

Shaping Subnational Statistical Systems to meet requirements of the SDGs
PARIS21 Cross Regional Forum
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“We need disaggregated data because behind the data there are people”

Forum Summary

Rationale for subnational data

As the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are now under implementation, the scope of work and interest on relevant indicators is widening. This calls for an ever-increasing need for effective co-ordination of the National Statistical System (NSS), both horizontally among line ministries and other data sources at central level, and vertically between the NSO and statistics departments in line ministries on the one hand and regional producers of statistics on the other hand. Co-ordination and subsequent synergies are essential to producing the necessary subnational data for measuring development results and reporting on a wide range of political, administrative, economic and social issues. Local statistics are being or should be widely used in order to (amongst others):

1. monitor attainment of the SDGs particularly responding to the *“no one is to be left behind”* principle
2. empower local communities and populations to hold authorities accountable
3. design, implement and promote local development policies and programmes
4. formulate mid- and long-term plans including support to fragile or post-conflict areas
5. fight poverty and reduce intra- and inter-area inequalities
6. improve the delivery of basic services, such as education, health and infrastructure- based services

Strategic development of subnational statistics

A subpopulation is a portion or part of national population that lives in the same identifiable geographical and/or administrative subdivision of national territory. Any system related to statistics at a level below the national level is called a subnational statistical system. Not all countries have subnational statistical system due to administrative arrangements or the size of the country. However, the need for such statistics remains a necessity in the wake of inclusive growth.

To better understand the characteristics of existing subnational statistical systems, PARIS21 developed a strategic paper based on desk reviews and in-depth country studies. The paper points out that subnational statistics rest on the existence of subpopulations within a country and a better understanding of the demand and supply side are critical if subnational statistics are to be developed further. For instance, local community or local government development programmes may not necessarily be identical to those of the central government although the two may also intersect and complement each other.

The paper recommends a number of guiding principles which need to be taken into consideration when developing a subnational statistical system and these include jurisdictional delineation, legal recognition, two-way subsidiarity, statistical participation, and local relevance. The paper further recommends updating NSDS guidelines to include subnational statistics system. For further details, the report can be accessed [here](#).

Sharing countries' experience

During the forum, a number of national statistical offices shared their experience in relation to subnational statistical systems. It was noted that there are wide variations in the development of subnational statistics across countries. Some countries already have fully or partially fledged subnational statistical systems while for others, it remains non-existent. Furthermore, existing systems have different set-ups with different reporting systems, achievements and challenges.

A number of achievement have been noted amongst those countries that have established subnational statistics and these include but are not limited to dedicated reporting mechanisms, censuses and survey programmes, statistics web portals, statistical information centers, etc.

Aside from the achievements identified above, a number of challenges were also voiced such as lack of clear policy and legal basis for local-level statistics, inadequate standards and co-ordination mechanisms, limited access to local statistics, fragility, inadequate statistics competences in terms of production and use and limited resources availed for local level statistics development.

How can sectors contribute to the development of subnational statistics?

A strengthen subnational statistical system is reliant on strengthened sector statistics. Ideally, sector statistics should be generated from the subnational statistical system that then feed into the national statistical system. The ground for interaction between the NSOs and the sectors that implement the SDGs is actually at the subnational level.

During this forum, a number of sectors shared their role in subnational statistical development and it was noted that sectors play both roles as producers as well as users of statistics. This is particularly true when it comes to providing actual services to people in need, determining where they are located, how many, and assessing the impact of all the development endeavors. Through censuses, the NSO provides denominators for the calculation of most sector indicators. Through surveys, the NSO assesses the impact of various development interventions.

Challenges however include differences in definitions and methodologies used between the NSO and the sectors which result in variations in findings.

Recommendations include the establishment of transparent protocols for adopting administrative or regulatory data in subnational, regional and global reporting. It was also recommended to build bridges between sector data systems and NSOs through sector strategies for the development of statistics as building blocks of the NSDS.

Can partnerships help solve some of the data challenges at the subnational level?

Partnerships help tap into opportunities provided by other institutions through knowledge, experience, resources and/or mandates in specific areas.

At this forum a number of local and international development partners were invited to present their work in local development including those involved in community level activities. Development partners are particularly interested in subnational data because national figures can hide high levels of inequality amongst subnational areas. In addition, subnational areas form units of analysis to measure gaps amongst them in their economic and social situations including cities and human settlements.

Challenges identified include lack of uniformity in the definition of subnational and variations in statistics capacity across regions. It was noted that more developed regions or states develop their own statistical products while areas with less development are statistically invisible. There is also a lack of common definitions for geographical units (such as NUTS) and statistical procedures (e.g.

subnational GDP). Finally, statistics produced at the subnational level do not always feedback into the national level, leading to duplication of efforts and inconsistencies.

Recommendations include:

- Develop guidelines for subnational strategies for the development of local statistics that are integrated into NSDSs
- Partner with geographical and administrative institutions on identification of subnational areas
- Promote participation in data sharing through establishment of local data sharing communities
- Develop statistical framework for the transformation of development project data into subnational statistics and
- Establish relevant data sharing partnerships

Recommendations

The issue of subnational statistical system is significantly complex but remains very relevant. The heart of the data revolution rests in subnational data which can then better respond to local development programmes as well as the 2030 Agenda. Step-by-step, measures need to be considered to strengthen subnational statistical systems.

Below are some proposed steps towards the development of subnational data

1. National and local governments should work to identify existence of subnational populations and the data needs for local development programmes
2. Countries, working in collaboration with regional and international organizations to amend their statistics legislations to recognise subnational statistical systems
3. PARIS21 working in collaboration with other development partners should develop guidelines for the subnational strategies for development of local statistics integrating them into the NSDS framework
4. Countries should work with geographical and administrative institutions on identification of subnational areas
5. Countries and local level development partners should establish data partnerships with major stakeholders and promote local participation in data sharing and the establishment of local data sharing communities
6. Countries working international development partners should harmonize subnational data standards, methods and definitions in line with UNFPOS
7. Countries together with development partners to operationalise subnational statistics system by transforming developing project data and sector data into subnational statistics
8. PARIS21 to document best practices, act as a knowledge hub and further support capacity building within the scope of subnational statistics.
9. Over the next two years, PARIS21 and other development partners to engage with a number of willing countries and partners to develop subnational strategies for the development of statistics.