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

Background document  
Available in English only

**United Nations World Data Forum: the data community's response to Covid-19 and the way forward**

Prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division for the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (HLG-PCCB)

# United Nations World Data Forum: the data community's response to Covid-19 and the way forward

## a background paper

(version as of 18 January 2021)

### Introduction

1. Following an open and public consultation, the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (HLG-PCCB) prepared the statement for the 2020 virtual UN World Data Forum entitled the [Global data community's response to Covid-19: data for a changing world](#)<sup>1</sup> which was launched at the closing session of the virtual Forum on Wednesday, 21 October 2020.
2. The statement stresses the increased demand for relevant, timely and trusted data and statistics as a critical part of building back a more equitable, sustainable and resilient future. The response appeals to the whole data community to come together to support the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and accelerate action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It resolves to ensure data to leave no one behind, promote data literacy and empower all users, develop capacity to modernize data systems, maintain trust and privacy in data and increase investments in data to respond more effectively to the Covid-19 pandemic and future disasters. Further, it emphasizes the need to meet the actions set out in Cape Town Global Action Plan and the commitment to make progress on an innovative funding mechanism for financing data and statistical development as called for in the Dubai declaration.
3. The initial draft was prepared by the members of an HLG-PCCB subgroup comprising Albania, Angola, Mexico, the State of Palestine, the Philippines, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, PARIS21 and the Secretariat (UN Statistics Division). The statement was shared for a public consultation from 5 August 2020 to 10 September 2020 and over 150 responses were received from a wide range of stakeholders representing the global community of data producers and users.
4. The final statement was updated to reflected language changes recommended from the public consultation but more detailed inputs received will inform the subgroup's work on the outcome document for the third United Nations World Data Forum to be held in Bern, Switzerland on 3 – 6 October 2021. The work on this document tentatively entitled the **Bern Data Compact for a Decade of Action on the Sustainable Development Goals** was quite advanced when the third Forum was postponed and the subgroup had to consider contingencies for a different type of document that became the statement for the virtual Forum.
5. This background paper provides further details of the inputs received from the public consultation and the recommendations on the way forward as we prepare for the third UN World Data Forum in October 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> See E/CN.3/2021/4 for the statement in other 5 UN official languages

## Findings of the public consultation

6. The consultation received inputs from a wide range of stakeholders representing the global community of data producers and users mostly through a questionnaire (see Annex) published on the UNSD website alongside the initial draft of the statement. This included a mix of open and closed-ended questions to collect feedback on specific issues, actions, and commitment laid out in the statement. All results from the open consultation presented in aggregate or without attribution.
7. The following **issues** related to the outcome statement were agreed upon by the community:
  - Demand for data and statistics are greater than ever but they are in short supply in many parts of the World (89 per cent of respondents)
  - Urgent need for data that is high-quality, timely, disaggregated and relevant but also open by default while respecting the right to privacy (97 per cent per cent of respondents)
  - Access to affordable information requires the strengthening of national statistical systems (94 per cent per cent of respondents)
8. The consultation responses also identified the following additional issues:
  - The need for implementation of new technologies for data production, processing and analysis that are interoperable; for example, machine learning to complement and improve traditional national statistical systems; use of secure platforms to handle sensitive data sets that is compliant with regulations on privacy and confidentiality
  - Limited awareness of the power of spatial data and/or remote sensing technologies
  - Gaps in documenting refugees, migrant populations, and/or marginalized groups
  - Strengthening vital statistics for better decision-making
  - Creating data ecosystems that enable fair exchanges of data between communities, local governments, and other actors who have capacity to collect/process data, whilst ensuring privacy of individuals and communities
  - Integrating citizen science into national statistical offices' work stream
  - Participation in data creation by those directly affected by the world's biggest challenges can contribute to data themselves
  - Limited uptake and use of data due to a lack of technical knowledge and funds available on the users' side
  - More thought on the ethical use and production of data
  - Enhanced collaboration between private and public data producers and establishing standards/guiding frameworks around public-public private data partnerships to ensure they are effective, safe, and secure
  - Need to explore new forms of co-operation and to intensify exchange between countries
9. The following **actions** related to the outcome statement were agreed upon by the community:
  - Create data to leave no one behind (91 per cent of respondents)

- Promote data literacy and empower the public to use data effectively (97 per cent of respondents)
- Maintain trust and privacy in data by full data users' engagement, protection through law, regulation and common practice (93 per cent of respondents)
- Develop data capacity to modernise data systems at all levels (95 per cent of respondents)
- Encourage the establishment of more data partnerships (88 per cent of respondents)
- Increase investments in data to respond more effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic (88 per cent of respondents)

