



UNITED NATIONS

United Nations Statistical Commission

Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics

GWG Bureau meeting

First meeting – 21 March 2018, 13:15 EST

By video-conferencing

Agenda item (3) –

Projects and Partnerships

Note by UNSD

This note describes the status of engagements, which the GWG has had with some major technology and data provider companies. This indicates that strategic partnerships are a real possibility and indicates as well that the GWG needs to decide how it wants to organize and further develop the arrangements. The note further describes the letter of the co-chairs to the GWG members inviting them to be involved in projects with those companies, and the responses received so far.

On 1 and 2 February 2018, a delegation of the GWG met with delegations of Google (on the 1st) and of Microsoft (on the 2nd) to hold initial discussions on how the community of official statistics could partner with the tech company and on which kind of projects. Further discussions took place with Google at the Google office in New York and by phone. Further discussion took also place with Microsoft by phone and will take place at the Microsoft office in New York on the 22nd of March.

(1) Google

Main counterparts at Google are John Harvey (UN account manager), Brian Sullivan (Google earth engine) and Lorin Rumberger (Google Cloud).

Action points:

- Google agreed that it would be able to prepare partitions on its Cloud server as a collaborative environment for the Caribbean project on economic statistics, which involves also Statistics Canada and UNSD.
- Google agreed that it is willing to collaborate on the use of Google Earth for the calculation of Fresh Water Extent with UNEP, UNSD, Statistics Canada, IBGE and Statistics Germany as potential partners (see slide below).
- There is interest to explore the potential use of data from the Android operating system on mobile devices

SDG indicators under UN Environment custodianship that can benefit from EO

6.3.2

Proportion of bodies of water with good ambient water quality

6.6.1

Change in the extent of water-related ecosystems over time

14.1.1

Index of coastal eutrophication and floating plastic debris density

15.4.1

Coverage by protected areas of important sites for **mountain biodiversity**

Financial model:

We are expecting further information on how the business model could make use of the Google foundation

(2) Microsoft

Main counterparts at Microsoft are Jennifer Brooks (UN Relations Director), Alexandre Pinho, Erik Arnold and Justin Spelhaug (Microsoft Foundation / Social Impact group) and Brant Zwiefel (Managing Architect, Strategy and Innovation Worldwide Industry)

Action points:

Microsoft had shown interest to collaborate

- on Earth Observations for calculation Agricultural crop production; and
- on the use of AI for unlocking insights in all available official statistics

Financial model:

Microsoft would like to use its social impact model for collaboration with the global statistical community, which would mean free (or almost free) collaboration with developing countries and more commercial relations with developed countries

(3) Amazon Web Services

Main counterparts at AWS are Michelle Harris (UN account manager) and Mark Ryland (Lead Data Architect)

Actions:

- UNSD received credits to work on its Trade Data Lake. This is ongoing, and a report is attached.
- We have been notified that the World Bank has a lot of unused AWS credit, and we may inquire if those can be used for GWG purposes

Financial model:

AWS is providing credits and regular assistance, so far for free.

(4) Nielsen

Main counterparts at Nielsen are Sumair Sayani and Sarah Cummings (Demand Institute / Nielsen) and Dana Childerhose (Nielsen)

Actions:

Provision of training price-data, Cloud space and know-how to collaborate on price index calculations with Statistics Canada, the Task Team on scanner data and UNSD

Financial model:

Initially, we are working out the use case as proof of concept, and will discuss the sustainable business model down the line.

(5) Alibaba

Main counterparts at Alibaba are Yeming Wang (International Business Development Director, Global), Abrar Ahmed (Business Development Manager, UK) and Yanan Weng (Data Solutions Architect, Europe)

Actions:

Two projects are of immediate interest:

- E-Commerce and Digital Trade in China
- Hosting mobile positioning data of Indonesia and other Asian countries

Financial model:

Initially, we are working out the use case as proof of concept, and will discuss the sustainable business model down the line.

(6) Positium (not a major company, but a main player for us in processing of Mobile Positioning Data)

Main counterparts are Margus Tiru (Chief Data Officer) and Siim Esko (Head of International Sales)

Actions:

Various projects on use of mobile positioning data for tourism statistics, movement of people, migration statistics with Eurostat, UNSD, Indonesia, Oman, Georgia, ITU and others.

Financial model:

Initially, we have to work out a sustainable business model over time.

