DATA *Voices*

ACHIEVING THE SDGs

The first-ever United Nations World Data Forum kicked off with a session aimed at laying the groundwork for, and looking at the specific objectives of, the conference. There were two high-level panels that addressed these issues.

Ms Teresa Clarke, the moderator of the session, said that when she spoke with her taxi driver about the World Data Forum, he requested that the forum look into the costs associated with data on the continent. This plea was echoed by the floor and the panel, who spoke to the importance of enabling all to become digital citizens. Affordable internet access is a prerequisite for the digital revolution that will enable the data revolution.

Agenda 2030 offers a new lens through which to look at the world and the urgent challenges we are facing. This new lens cannot change things by itself. The phrase "Leave no-one behind" is not simply a catchy slogan, but a commitment that signals a paradigm shift for the development agenda. Accurate, reliable, timely, disaggregated data is required to ensure that the needs of the poor and most vulnerable can no longer be hidden behind "the average".

National statistical offices (NSOs) have to step up to the plate and become the central information hub for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While NSOs cannot be expected to produce all the data required, they should be at the forefront of coordination of the production of statistics to monitor the SDGs. All communities represented at the forum have a crucial role to play in ensuring that the required data is produced in line with international standards and best practice.

A question that always arises at meetings of this nature is, what happens after this? How will the discussions that are held in here impact on the world out there? The Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data is being launched at the United Nations World Data Forum. The Plan gives a vision with a global "to-do" list of what needs to be done to achieve it, and provides a blueprint for not only monitoring, but also achieving the SDGs.

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RETHINKING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

With the move to Agenda 2030, there are now 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 169 targets and more than 200 indicators. The SDGs need data that is more accurate, nuanced, innovative and collaborative. This places additional data burdens on under-resourced national statistical offices (NSOs), which ofttimes struggled to meet the data requirements for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals.

SDG data and statistical presentations often end with a slide that says, "We need to build more capacity". This session sought to start with that premise: to unpack what it means, and who should be capacitated -- producers, users, donors or all of these groups?

The SDGs are a game changer in the field of data and statistics. The need for statistical capacity development is highlighted in the SDGs, and Agenda 2030 has a chapter on follow-up and review. The early inclusion of statisticians in the development of the SDGs and the monitoring framework points to the increased awareness of the necessity for statistics to inform and support the achievement of Agenda 2030.

But how can this massive need for data be met? And what type of capacity development is needed? The focus must be on the fundamental requirements, not necessarily on what is "sexy" or "speedy" or "hot right now".

Capacity retention and utilisation strategies need to be built into capacity building programmes to ensure that the capacity that is built does not simply walk out of the door.

While funding is always an issue, what came out strongly in the session is the need to build on what is currently there, and to utilise partnerships and relationships with other organisations that can, for example, conduct a peer review that would enable capacity building in a specific area. There is always a need to do more with less, especially in the context of statistical production, which often falls low on a government's list of priorities.

Capacity development needs to be defined; there has to be agreement on what needs to be done. Capacity development should align to national and international priorities, to ensure that what is learned can be applied to the everyday functioning of statistical producers, users and donors.

*"**Statistics can make an enormous difference to the quality of democracy.** Innumeracy is the enemy of democracy. People familiar with numbers and facts can measure progress in their own lives and are empowered to speak about what remains to be done".*

Ian Hacking argues, "Quiet statisticians have changed our world, not by discovering new facts or technical developments, but by changing the ways that we *reason, experiment and form our opinions*".

EMPOWERING THE DISABLED

Using statistics to ensure that no one is left behind

There was a striking gap in the MDGs: persons with disabilities were not mentioned in any of the eight goals or the attendant 21 targets or 60 indicators, nor in the Millennium Declaration. This was mainly due to the fact that there was very little reliable data available on disabled persons.

In recent years, representatives from national statistical agencies have met informally to address selected problems in statistical methods, and some of these groups have become formally known as "city groups". The Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG) is one of these city groups, constituted to address the urgent need for cross-nationally comparable population-based measures of disability. Its mandate is the promotion and co-ordination of international co-operation in the area of health statistics, focusing on disability data collection tools suitable for censuses and national surveys.

