



MORE AND BETTER DEVELOPMENT DATA FOR A DECADE OF ACTION



Photo: Dominic Chavez/World Bank

WHAT IS THE BERN NETWORK?

The Bern Network on Financing Data for Development is an open, multi-stakeholder alliance to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by promoting more and better financing for data. Focused primarily on poor countries and fragile states, it works to support better identification of needs, improved investment proposals, better co-ordination at the country level, and bridge domestic and external financial and technical support for low-capacity countries.

The 2020 United Nations World Data Forum (UNWDF) provides a unique opportunity to strengthen the foundations of sustainable development. Without accurate, timely, and reliable data, we simply do not have the necessary evidence to chart a course to achieve the SDGs. Too many countries do not know where they stand, or are relying on data that are too old to design the necessary policies and programmes to deliver a life of dignity for all. We need to put data at the heart of the Decade of Action and we need your support. Together, we can ensure that national statistical systems are able to support sustainable development to 2030 and beyond.

THE CHALLENGE

Nearly five years after they were adopted, it is increasingly clear that the world is not on track to achieve the SDGs. To accelerate action, the United Nations General Assembly, at its 74th session, initiated a 'decade of action and delivery'.¹ Its resolution calls on everyone – governments, private sector and civil society – to re-double their efforts to achieve Agenda 2030 and leave no one behind.

UN Member States are firmly committed to making sustainable development a reality. They stand ready to lift the poor out of poverty, halt life-threatening climate change, and tackle inequality in all its forms. But their resolve is being confronted by a severe gap in timely, accurate, and reliable data. These missing data reduce the ability of countries to design and implement efficient and effective policies and programmes, spot opportunities and avoid risks, and monitor progress.

¹ <https://undocs.org/en/A/HLPF/2019/L.1>



How is it that the rich world is drowning in data while nobody knows how many mothers die in childbirth in South Africa?²

The most severe data gaps are in the poorest and most fragile countries, where governments lack the resources to build strong statistical systems. In these countries, extreme poverty is widespread. But because we lack up-to-date and reliable data, nobody knows where it is concentrated or what needs to be done to overcome it. The last population count might have taken place decades ago, which means that today governments and development partners do not know where to build roads, schools and hospitals. Although many go hungry every day, nobody has the data to understand how agriculture can become more productive. Too many women and children are not officially registered, keeping them from accessing crucial public services and increasing their chance of being exploited.

Data and statistics are to policymaking what instruments are to an airplane. Without them, we are flying in the dark.

THE OPPORTUNITY

At the dawn of the Decade of Action, we have a unique opportunity to switch on the lights. The SDGs have reinvigorated the momentum to tackle humankind's biggest challenges. With the right mix of data, tools and technology, and the will to use them, we can end extreme poverty, reduce gross inequalities, prevent discrimination against women and girls, halt climate change, and protect our rapidly deteriorating natural environment. Strengthening foundational data systems is a critical ingredient in making this happen.

New data sources and technologies such as 'big data' and artificial intelligence hold enormous promise. But they are not alternatives to the basic building blocks of official statistics – censuses, surveys, and administrative data systems. Rather, new data and technologies can help derive new insights from traditional statistics.

Similarly, digital connectivity – mobile phones in many pockets – offers several new sources of timely data. But their promise can only be realised if national statisticians can categorise, disseminate, and verify these new data sources. New data make investing in national statistical systems even more imperative.

The Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data (CTGAP), adopted by the UN Statistical Commission and welcomed by the UN General Assembly in 2017, identifies strategic areas that need strengthening and serves as a framework for investment. The Dubai Declaration, announced at the UN World Data Forum in 2018 and endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission at its 50th session in March 2019, calls for the establishment of a funding mechanism to mobilize domestic and international funds to strengthen the capacity of national data and statistical systems. The Dubai Declaration recognizes that innovative funding strategies are critical for successful implementation of the CTGAP.

Spending on data will make it less costly to achieve Agenda 2030, as it will enable smarter investments, reduce mistakes, and drive greater impact.³

² <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/94/2/15-155036/en/>

³ Investments in data and statistics have resulted in notable returns. For specific examples, visit the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data and SDSN TREND's Value for Data Case Studies series at <http://www.data4sdgs.org/resources/value-data-case-studies>

OUR PROPOSAL

Building the statistical infrastructure for the Decade of Action will require a strong political commitment to scale up and make better use of existing funding. Developing country leaders need to scale up their support to national statistical systems. Their partners, bilateral and multilateral alike, will have to coordinate their support and get behind national priorities. Additional funding will have to come from domestic resources, if possible, and from aid providers, if necessary.

