UNSD-DFID PROJECT ON SDG MONITORING

SPECIAL EDITION
Newsletter May 2020

IMPORTANT PROJECT UPDATE

The project now also covers support to COVID-19 data response:

- Establishment of national COVID-19 data hubs
- COVID-19 related survey work
- Linkages between COVID-19 and the SDGs

SDG related activities continue on a remote basis

A substantial change to project implementation

The last newsletter came out in the first week of March. At that point, we reported that 15 out of 20 project countries had sent representatives to the UN Statistical Commission. The week after, the UN and many other organizations started working remotely and many still are.

At the same time, most countries are struggling with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic directly through citizens falling ill and dying, but also indirectly with the effects on the society and the economy. In these situations, national statistical offices play a key role in providing timely and reliable data and coordinating data efforts across the statistical system. Most, however, were not sufficiently prepared for the crisis and data operations and access have become more difficult.

Many donors are also struggling with the new situation, as there is a need to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs while still supporting projects that are ongoing. This has also affected our project. At the same time, both DFID and UNSD saw the urgent need to support national statistical offices in their COVID-19 response and agreed that UNSD would explore ways to provide this support.

UNSD has been in touch with the focal points in all project countries, asking about their current situation, their challenges and their needs. In this newsletter we highlight some of the areas of work that have already been agreed upon.

A key area will be to work on the establishment of national COVID-19 data hubs where NSOs can publish data relevant to the pandemic in an interactive way. Another area is support to survey implementation now that regular field work has been disrupted in many countries. In countries where local project funding is available, budgets are being revised to incorporate COVID-19 related needs, including for example for the purchase of internet bundles or survey implementation planning. Other areas have also been discussed and UNSD will follow up as relevant.

Situation in the 20 project countries

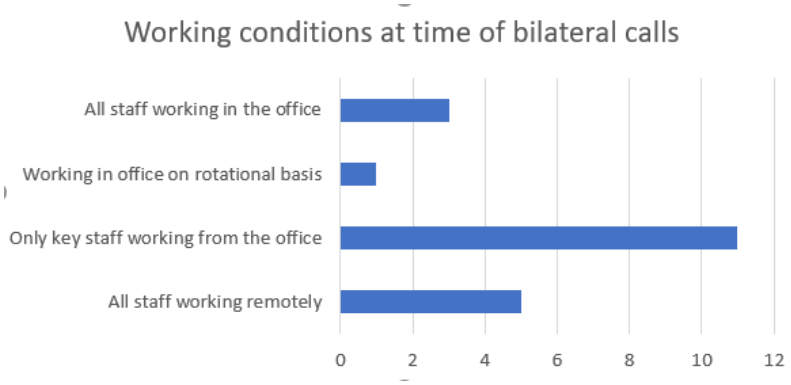
In the last month, UNSD has connected with the focal points from the 20 project countries in different ways. With some, communication has mainly been per e-mail, with others we have had calls on various tools such as MS Teams, Zoom, Webex, WhatsApp and Messenger. Connection has been surprisingly good in most cases, sometimes even with video.

The majority of the countries have reduced office activities, but almost all offices still have some level of activity, often allowing only senior managers access to the premises. Most focal points do have laptops and access to internet even though working remotely.

The major challenge to many is the disruption in survey and census implementation as field work has been stopped. At the same time, there is a need to collect data on the pandemic's effect on the country, so alternative methods like phone interviewing are being considered.

It varies to what extent the NSOs are involved in the overall COVID-19 response in their countries, in some they have been given a central role while in others they are not involved at all. Together we are trying to increase involvement if possible.

UNSD and the World Bank, in cooperation with the UN Regional Commissions, have carried out a joint survey of all NSOs on the impact of the pandemic on statistical operations and mitigations needs and efforts. Results are being made available on the UNSD COVID-19 Response webpage and shared with partners.



COVID-19 related surveys

Field work has been disrupted in a majority of the project countries. At the same time, there is a strong demand for information that can help shed light on how the pandemic has affected the socio-economic situation in the country.

Many NSOs are therefore currently looking at how they can continue the surveys they had planned, and how they can conduct COVID-19 specific surveys, potentially also in combination.

Key in this context is how to adapt the data collection and processing procedures. Moving from face-to-face interviews to using the phone or internet to conduct surveys is a substantial adjustment which requires revisions of sampling procedures, questionnaire design and training of employees.

Some international actors such as the WHO, World Bank and UN Women have already developed standardized surveys that are now being rolled out in many countries. For NSOs that want to carry out surveys on their own, more specific support may be needed, and this is where UNSD offers to support project countries.

In addition to the webinar mentioned below, useful materials can also be found on the COVID-19 response page.