(7) **ESRI**

Main counterpart is Linda Peters (UN account manager, Business development)

Relation with GWG needs to be clarified

(8) **Cloudera**

Main counterpart is Claudia Juech (Executive Director, Cloudera Foundation)

Relation needs to be developed

Letter of the co-chairs and project proposals

On 15 February 2018, we circulated a letter of the GWG co-chairs to the country members of the GWG inviting them to participate in projects with major tech companies over the next 18 months, see Annex 1 for the full letter.

The letter was sent to Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, China, Colombia, Denmark, Egypt, Germany, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Tanzania, UAE, UK and USA.

We received positive replies from **Brazil** (Land cover and land use, prices, use of AI for unlocking statistics); **Egypt** (prices); **Italy** (Land cover and land use, prices, consumer sentiment, tourism statistics); **Korea Republic** (Crop statistics, consumer sentiment, tourism statistics); **Philippines** (no specific project); **Saudi Arabia** (consumer sentiment, tourism statistics); and **UAE** (prices, tourism statistics). Switzerland replied that it could not commit to participation in a project at this time.

Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Mexico, Netherlands and **UK** are assumed to be interested in projects as core members of the GWG, which brings the total number of interested countries to 13. Cameroon and Morocco participated in the informal GWG meeting in New York, and Germany expressed great enthusiasm in participating in the work of the GWG during its intervention at the Statistical Commission.

On the side of the international organizations we can count on support from UNEP, IMF, UNECE, UNESCAP, UNECA, African Development Bank, CARICOM and of course UNSD.

In short, the GWG members show commitment to be part of the projects over the next 18 months and show through experimentation that the proof of concept for data collaboration, partnership with private sector and GWG platform can be delivered.

Annex 1 – letter of the GWG co-chairs



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United Nations Statistical Commission
Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics

15 February 2018

Exciting new opportunities to collaborate with Big Data

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Last year the Global Working Group (GWG) set a very ambitious agenda to innovate and modernize official statistics by establishing data collaboratives and developing trusted methods, applications and services to be shared on a common global platform.

As described in our report¹ to the Statistical Commission, we delivered on topics, such as the handbook on the use of earth observations, methods for the use of scanner data and training in the use of mobile phone data.

Much more needs to be done to help realize the full potential of Big Data for official statistics.

We, the co-chairs of the GWG, are writing to all of you today asking that your offices increase their involvement in the work of the GWG during the upcoming 18 months. We consider this a time of great opportunity to show that through global collaboration and strategic partnerships our offices can reap the benefits of new data sources and new technologies to produce better statistics.

Let us explain why now.

Earlier this month a delegation of the GWG met with teams of Microsoft and Google in Seattle and New York as part of our exploration of new partnerships with the private sector. These meetings were both inspiring and promising. The technology companies were committed to contribute staff time, training, tools, applications and cloud server facilities. Similar collaborations with other private sector cloud and data providers will be explored in the near future.

Specific project proposals we are considering in partnership with the private sector are:

¹ The activities since last year is covered in the 'Report of the Global Working Group on Big data for Official Statistics' to the UN Statistical Commission, see <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/49th-session/documents/2018-8-BigData-E.pdf>

- ✚ Fresh water extent and quality measures
- ✚ Land cover and land use
- ✚ Forest resources assessment
- ✚ Quarterly agricultural crop production
- ✚ Measuring inflation and price fluctuations
- ✚ Smart Cities measures
- ✚ Unlocking and visualizing official statistics with AI
- ✚ Data sharing and exchange using cloud environment
- ✚ Tourism and mobility statistics using mobile phone and social media data
- ✚ Business and consumer sentiment indicators using social media data
- ✚ Vessel tracking data for trade and transport statistics

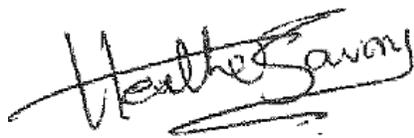
All these projects require active collaboration, participation and commitment from your side. The contribution of your office would be mostly staff time and expertise. We expect to execute the projects at a fast pace and on a low budget.

We have a window of 18 months to prove that these strategic partnerships are beneficial for the work of your offices and for the modernization of official statistics.

Please indicate by 2 March 2018 if you are in principle willing to participate in one or more of these projects – so that we can announce these new initiatives at the forthcoming Statistical Commission.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,



Heather Savory,
ONS, UK and
Co-chair
Committee on the Global
Platform



Niels Ploug,
Statistics Denmark and
Co-chair
Committee on Data
Collaboratives