UN World Data Forum set to kick off with ambitious agenda, launching innovative data solutions to improve lives

More than 1,000 data leaders from government, business, science and civil society to collaborate on challenges and initiatives at Forum, opening 15 January in Cape Town

(New York/Johannesburg, 10 January) -- The inaugural United Nations World Data Forum, taking place in Cape Town, South Africa, on 15-18 January 2017, is set to kick off with an ambitious and innovative programme and roster of over 300 speakers from across the data community.

Over 1,000 data experts from more than 100 countries have registered for the Forum, including from national statistical offices, data scientists from the private sector and academia, international organizations, and civil society groups, as well as political leaders and sustainable development advocates. The programme is posted online at UNdataforum.org.

The Forum, which will be held at the Cape Town International Convention Center, will be a unique opportunity for major producers and users of data and statistics to collaborate in launching new initiatives and innovative solutions that will deliver better data on health, education, income, environmental indicators and other aspects of sustainable development. With almost 100 sessions and parallel events, from data labs and interactive knowledge-sharing spaces, to more traditional keynote speeches and panel discussions, the Forum is expected to address a wide range of data issues.

"I am confident that the first UN World Data Forum will generate fruitful collaboration across the statistics and data communities, and cutting edge practical solutions to current challenges," said Mr. Wu Hongbo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, who heads the Secretariat for the Forum. "I also hope it will boost political and financial support and partnerships for improving statistics and data capacity in many countries, to harness the power of data for the public good and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda."

Innovative approaches
Among many points of discussion, the Forum will feature presentations and data labs focusing on a number of innovative solutions, including:
- How using mobile phones and online interviews can improve the accuracy and cost-effectiveness of gathering data, based on experiences in Africa and Latin America.
- How high-res satellite images can be used to map poverty and measure soil fertility and crop yields.
- How call records and other sources can be used to gather better data on migration and refugees.
- How open data can improve the productivity of African agriculture, showcasing practical lessons learned from an 8-year public-private partnership, the Africa Soil Information Service, including ways to incorporate new technologies such as crowd-sourcing, remote sensing and drones.
- How involving mobile carriers, banks and social media companies in partnerships can generate new, large-scale data sources.
- How civil society groups are using data to talk to governments about citizens' experiences and priorities, and how this can build accountability and change policy.

Core issues
Other plenary sessions and panels will focus on core issues agreed by the organizing committee, including:

- A new look at how to harness the data revolution for sustainable development;
- Rethinking how to build official statistical capacity in those countries where it is needed, encouraging new commitments and collaborations;
- Integrating new data sources and big data innovations into existing structures, and how to facilitate data sharing and collaboration across sectors;
- Counting minorities and vulnerable groups and improving gender data so that we "leave no one behind" and ensure the protection of human rights; and
- Understanding the world through data: data visualization, literacy and journalism.

The Forum was agreed by the UN Statistical Commission based on a recommendation by the UN Secretary-General's Independent Expert and Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development. Improved use of data and statistics will be crucial to achieving the transformational vision of a better future for people and the planet, set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development agreed by world leaders at the UN in September 2015. Better data is needed to track progress and inform policy decisions from the local to the global levels. Rapid expansion in new sources of data is creating large-scale opportunities for innovative solutions, which need to be integrated with strengthened official data mechanisms and structures.

The first UN World Data Forum will be hosted by the Government of South Africa and Statistics South Africa, with support from the Statistics Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. A number of partners– including governments, the World Bank, UNICEF, and several civil society organizations and research institutes– are collaborating to organize the Forum.

For Media: Media wishing to cover the Forum who have not yet registered should send a request by e-mail to dataforum@un.org; online registration is closed. More information can be found at UNDataForum.org, or follow on Twitter @UNDataForum. Plenary sessions will be livestreamed. An advance press briefing will be held in Johannesburg on 10 January at 4:00pm at the Holiday Inn Sandton, with additional access by WebEx and archived video; and at UN Headquarters in New York at noon the same day, with live webcast at webtv.un.org. An opening press briefing will be held on Sunday, 15 January, at 2:30pm at the Cape Town International Convention Centre. Details will be posted on the Forum website media page.

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