UNSD-DFID project webinars

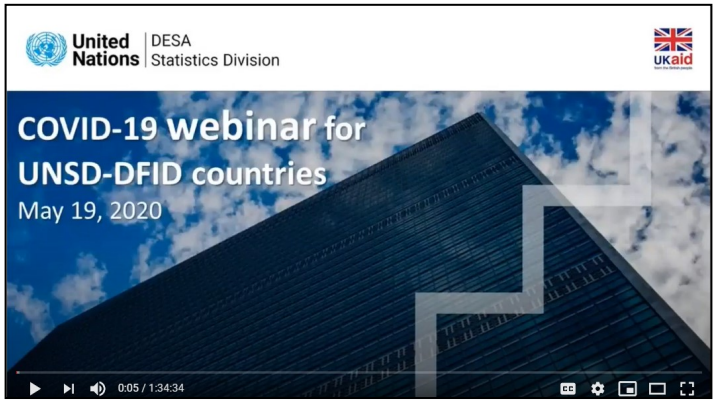
UNSD has started a series of webinars which are specific to the project and areas of interest specified by project countries. The first webinar was conducted on 15 April and provided a general introduction to the adjustments to the project, showcased UNSDs overall response to the COVID-19 crisis with its two new platforms (see last page of this newsletter) and asked questions to participants on related to challenges and needs. Ghana also presented their work on their COVID-19 hub.

A second webinar was conducted on 19 May and discussed survey implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic. It focused specifically on sampling and other preparatory adjustments necessary to carry out surveys remotely through telephone or online tools. During the webinar, participants asked many interesting questions which were later gathered in a Q&A.

On 10 June, a webinar will be conducted which discusses the effect of COVID-19 on the SDGs. More webinars are being planned with 2-3 weeks intervals. The intention is to also make them available on the COVID-19 response page and the UNSD-DFID project page.

In addition, UNSD is planning to conduct a webinar together with ONS and CODE on Open SDG for countries currently using Open SDG or considering doing so on 17 June.

More general, but still relevant, webinars are also conducted as part of the World Data Forum webinar series, more information can be found here.



Survey implementation during COVID-19 pandemic webinar and related materials are available online on the project website

COVID-19 datahubs and federation

At its 49th session in March 2018, the Statistical Commission welcomed the efforts to establish national and global data hubs for the SDGs using ArcGIS technology. The national data hubs (or platforms) visualize national SDG data using maps and graphs. The hubs can also be shared globally through a federated system. Some of the UNSD-DFID countries have chosen this approach.

Building on the same technological platform and architecture, the establishment of national Covid-19 data hubs, which also can be federated into a network of COVID-19 data hubs, aims to enable the sharing and use of multiple sources of high-quality, geospatially enabled data necessary to monitor the spread of the disease and to inform policies to mitigate its impact on people's lives.

Role and benefits of NSOs establishing COVID-19 hubs

National Statistical Offices (NSOs) have a natural collection, coordination and dissemination role when it comes to data and statistics overall and this includes data on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. By using data they have collected themselves and collecting information from other sources, they can potentially provide a nuanced picture of various sectors being affected.

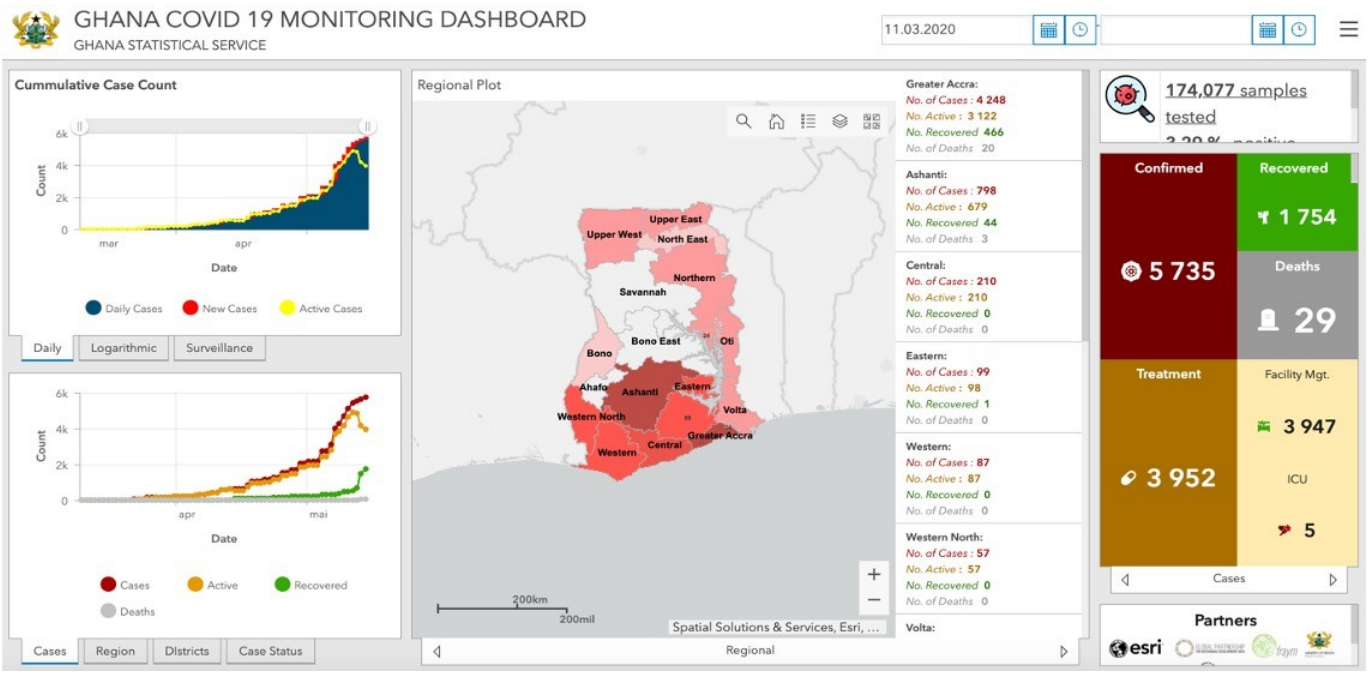
National COVID-19 Data Hubs can help national statistical offices getting quickly up to speed in building their own COVID-19 open data sites, with ready-to-use templates that allow them to focus on responding to the urgent demand for data and insights from their constituencies. They could become a go to place for decision makers and also help the NSO with more visibility of its work.

