

Friday Seminar on Emerging Issues

MANAGING THE DATA REVOLUTION

INTEGRATED STATISTICS AND PARTNERSHIPS IN DATA FOR STATISTICAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE POST-2015 ERA

New York, 28 February 2014

The Friday Seminar on Emerging Issues has as its theme this year: “Managing the Data Revolution: Integrated Statistics and Partnerships in Data for Statistical Organizations in the Post-2015 Era”. It will provide the setting for an interactive dialogue between the providers of official statistics and their existing and prospective partners in data on the formulation of shared statistical objectives within the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

For instance, engagement with business¹ around corporate sustainability² means working on a partnership regarding robust and internationally agreed accountability measures in order to make business commitments transparent and to ensure that progress towards them is real. Civil society as a partner may lead to finding new data sources to measure an enabling environment of societies³, whereas think tanks like the world resources institute (WRI) are invaluable in increasing sources of information on many topics like a sustainable food future, or ecosystems and human well-being. Recently, WRI developed monitoring platforms for, among others, deforestation (Global Forest Watch⁴) and water management (Aquaduct⁵). These map-based monitoring systems demonstrate the power of partnerships in sharing purpose, techniques, knowledge and data.

These success stories should lead to further open data initiatives where the statistical community can play a significant role by sharing their knowledge of statistical methods and techniques but also by giving access to their micro-data on businesses, households and land cover. Cooperation can also strengthen the credibility of these monitoring platforms through the independence of national statistical offices (NSOs).

NSOs need to prepare themselves for the high demands that will inevitably arise from the post-2015 development agenda and the expansion of integrated economic, social and environmental statistics. They should increase their efficiency and ability to adapt to new requests by increasing the flexibility in business operations and by enabling the sharing of methods, components, processes and data repositories within the organization and across statistical organizations.

¹ <http://unglobalcompact.org/resources>

² http://unglobalcompact.org/docs/news_events/8.1/GC_brochure_FINAL.pdf

³ <http://www.civicus.org/eei/>

⁴ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-26287137>

⁵ <http://www.wri.org/our-work/top-outcome/major-companies-funds-and-banks-drive-improved-water-management-using-risk>

Giving open and easy access to micro-data will increase the relevance and value of the official statistics, and will improve delivering the mission of NSOs in the post-2015 era.

The report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons asked for integrated solutions and concluded that 'the moment is right to merge the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability guiding international development'. To support this, the Panel recommends establishing a Global Partnership on Development Data that brings together diverse but interested stakeholders – statistical offices, international organisations, civil society organizations, foundations and the private sector. In 'a life of dignity for all', the Secretary-General recommends this proposal for 'a new global partnership and a data revolution for monitoring progress and strengthening accountability'.

The Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress (a recently established body within the UN Statistical Commission) agreed with the emphasis placed by the High-level Panel on the importance of a data revolution (involving the mentioned stakeholders) to improve the quality of statistics and information available to citizens and to set up a global partnership on development data to make this happen. It also underlined that, for the post-2015 monitoring framework, an integrated approach to the economic, social and environmental domains should be followed.

Key questions

- How can statistical organizations streamline and harmonize operations and standards across the statistical system, and at the same time **integrate statistics** across the economic, social and environmental dimensions?
- How does a **partnership in data** with the corporate sector, civil society organizations and think tanks benefit official statistics in the post-2015 era?
- Which means of implementation are (to be made) available to assist the **statistical organizations** to meet the new demands **in the post-2015 era** and how can existing mechanisms, such as the Busan Action Plan or Paris21, make this happen?

Discussion note

As has become abundantly clear in the ongoing discussions on the monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals, the Data Revolution and the use of Big Data, business as usual will not allow the national statistical systems to address the challenges posed by the post-2015 development agenda in measuring progress in poverty eradication and sustainable development. This concept note proposes that integrated business solutions be introduced and inclusive partnerships in data be established by the providers of official statistics to meet the increasing demands.

The demands are increasing

The partners from other communities such as the corporate sector, think tanks, academia, civil society, media and local communities seek increasingly integrated statistics to undertake strategic analysis of progress in a post-2015 development agenda that is universal in scope, takes an integrated approach to addressing the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development challenges and leads to more sustainable, inclusive and equitable development

outcome for all. These demands, therefore, require measurement and reporting on progress and sustainable development through trusted, integrated and up-to-date official statistics, including the reporting for the emerging framework for the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals at local, national, regional and global level.

The role of official statistics is at stake

National statistical offices obtained their unique role in societies by providing easily accessible high quality and policy relevant data based on the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and related legal mandates ensuring their independence in reporting. However, this status is not guaranteed with the fast entry of new technologies and increasing rate of digitalization of our societies. New data sources are competing with official statistics that meet the increasing public demand for more rapid or even real-time statistics. Meanwhile, many producers of official statistics are faced with decreasing budget allocations and declining response rates on their traditional collection instruments.