The WG has developed a Short Set of Questions on Disability, which is suitable for use in censuses and surveys. Results from the WG Short Set differ markedly from a yes / no "Are you disabled?" question often asked in censuses. Countries are encouraged to include the WG Short Set of Questions on Disability in data collections that produce the sustainable development goal (SDG) indicators. The WG is able to provide technical support to countries that are implementing this.

The work of the WG has ensured that persons with disabilities are strongly included in the 2030 Agenda, with Goal 17 placing particular emphasis on data being disaggregated by disability.

Representatives of Handicap International, Sightsavers, and the Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre at University College London gave presentations on projects undertaken by these organisations to improve the lives of people living with disabilities. What came through strongly in these presentations is that civil society, including disabled persons' organizations (DPOs), can not only contribute to data collection, but are very often the source of data themselves. This includes opportunities for DPOs and persons with disabilities to engage as active contributors in data collection on the SDGs and provide guidance to National Statistical Offices at the national, regional, and global levels, particularly related to the adoption of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics: Short Set of Questions on Disability.

During discussions, the issue of how disabled persons can be enabled to access data was raised. This is an area that needs to be looked at closely by all National Statistical Offices and all those who disseminate statistics.

Thanks to the sterling work done by the WG and other DPOs, we can be assured that people living with disabilities, when it comes to data, will no longer be left behind.

LEARNING TO LOVE DATA AGAIN

Sometimes it feels nice to be the guinea pig. Sometimes it feels kind of special... especially if it's in the name of science, or, more specifically, in the name of statistical literacy. One can be forgiven for entering a breakaway room straight after lunch with expectations of sitting back, stretching out, and idly listening to a few presentations.

But a normal, run of the mill breakaway session was not on the cards for delegates who attended the innocuously named session: "Developing a collective curriculum to make civil society data literate." No normal presentation session here. The energetic team from I Hate Statistics had other plans on the cards for the well fed delegates. Or rather, other plans on post-it-notes.

Making statistics hot again, a phrase splashed across the I Hate Statistics website, was insightfully demonstrated during the workshop-like setup of the session. Pim Bellinga and Thijs Gillebaart, two entrepreneurs from Amsterdam, kick-started I Hate Statistics with the main aim of helping people, in particular students and journalists, to understand and make sense of data and statistics.

They want to bring those who think they detest statistics to a place where they can understand the world through data. After all, what's the use of expending all that energy, time and money in making data widely accessible when people don't know how to properly interpret data?

The session involved delegates interacting to develop a basic, draft curriculum for data literacy. Broken up into groups, delegates were asked to capture their idea of who they thought users of data were on post-it-notes. The groups were then asked to ponder and write down the answers to two important questions: in what way might these various users process data, and what skills or abilities should these users master in order for them to be more data savvy.

The end result of the exercise? A list of important users and the skills they would need to improve their understanding of data. Taken together with a wide range of other feedback, I Hate Statistics plan to use the information to eventually develop lessons that would correctly target different kinds of people with short visual lessons and stories.

Quite productive for a post-lunch session. Even though delegates found themselves in a guinea pig role of sorts in a workshop-like scenario, the minuscule contribution made to advancing statistical literacy will eventually bear valuable fruit.

CREATING A LASTING LEGACY

Advocating for the use of administrative data to inform the SDGs.

"If we can use the 2030 Agenda to engineer greater use of administrative data in statistical production, this could be one of the lasting legacies of the Agenda." These were the opening remarks made by Mr Jørgen Elmeskov, Director General of Statistics Denmark, as he gave the keynote address at a session that addressed the use of administrative data in statistics.

Monitoring of the SDGs poses enormous challenges. The scope of the Agenda is vast, with a concomitant need for data to monitor it. Monitoring should be done in a way that enables comparison across countries, yet different countries have different capacities. The pledge to leave no-one behind requires a level of granularity that is not easily achieved, and all of this rests on the shoulders of National Statistics Offices (NSOs) operating with severely constrained resources.

