

UNSC Side Event hosted by the Inter-American Development Bank

The Political Economy of Statistical Capacity

Thursday, March 8, 2018 8:15-9:30 am

Conference Room 11

Open meeting

The importance of national statistical offices (NSOs) is well established. Reliable data are central to public administration and public policy formulation. They provide the essential elements for evaluating policy choices, providing inputs to both private and public sector decision making, allowing for results-based management of policy, and enabling subsequent analysis of short-term trends and long-term historical patterns of development.

NSOs play a key role in improving data collection and providing data for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at a global level. In the context of monitoring the SDGs for a post-2015 development agenda, NSOs are essential to providing credible data, setting baselines for comparison, and providing effective and reliable metrics on issues such as poverty, gender equality, health, and the environment within countries. These potential contributions are increasingly recognized not only as essential government functions, but even as an exciting new frontier in development, not least because of the increasing availability of “big data,” promising new techniques for evaluating massive amounts of data, and the proliferation of the technologies needed to effectively make use of it.

Yet it is important to go beyond the technical and methodological view of capacity as isolated elements and examine the relevance of statistical institutional strengthening within the policy formation process, especially in terms of the capacity of the state. Thus, it is vital to analyze the effects of the political economy on statistical institutionalization.

The incentives to strengthen statistical capacity are not always aligned within governments. That is, there are trade-offs that affect the development of statistical policy: on the one hand, governments need data to make better decisions; and on the other, these same data can support citizens as they demand accountability for the decisions of their governments, which can consequently go against the interests of the latter. In this context, more knowledge is needed to understand why governments would be interested in strengthening their NSOs.

This panel will discuss issues such as why there is variation in the generation and use of statistical information across countries, as well as how governments produce statistics, why they make more or less use of them, and how they could produce and disseminate them better in the future. Attention will be paid to political economy factors and how they affect statistical capacity.

Moderator:

José Antonio Mejía, Inter-American Development Bank

Panelist:

Matthew Taylor, American University

Martine Durand, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

Hernán Muñoz, National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC), Argentina

Shaida Badiee, Open Data Watch

Michel Mouyelo-Kataoula, African Development Bank

Question and Answers