The solution may be innovation combined with new partnerships

It is these emerging realities that force the statistical institutes to fast track the introduction of innovative business solutions and reaching out to new partnerships with the corporate sector, civil society, think tanks and academia and media, while extending the scope of their legal mandates and ensuring the allocation of adequate resources. Business as usual, with gradual and minor adjustments to production processes, organisational structure and partnerships, will erode the role and relevance of official statistics in an increasingly competitive market of information providers. As the High Level Panel on Post-2015 Development Agenda clearly acknowledged, there is an opportunity to actively take advantage of new technology, sources of Big Data and new partnerships in data to empower people and business with official statistics on the progress towards sustainable development.

Integrated Statistics

The strategic policy analyses of sustainability conducted by the various communities require an understanding of the interactions between persons, businesses and geospatial sites undertaken during production and consumption across the economic, environmental and social dimensions. The providers of official statistics are well placed to address these strategic data needs for integrated policy and decision making. These common interests of the various communities for *integrated statistics* should drive and foster the mutually beneficial partnerships.

Only through the adherence to the principles, concepts and definitions of internationally agreed statistical systems can the international coherence and consistency of time series of statistics and multi-dimensional indicators become a reality. For the production of economic, environment and related socio-demographic statistics, the System of National Accounts (SNA) and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounts (SEEA) are the existing internationally agreed standards. For those sectors like energy, water, or forest for which statistical standards are not yet harmonized the SNA and SEEA, statistical programmes must be developed to ensure alignments.

The release of integrated and multi-dimensional statistics by providers of official statistics has a clear comparative advantage over the stand-alone or ad-hoc indicator approaches adopted by other information providers. This *system's approach for integrated statistical production* will provide the highest quality assurance of statistics, the flexibility of the production process to introduce new emerging issues, the lessening of response burden, the accelerated use of administrative data and ultimately the cost efficiency in the statistical production and services to our clients. Moreover, the statistical offices should leverage their institutional arrangements by seeking a broadening and strengthening of the legal provisions on issues like privacy of data providers, protection of statistical confidentiality and mandates for data collection and linking administrative data for statistical purposes. This includes promoting unique identity numbers for enterprises, persons, produced and financial assets, natural resources and geospatial and geographic units and maintaining classifications for these observation units.

For an efficient production of integrated statistics a '*common business architecture for standardized information management*' needs to be considered, such as the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) and the related work on the Generic Statistical Information Model (GSIM). The GSIM as reference framework recommends standards on documentation and exchanges such as the data documentation initiative (DDI) and standard data and metadata exchange (SDMX). This integrated business solution for efficient communication among providers of official statistics will make it possible to consider shared development and use of integrated business and household survey programmes and related IT tools. This information management agenda will foster the easy and open data access across the communities of societies based on principles of open solutions and open knowledge.

The mission of the *High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Statistical Production and Services* of the Conference of European Statisticians is to oversee development of frameworks, and sharing of information, tools and methods, which support the modernisation of statistical organisations. The aim is to improve the efficiency of the statistical production process, and the ability to produce outputs easier, less resource-intensive, and less burdensome on data suppliers. New and existing products and services should make use of the vast amounts of data becoming available. Statistical organisations should create environments that facilitate the reuse and sharing of methods, components, processes and data repositories, and organisational changes are required to implement this strategy. The measure of success is not the completion of a single big task but the realisation of the ability to continually adapt to the changing world.

Partnerships in data

Existing network initiatives⁶ in sustainable development are already reaching out to the official statistical community at the global level, from which initiatives at regional, national and community level should be explored. These partnership with academia and think tanks will advance the analytical and policy use of integrated statistics for poverty eradication and multi-dimensional aspects of sustainable development. Moreover, they will promote the production of timely and high quality integrated statistics based on a system's approach.

⁶ Independent Research Forum on a Post 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda (IFR2015), Southern Voice on Post MDG International Development Goals, Sustainable Development Solutions Network

The partnership with the corporate sector is based on the realisation that sustainability is a strategic issue for businesses. Common metrics of corporate sustainability reporting are to be developed for the global, national and business level, which allows for the use of such data for official statistics and the articulation of sustainability indicators at national and global level that meet the strategic needs of the corporate sector. On the link between corporate sustainable reporting and official statistics, existing initiatives⁷ should be mobilised. Equally strategic is the partnership with the corporate sector in addressing the use of Big Data for official statistical purposes. Apart from the common technological and analytical challenges to be addressed in use of these data for the production of rapid estimates for economic, social and environment statistics, there are privacy, confidentiality and perception issues to be tackled. Also, the partnership with the corporate sector can be leveraged to apply its prowess in communicating and educating the public on official statistics to support sustainability causes. Similarly, the partnership with civil society aims to advance the monitoring of the sustainable development goals using integrated statistics complemented by indicators at the community level. Existing initiatives seek this collaboration with the community of official statistics.

A system-wide partnership among international agencies, including UN agencies and funds, and the Bretton Woods partners, will again need to be forged for a global reporting mechanism on the post-2015 SDG framework and its means of implementation. Efforts should continue to implement the SNA and SEEA ensuring the production of coherent and consistent statistics across the economic, environment and social dimensions supported by integrated business and household statistics programmes, use of administrative data and based on standards for statistical information management. Moreover, a collective effort should be made to implement the Busan action Plan for statistics, including its reflection on technology transfer, legal mandates and allocation of adequate resources for official statistics, improvement of statistical management and high level political support for statistics.

⁷ Green economy coalition and its project “measure what matters”