

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS TO UNITED NATIONS WORLD DATA FORUM
Dubai, 22 October 2018

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be with you today.

We live during a time of unprecedented challenge – but, equally, unprecedented and massive opportunity.

Our blueprint for addressing these challenges and seizing the opportunities is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

But to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, we need more and better data.

With accurate, representative, inclusive and disaggregated data, we can understand the challenges we face -- and identify the most appropriate solutions for sustainable development.

For example, data on disaster preparedness and early warning systems can save lives and livelihoods.

Last year, natural disasters cost 330 billion dollars.

Better data can help avoid some of these losses.

Mexico's earthquake early warning system has issued 158 alerts since 1993 significantly reducing the potential impact.

Robust and accessible data and information can provide a host of other benefits.

It means students can find out about job opportunities and women can learn about laws protecting them from discrimination.

It means citizens can monitor how their governments are performing and hold decision-makers to account.

It can strengthen trust in public institutions and unveil new opportunities.

For example, in Buenos Aires, Google data suggests that rooftop solar potential is equal to about 946,000 tonnes of avoided emissions a year -- which is the equivalent of taking 200,000 cars off the road.

But, while it is clear that the data revolution is having an enormous impact, it has not benefited everyone equally.

Since 1970, natural disasters have affected the lives of more than 460 million people in Africa.

Many lives and livelihoods could have been saved with better data and forecasting.

And in more than two thirds of countries, there is a lack of gender disaggregated data on violence against women.

Our task is to make sure data is available to all people.

We must make sure it is harnessed to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels and in all regions and countries.

That is why the United Nations is leading global efforts to integrate data and information systems.

The Open Data Hub for the Sustainable Development Goals allows countries to bring together different data sources, integrated with geospatial information, for evidence-based decision-making and advocacy.

The global SDG indicator website gives users access to all available global data and enables them to see interactive stories about progress on implementing the 2030 Agenda.

And UN Global Pulse works to harness big data to accelerate sustainable development and humanitarian action globally.

Meanwhile, the UN system is also working to build the statistical capacity of countries to improve the timeliness and quality of data and statistics on the SDGs, in part through a new global network of statistical training institutions.

And the United Nations Centre for Humanitarian Data in The Hague is increasing the impact and use of data throughout the humanitarian sector, ensuring that aid workers around the world can access the data they need to make fast, life-saving, informed decisions.

We are also partnering with the World Bank on ID4D, allowing us to ensure with biometrics that we leave no one behind from birth.

And we are examining the broader implications of the data revolution.

This means establishing ethical norms, data privacy and data protection frameworks, so that data can be used safely and responsibly for the public good.

In July this year, the Secretary-General launched a High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation. This panel of experts includes His Excellency Mohammad Abdulla Al Gergawi, and we are glad to have him.

Its task is to help harness the benefits of emerging technologies, including issues of data literacy, data privacy and the digital divide, while avoiding the unintended negative consequences of technological innovation, such as job losses and the erosion of workers' rights.

But we urgently need to bridge important gaps.

Funding for data and statistical systems remains limited.

And beyond funding, we need political, technical and advocacy support in all areas.

We need to develop data literacy, innovative tools and data visualization platforms, which allow users to understand data intuitively and interact seamlessly with data in real time.

This will be integral to delivering for people and communities at the country-level – the litmus test of our reforms in the UN development system.

UN country teams of the future must be fully equipped with the right skills and capacities to harness the opportunities offered by all types of data and innovation, including emerging technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, blockchain, robotics and drones.

We also need to improve the availability of disaggregated and local-level data.

To make better decisions, local officials need to understand what is happening at the level of individual communities.

Local governments, civil society groups, and businesses are developing innovative tools and technologies to improve the availability of such detailed local-level data.

For example, across Asia, Africa and South America, women are using crowdsourcing to map the safety of the streets and public spaces in their communities.

Such technology is empowering and can help make communities safe for everyone.

In Delhi, such data showed that there were more than 7,000 dark spots.

The local government is using this data to illuminate these unsafe areas.

Making such inequities visible through better data is crucial to enabling change.

I invite all data innovators to work together with the United Nations to improve the availability and use of disaggregated and local data.

Together, we can safely and responsibly harness the power of data to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and bring about a world where no one, absolutely no one, is left behind.

That is why I welcome you all here today: friends, partners, colleagues, and especially those who are new to working with the United Nations.

We need you, and we thank you for your engagement and commitment.

I look forward to our exchange of ideas here today.

Thank you.

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