National COVID-19 data hubs could be structured as prioritized by individual NSOs or follow the structure of the global COVID-19 data hub owned by UNSD. The UNSD hub is categorized in four thematic areas namely Virus tracking, Health Infrastructure, Economy and Population.

Support from UNSD and Esri

UNSD is available to support UNSD-DFID project country NSOs in establishing these hubs, as well as with the efforts to assess and access a wider set of data sources.

UNSD´s technology partner Esri has announced a COVID-19 Response Package which is also extended to National Statistical Offices for using Esri's geospatial platform and tools. Through the partnership, NSOs can use the relevant Esri tools for free for a period of 3 years, and at a



Picture above: Screenshot of Ghana COVID-19 hub, available here

Picture above: Screenshot of State of Palestine's COVID-19 hub

substantially reduced cost until 2030.

UNSD is ready to support all project countries in establishing their own hubs. A concept note has recently been shared and some countries have already shown interest.

NSOs who already have established hubs

The Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) has been among the pioneers of developing COVID-19 data hubs in support of the COVID-19 response at the national level and has put in place the mechanism of working with relevant ministries such as Ghana Health Services in providing essential data services to support the government in the fight against COVID-19. See their hub here.

UNSD has supported the statistical offices of Jordan and the State of Palestine in developing their own COVID-19 data hubs. Both were already using the ArcGIS technology and therefore were able to establish this in the course of a few work sessions. Palestine Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) has already published theirs which is available here.

Access to relevant data is key

While NSOs themselves have data which are relevant to the situation, such as information on access to clean water and soap or the number of people who are smoking, the data hubs become more complete by adding data from administrative sources. The ministries of health or related public health institutes are a particularly interesting data sources during the pandemic, but other administrative data which can help shed light on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 should also be assessed and potentially used.

UNSD, together with the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, have convened a collaborative on administrative data. The main aim is to create information exchange among NSOs and partners which would help address challenges related to accessing and processing such data sources. The work will build on the strong efforts already made within sectors such as CRVS and business registers.

Continued efforts on SDG monitoring

Monitoring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals is as important as it was before the pandemic. Out of the 20 project countries, 9 are presenting their Voluntary National Reviews this year and others will be presenting theirs in 2021. How COVID-19 has affected goal achievement is also an interesting question that many want to know more about. The NSOs who are the key partners in this project are therefore continuing their work to make more data and metadata on the SDGs available, and the project supports them as needed.

In bilateral conversations, most NSOs have expressed interest in continued support to implement SDG monitoring. Their areas of priority vary based on work already achieved and overall priorities in the countries.

Establishing SDG platforms

In the last months, UNSD has been working with almost half of the project countries in establishing or improving their SDG platforms.

Jointly with the African Development Bank, UNSD has supported six African countries in establishing platforms on the Open Data Portal. Burundi, Mozambique, Uganda and Zambia have already progressed quite well in the process and are expected to be publishing their platforms soon if they have not already done so. Liberia and Zimbabwe have both had challenges with internet connection, but are also working on their platforms.

