate data collection by citizens and communities to monitor their rights from a human rights perspective. It also supports partnerships between other national human rights institutions and NSOs to sustainably foster a human rights-based approach throughout data processes. This includes among other things, ensuring a participatory process and conducting data disaggregation on important issues for the rightsholder groups. DIHR will contribute to the Collaborative by (a) Hosting the EGM (logistics and financial contribution for the venue, and technical expertise); (b) Coordinating with their partners to submit case studies; (c) Reviewing case studies; (d) Contributing to the framework on citizen data; (e) Supporting their partners at country level to implement related work; and (f) Joint fundraising.
- The Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities for Sustainable Development (SGPwD) is the focal point for all UN-related sustainable development processes. The SGPwD aims to enhance the opportunity for persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, non-governmental and other organizations working on the rights of persons with disabilities to advocate with a unified voice in all UN sustainable development processes, including in the global SDG indicator framework and related data processes. For the Collaborative, the SGPwD will coordinate and share best practices from organizations of persons with disabilities, disability NGOs, and other partners who are designing, collecting, analyzing, and using citizen-generated disability data to fill gaps. The SGPwD will meaningfully and actively be engaged in the Collaborative and work with others to carry out the objectives, and jointly fundraise for the Collaborative.
- The Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) promotes the better use and production of statistics across Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia-Pacific. Since its establishment in 1999, PARIS21 has successfully developed a worldwide network of statisticians, policy makers, researchers, civil society organisations, and development partners committed to evidence-based policy making for sustainable and inclusive development. With the main objective to achieve national and international development goals and reduce poverty in low- and middle-income countries, PARIS21 facilitates statistical capacity development, advocates for more and better financing for development data, and provides analysis, technical assistance, and innovative solutions for national statistical systems in partner countries. PARIS21 brings technical knowledge and guidance about operationalising CGD with NSOs to the Collaborative, as well as novel approaches to strengthening standards, planning, and skills to support inclusive and participatory approaches to development data. PARIS21 will also support the Collaborative in fundraising and outreach to amplify the impact of lessons and solutions.
- Open Data Watch (ODW)– Open Data Watch is an international, non-profit organization of data experts working to bring change to organizations that produce and manage data. ODW is dedicated to supporting the development data sector for better and more inclusive data systems, improving data and statistical development capacity efforts, and promoting better data use and impact. Since its establishment in 2013, ODW has led the advancement of the open data agenda, promoting an innovative approach of considering the whole data value chain to maximize the relevance and impact of data, including by placing citizens at the center of data and statistical systems. Given their unique experience in working in development data across the data ecosystem and providing support to data producers, ODW will contribute to the development of the new CGD framework in the aspects related to engagement of citizens that are going to be considered and addressed in the framework,

and to the development of concepts, definitions and key attributes in engaging citizens. They will also build on their extensive network of partners to engage in fund raising and contribute to the development of guidance to countries for advancing CGD and their integration in official statistics, as they face challenges in fully leveraging the power of CGD for public policy, especially when issues of data quality, data ethics in engaging citizens, and lack of trust between citizens (civil society organizations) and government entities arise.

- The World Bank's Development Data Group: By unlocking the full value of data for development, the Development Data Group helps achieve the World Bank's mission to create a world free from poverty on a livable planet. Through leading data public goods, cutting-edge innovations and research, pioneering partnerships, and globally trusted technical expertise, the Bank's Data Group lead efforts to ensure development data is of high quality, accessible, and widely used across the world. The Data Group is pleased to join the Collaborative to contribute its technical expertise and convening capacity in the area of CGD to bring state and non-state actors to (a) help operationalize the aspirations of Collaborative; (b) help raise and coordinate funds; (c) advocate for CGD at global, national and sub-national level; (d) pilot and identify best practices to mainstream CGD to help the poorest in low-and middle income countries; and (e) establish data standards to help create comparable datasets and to enhance coordination and alignment of fragmented development data activities.
- UNITAR (United Nations Institute for Training and Research): A UN entity whose main mandate is to provide capacity building, training and learning solutions for government and non-government stakeholders to promote sustainable development policies and approaches. Under its statistics and data portfolio, the Institute works with National Statistical Offices, academia, other government entities and civil society organizations to develop capacities for better data governance, data partnerships and improved data use by various stakeholders. It participates in research projects on the use of citizen data and participatory research to inform better policies. UNITAR will draw on its expertise and the network of partners, including in academia and CSOs, to advance the work of the Collaborative, in particular when it comes to sharing knowledge, supporting the exchange of experiences and the application of good practices by countries and organizations, and building capacities of various stakeholders to promote citizen data. UNITAR will engage in joint fundraising for the work of the Collaborative as well as support the outreach.

Co-leads:

UNSD and UN Women are the initial co-leads of the Collaborative. Co-leads share the responsibility of guiding the Collaborative, serve as a central point for information flow, represent the Collaborative in external settings such as stakeholder meetings and conferences, contributing to fundraising and managing resources including budget, personnel and time.

Co-leads rotate every two years, to be elected by the Steering Committee members. One co-lead may stay for an extra year to maintain continuity and smooth transition to the new co-lead.

Secretariat:

UNSD serves as the Secretariat for the Collaborative. It coordinates and facilitates the work of the Collaborative:

- Coordinating input from the Collaborative members and on the production of methodological guidance

- Taking lead in the stakeholder engagement and communication including liaison, managing membership recruitment, registration and participation, disseminating information about the Collaborative's activities and achievements and developing and maintaining communication channels
- Facilitating communication among members and between workstreams, and serving as a central point of contact for the Collaborative
- Managing the resources and daily function of the Collaborative
- Leading the evaluation and impact assessment of the Collaborative

Working mechanisms

The Collaborative should have its annual and medium-term workplan, to be proposed by the Secretariat, under the guidance of the co-leads and the Steering Committee. An annual progress report should be prepared.

Substantive work of the Group is carried out through workstreams, and the topics of the workstreams should respond to requests made by the UN Statistical Commission and align with priorities established by the Collaborative and its members. Workstreams are to be proposed and led by members and need to be approved by the Steering Committee, have clear terms of reference and expected duration of work; and should report back to the Collaborative regularly. Workstream lead(s) may also invite resource persons outside of the Collaborative to contribute to its work. The Steering Committee should ensure the consistency of the terms of reference across workstreams.

Output of the Workstream is reviewed by the Collaborative members and approved by the Steering Committee, to be submitted to the Statistical Commission for approval or for information per the nature of the output.

Meetings and communication

The Collaborative will hold regular consultation sessions with its members that will (a) provide updates on the work of the Collaborative and (b) seek guidance and support from members. There will be an annual in-person expert group meeting, with a focus on key methodological issues and lessons learnt. The Steering Committee holds monthly meetings, with two meetings in-person annually and the rest in virtual form.

The Collaborative will hold open information sessions for information update and consultation purposes. Regular newsletters and other communication channels should also be explored to amplify the impact of the Collaborative, including organizing sessions at major fora which will also create opportunities for members to meet in person.