However, the SDGs might be the push that is needed to encourage NSOs to look at administrative data as a source for the collation of statistics. Denmark has 100% coverage of all citizens within their administrative registers, and no longer conducts a census, as their registers are used to do a population count.

The use of administrative data has a number of advantages. As the data is already collected for administrative use, the associated costs are low, and what needs to be determined is how these records can be used for statistical purposes. Administrative data can also produce more detailed statistics at various levels of granularity, especially those datasets that come with a geo-spatial dimension.

Ms Lisa Bersales, National Statistician of the Philippines, and Ms Ola Awad, President of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), shared their country experiences in the use of administrative data. In mapping data available to monitor the SDGs, the Philippines found that only 33% of the information comes from censuses and surveys, with 60% coming from administrative records. The SDGs increase the

need for quality assessments of administrative data to make sure that they meet international standards.

When the PCBS was established in 1994, no statistical infrastructure was in place. By 2016, 46% of Palestinian statistics were being sourced from administrative data. A mapping exercise similar to that of the Philippines showed that almost 50% of the SDG indicators can be produced using administrative data.

Mr Elmeskov emphasised that the use of administrative data is not only relevant for countries with a high level of sophistication.

Boldness is needed from both NSOs and politicians to achieve Agenda 2030. Participants are encouraged to seize this rare opportunity to increase the use of administrative data that results from the need to monitor the SDGs.

DATAVoices

Delegates at the historic World Data Forum being hosted in South Africa at Cape Town's CTICC, share their view of this innovative union of young and old.

JHONSON RAMAROSOLOFO
Provincial Manager for the
National Institute of Statistics,
MADAGASCAR

How did you hear about the 1st World Data Forum?

The United Nations invited the Director-General of the National Institute of Statistics to come to Cape Town, but due to other commitments he could not be here. I was nominated by him to represent him here at this forum.

What have you learnt from being here?

I have learnt many new innovative things about big data and open data to measure the sustainable development indicators for Agenda 2030. In the statistical institute they should bring these new tools to my country to develop faster and more accurate statistical processes.

We have many specialists in this field in my country and I would like to see them attending the 2nd World Data Forum to come and collaborate and share their knowledge and build new networks to grow our NSS.

Have you heard about the International Population Conference (IPC) taking place in South Africa, Cape Town?

No!

OLEBOGENG MFOLOE
Survey Statistician,
Statistics South Africa,
SOUTH AFRICA

How did you hear about the 1st World Data Forum?

It was advertised within the organisation and I was nominated to attend by my superior.

What have you learnt from being here?

I have learnt that statistics is very broad and there are many innovative tools that we can utilise to improve the quality of our work and the way we think. As a young statistician I should start thinking about using big data to impact policy and decision makers in South Africa and Africa.

Have you heard of the IPC?

Yes I have - it was advertised internally and I submitted my abstract before the closing date - there are three of us working on a paper together as this will be our first opportunity to present at an international conference.

MAKING STATISTICS SEXY

We are I Hate Statistics, two social entrepreneurs from Amsterdam who like solving problems. We have set ourselves one goal: teaching even those people who are inclined to think they hate statistics how to understand the world through data. On January 16, we'll be sharing our experiences and vision on how to help everyone learn to love data and statistics.

Sharing data is not enough

One of the organisations that has greatly inspired us in our goal and has paved our way to join the UN World Data Forum in Cape Town this year is the Swedish fact tank Gapminder. The global data heroes from Sweden are doing an amazing job when it comes to freeing the world from widespread misconceptions by introducing everyone who's willing to listen to the right data.

However, showing the right graphs is not always enough. If people do not possess the skills to critically interpret those beautifully presented data, those data might lead to even more misconceptions. In our rapidly digitalizing society people are faced with torrents of data every day. Hence, the need for everyone to possess basic data skills is more important than ever. And this is exactly where we can be of help. We figured that alongside teaching statistics to students we'd start at the core of public life: journalists.