For Viet Nam, UNSD is working with IStat to set up a meeting to follow up on earlier work to set up a SDG section of their statistical databank using PxWeb.

Cambodia has long been the only project country who uses .Stat for their SDG data. The platform is still in operation, but its hosting is currently being moved from OECD to the Global Platform. At the same time, the .Stat Suite being updated which will allow Cambodia to add more functionality and more data. Tanzania has shown interest in also establishing .Stat for their data overall and that process is expected to start in the next month.

Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar are all interested in setting up an OpenSDG front end platform for their SDG data. Myanmar has progressed further as a workshop was planned for April. Work is currently on pause, but is expected to be reconvened soon.

Remote metadata, data modelling and user engagement workshops

Most countries have already been trained in data modelling, but not all and some are also requesting to refresh their skills. A first remote data modelling workshop is planned in Rwanda in the first half of June and more are expected to follow.

Bangladesh, Nepal and Tanzania are among the countries who have not yet been trained in SDG metadata compilation as part of the project. They have therefore shown interest in a remote workshop on SDG metadata compilation. A structure has been set up, but dates have not yet been agreed upon.

Uganda has shown interest in a follow up workshop on user engagement, as well as on data quality assurance. Both are expected to be adjusted to an online format soon. Dates will be agreed upon following that.

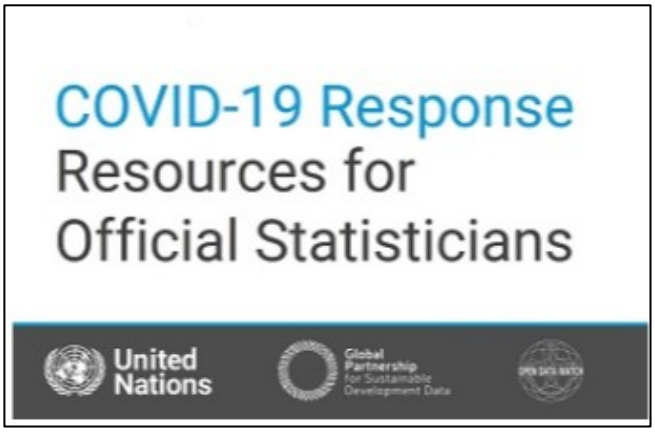
Adjusted metadata template

Jointly with the global SDMX working group, a revised template for global metadata reporting has been agreed. The aim of the new template is for it to allow automated data exchange using a SDMX metadata structure definition (MSD).

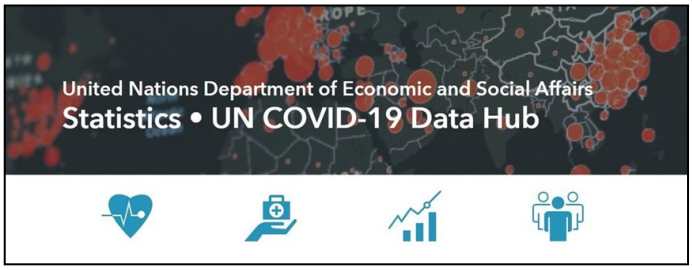
As part of the project, the template has been adapted for use in national reporting. The guidance provided has been adjusted to make it easier for countries to understand what is required from them and a few fields not relevant for national reporting have been greyed out. Otherwise, the template outline is the same as for the global reporting. It can be used by countries to record their metadata for both global and additional national indicators in a comparable format.

Useful tools linked to COVID-19

UNSD has established a **COVID-19 response page** that provides a space for the global statistical community to share guidance, actions, tools and best practices to ensure the operational continuity of data programs by National Statistical Offices, and to address issues of open and timely access to critical data needed. See the link to the page below.



Link: https://covid-19-response.unstatshub.org/



Link: https://covid-19-data.unstatshub.org/

UNSD has also established a **COVID-19 datahub** that provides access to the software and tools, provided by Esri, that allow countries to join the federated network of COVID-19 data hubs, as outlined above. It uses web GIS technologies for sharing available data resources and web services in an open and interoperable environment. The page also presents COVID-19 data from other actors who are also using the ArcGIS tool, among others WHO and John Hopkins and interested national statistical offices.

Training materials

Some staff may have limited possibilities to do their job as usual, for instance due to disruptions in field work. Many are therefore interested in learning new skills.

As has been mentioned in earlier newsletters, there are various trainings available in statistics. The project has made available all its training materials on the UNSD-DFID projects website here.

At the UN Statistical commission, a hub for statistical training courses was also launched. While there are still gaps in who has made their trainings available on the page, over 50 e-learning courses can already be found on the statistics landing page of UN SDG:learn.

The page is the result of the collaborative efforts of the Global Network of Institutes for Statistical Training (GIST). More info on the GISTs homepage.

Project website

For general project information, please visit

https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/unsd-dfid

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