

United Nations Expert Group Meeting

Harnessing data by citizens for public policy and SDG monitoring: a conceptual framework

Background

More than six years in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and despite improvements, big data gaps still exist in all areas of the SDGs in terms of geographic coverage, timeliness and the level of disaggregation required. Intensified efforts need to be made to fill those gaps. The Agenda asks that follow-up and review processes at all levels should be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and support the reporting by all relevant stakeholders. Therefore, the successful implementation and monitoring of the agenda needs the engagement of citizens, with particular attention to the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable.

Engaging citizens in the process of data collection, analysis and dissemination is important in (a) gaining scientific knowledge and filling data gap to inform policies and monitoring, including on the SDGs; (b) mobilizing action and raising awareness on pressing social, environmental and economic challenges; and (c) helping improve transparency, accountability and effectiveness of public institutions.

Citizens can contribute to data production and research in various ways, influenced by social, political, economic, cultural and geographic factors and scientific disciplines. This context-specific nature of citizen engagement in data and knowledge production has led to the development of various terms and definitions in the field, such as crowdsourcing, community-based monitoring, volunteered geographic information, participatory mapping, participatory action research, citizen-generated data, and citizen science, among others. In addition to the abovementioned types of active engagement with citizens, one can also argue that data generated from social media and collected through household surveys are also contributions from citizens.

Different types of citizen engagement are used to serve different purposes. For example, community-based data production and dissemination were carried out in India under the "[100 Hotspots: socially excluded vulnerable communities and SDGs in India](#)" project for engaging with and a better understanding on the status of socially and economically excluded communities. At Statistics Canada, crowdsourcing "[involves collecting information from a large community of citizens who are experts within their local environments.](#)" Examples of such data collection include the [collection of prices of cannabis in the country](#), and the [impact of COVID-19 on Canadians](#). A [multi-country survey](#) was carried out by daily to Facebook users to monitor COVID-19 Trends and its Impact, with a million responses per day, to provide timely data to inform policy. Organised beach cleaning by volunteers helps the collection of data on beach litter to support the monitoring of SDG 14.1.1.

All examples above showcased the importance of citizen contributions to produce data that are more granular (e.g., 100 Hotspots and the price of cannabis) and more timely (e.g., COVID impact on Canadians and Facebook user survey on COVID-19); or to fill gaps in official data (e.g., marine litter cleaning). The question is how to harness the potential of this data source to address the SDG data gaps and needs and how to integrate them into official statistics in a sustainable way.

Objectives

Within this context, the UN Statistics Division is organizing an expert group meeting on ways to harnessing data generated by citizens to make an impact on public policy including the SDG monitoring. More specifically, the meeting will

- discuss different ways and types that citizens can be engaged in producing data and making an impact on policies
- discuss the possibility of a conceptual framework on ways of citizens being engaged in data production and use and in filling SDG data gap, including discussions on various concepts and definitions and key attributes in engaging citizens in the entire data value chain.
- Reviews challenges of integrating these data into official statistics and policy processes and discusses how the international community could support the engagement with citizens in various ways through sharing of and documenting experiences and providing guidance.

Participation

- National statistical offices and other stakeholders within the national statistical system
- Academia
- Civil society organization
- Private sector

Preparation for the meeting

A paper will be prepared before the meeting and will cover: (a) a review of existing practices on various ways citizens contribute to public policy and SDG monitoring; (b) a draft proposal on the conceptual framework and recommendations on the way forward for the community to support more active engagement of citizens. The paper will be prepared by UNSD in collaboration with partners, building on existing work in the area.

Dates: 10-11 November 2022

Location: Bangkok, Thailand (in-person)