Fighting data ignorance

Because who knows better how to reach the average news consumer than journalists?

So we started talking to journalists to find out how they thought they might improve their work. "I would strongly recommend you to start with journalists," Belgian data journalist Maarten Lambrechts told us.

Many journalists said the same thing: 'we do not have

I Hate Statistics – Pim Bellinga, Founder & Thijs Gillebaart, Co-Founder

Interpretation is everything. And people need basic data literacy skills to draw the right conclusions and to understand interpretations made by others.

the time and skills to understand and interpret data'. And that's a shame, since journalists are fundamental in informing audiences worldwide about global challenges demonstrated in the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals.

Fighting data ignorance also means fighting for sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. But what if journalists get the data wrong, because they simply do not have the time to dig in or haven't been taught statistics during their journalism studies?
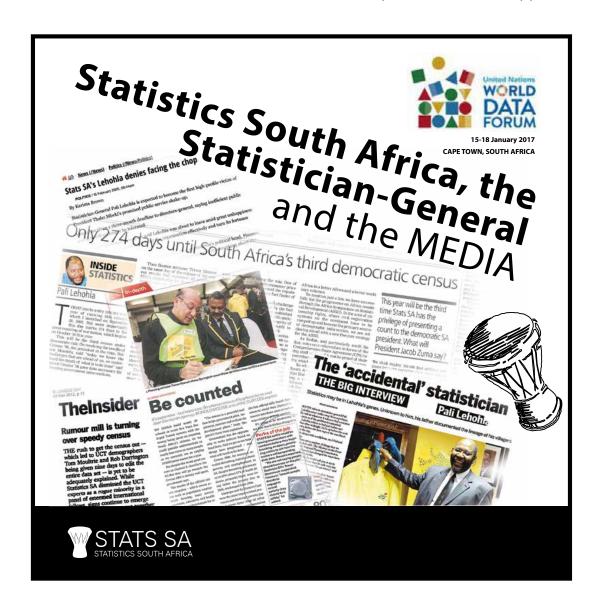
READ MORE:

http://undataforum.org/WorldDataForum/i-hate-statistics-making-statistics-sexy/

THE TAR ON THE ROAD!

The journey in building a statistical literate society

Visit the Stats SA stand between 15-18 January 2017 for a free copy.

Statistics is a conduit of trust. It is the most publicly transacted currency and therefore has to imbue trust.

I have learned that use and practice of statistics including emergence of other players is possible when a statistician-general takes an educative lead in terms of the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. This is especially holding fearlessly to the Principle Four "addressing misuse and wrong interpretation of statistics!"

Dr Pali Lehohla
Statistician-General of South Africa and Head of Statistics South Africa

What you need to know about the World Data Forum

1. Conference mobile application

We have an app! Go to the Google Play Store/App Store, search for Stats SA UNWDF 2017 and install it. The delegate with the most points at the end of the conference will win a prize from our sponsor, MTN.

2. Wi-fi connection

To download the app (and post about the Forum on social media), you need Wi-fi. We have it!
UN World Forum
Password: @capetown2017

3. Social platforms

Use #UNDataForum to share your experience of the first ever United Nations World Data Forum
- *Follow @UNDataForum and @StatsSA for regular updates*
- *The presentations will be available on SlideShare www.slideshare.net/StatsSA*
- *Videos will be available on the UN DESA Youtube*
- *Live Streaming: www.undataforum.org*
- *The presentations will be available on SlideShare: www.slideshare.net/StatsSA*

4. Interpretation units

*These are available outside Auditorium 1. **Please produce your passport/ID to obtain a unit. These are to be returned after use.***

5. Official Gala dinner

Everyone is invited to the official conference Gala dinner, hosted by MTN and Stats SA at Ratanga Junction in Century City. This will take place on Tuesday, 17 January at 19:00. Transport will depart outside the ICC from 18:30.

*Entertainment will be provided by Yvonne Chaka Chaka, the **UN Goodwill Ambassador.***

If you have any comments on the newsletter please contact the editorial team:
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