#### 10. Additional actions identified

- Mitigate disparities in data collection capacity
- Use citizen-driven data to complement official statistics where gaps remain
- Create standards for data collection in pandemics
- Promote data interoperability
- Leverage machine learning to transform national statistical systems
- Ensure the accessibility of data and systems to people with disabilities
- Empower data collectors to collect and share data responsibly and ethically
- Promote data utilization and translate data into policy, programs and the public
- Build on existing partnerships and country efforts to make them more inclusive where people and organizations, both public and private, can coexist
- Advocacy towards openness and transparency of the government's data to its people
- Ensure strong leadership and governance with an empowered national statistician or relevant national data coordinator who is open and enabled to collaborate with third parties

11. About 74 per cent of the respondents agreed with the commitment to make progress on an innovative funding mechanism called for in the Dubai declaration.

#### **Way forward**

12. The subgroup will continue its work during 2021 to finalise the outcome document for the third Forum and specifically:

- use the detailed findings from the public consultation to further refine the existing draft of the document;
- and inform a new consultation to be launched in Spring 2021 to collect new commitments and actions from the data and donor communities;
- these commitments and actions will be mapped to outstanding actions identified by the subgroup on the financing and implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan (CTGAP).

## Annex I

### **Consultation questionnaire: 2020 virtual United Nations World Data Forum (UNWDF): Global data community's response to COVID-19**

The 2020 virtual United Nations World Data Forum (UNWDF) is a chance for the global data community to focus on the most important data issues emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, to promote data during the eventual recovery and discuss how to apply data solutions to get back on track with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. An outcome statement will be launched at the end of the virtual Forum to express the commitments of the different actors in the data space to advance the data agenda. This consultation is an opportunity to contribute to this statement with your views and inputs.

Please use this questionnaire to indicate your agreement or otherwise with the themes and content of the statement as well as provide your own ideas and suggestions on how the outcome statement should be communicated to the wider public. The full text of the consultation document can be found [here](#). Please complete this questionnaire by Thursday, 10 September 2020.

Note: All results from this open consultation will be shared anonymously and in aggregate. Any attribution of a comment to an organisation or individual will not be done without first seeking their express permission.

Contact\_details. Please provide information:

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Gender \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_  
Organisation \_\_\_\_\_  
Country \_\_\_\_\_

Question 1: Please vote on the most appropriate tagline for the Global data community's response to COVID-19 (outcome statement)

Question 2: The organisers of the virtual Forum are actively looking for high-profile speakers who could speak on the themes of data use, data trust and data to leave no one behind. Can you recommend a speaker who can talk on these subjects?

Question 3a: The outcome statement has a preamble which describes 3 current issues affecting the data community, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with these issues:

Issues	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
a. Demand for data and statistics are greater than ever but they are in short supply in many parts of the World			
b. urgent need for data that is high-quality, timely, disaggregated and relevant but also open by default while respecting the right to privacy			
c. access to affordable information requires the strengthening of national statistical systems			

Question 3b: Are there other issues facing the data community in 2020 that you would like to include?

\_\_\_\_\_

Question 4a: The outcome statement calls for 6 action items, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with these action items:

Action item	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
a. Create data to leave no one behind			
b. Promote data literacy and empower the public to use data effectively			
c. Maintain trust and privacy in data by full data users' engagement, protection through law, regulation and common practice			
d. Develop data capacity to modernise data systems at all levels			
e. Encourage the establishment of more data partnerships			
f. Increase investments in data to respond more effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic			

Question 4b: What additional actions should the data community and data users pursue?

\_\_\_\_\_

Commitment. Question 5a: The outcome statement concludes with the following commitment, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with this commitment:

For further information on the Dubai declaration, see

[https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/hlg/Dubai\\_Declaration\\_on\\_CTGAP\\_24\\_october\\_2018.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/hlg/Dubai_Declaration_on_CTGAP_24_october_2018.pdf)

Commitment	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
make progress on an innovative funding mechanism called for in the Dubai declaration			

Question 5b: What other commitments should be prioritized to ensure all countries have the necessary resources to implement the Cape Town Global Action Plan?

For further information on the Cape Town Global Action Plan, see

<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/hlg/Cape-Town-Global-Action-Plan/>

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Question 6: Please provide any additional comments on the outcome statement you wish to share (2,000 characters)

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Question 7: How would you recommend promoting the outcome statement when it is launched following the virtual Forum?

- United Nations social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, etc.)
- News media
- Online individual professional networks (LinkedIn, etc.)
- United Nations website
- United Nations contact email list/ newsletters
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