A stronger, mutual financial commitment is paramount. But to be effective, it should come with a set of sensible commitments about our partnership that reinforce and support one another. Taken together, they will improve the quantity and quality of development data by creating efficiencies in current spending, leveraging existing resources, and attracting new funding. Making this a reality will require a shared vision between developing countries and their partners:

COMMITMENT AREAS:

- 1 MOBILISE DOMESTIC RESOURCES.** Domestic resources will have to account for the largest share of additional funding for data and statistics in developing countries. Strong commitments from developing country leaders to invest in data and statistics should therefore be incentivised.⁴ The efforts of NSOs to lobby for funding should be supported and championed in cooperation with ministries of finance, budget committees, and national statistical offices.
- 2 SCALE-UP FUNDING.** Donors – bilaterals, multilaterals, foundations, and thematic global funds – should commit to increasing financial support to data and statistics, which currently account for only one-third of a percent of total ODA. Various options are available. For instance, donors could establish a fresh pooling arrangement to fund system-wide improvements. Donors could also coalesce around a ‘data compact for the poor’. Multilateral donors – regional and international financial institutions and UN agencies – have been key partners of national statisticians all around the world. They could commit to scaling up their support to data and statistics.⁵ Coordinating the use of their resources with any new mechanisms that will be established has to be a priority.

The Bern Network will gauge the interest of donors and custodians of existing funds to explore what more is needed, and donors are willing to commit.
- 3 BOOST EFFICIENCY.** Development co-operation actors should streamline their support, follow best practices, and adhere to aid transparency standards. To avoid duplication, actors could commit to using country-produced data wherever possible and to sharing their own data whenever collection cannot be avoided. They could also commit to allocating a small percentage of their project funds to strengthening relevant data and statistical systems. This should help spark a virtuous cycle in which increased demand leads to increased use, which will thereby strengthen and improve the statistical system to respond to growing demand. This can also help ensure investments follow a holistic strategy to develop capacity of the system as opposed to piecemeal interventions.⁶ As a general principle, a “do no harm” approach should be adopted.

⁴ Relevant examples of commitments and incentives related to domestic resource mobilization include the Addis Tax Initiative launched at the Third International Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa in July 2015.

⁵ In fact, the World Bank’s IDA19 Replenishment cycle already includes the first-ever policy commitment for data.

⁶ https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/development-co-operation-report-2017/rethinking-donor-support-for-statistical-capacity-development_dcr-2017-9-en

4 STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION. There is ample scope to strengthen co-ordination between donors and among donors and partner countries, promote south-south cooperation, and harness digital technologies to make the status quo of funding for statistics more cost-efficient. As a starting point, the Bern Network will explore the inventory of existing sources of information on support to statistics and data gaps. Along the lines of the clearing house mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)⁷ and building on existing initiatives,⁸ online platforms that provide information on data supply and demand could be set up and linked to pooling arrangements (see below).

5 LEVERAGE SECTORAL FUNDS. Sectoral data investments are valuable as they aim to strengthen core systems that can support and sustain outcomes in areas such as health and agriculture. There are opportunities to gain efficiencies in such investments and make them more sustainable by connecting them to national statistical systems. Improved integration between administrative data systems and core statistical systems can have cost-saving benefits, work towards closing data gaps, and lead to a stronger national statistical system overall. The Bern Network should explore how to connect lessons learned from sectoral project and fund investments in data and how to leverage the benefits across sectors to build a stronger foundation for countries' statistical and administrative systems.

NEXT STEPS

The Bern Network will develop concrete commitments in the above areas and build a diverse coalition of governments and other stakeholders. Within and among each commitment area, this process will include a combination of analytical work, testing, and co-creation. Analytical work will ensure that the actions are ambitious but feasible. Testing will involve engaging governments and other stakeholders to explore their interests, understand their constraints, and learn to what they may be prepared to commit. Co-creation will enable all stakeholders to contribute, ensuring that the actions remain ambitious while creating maximum opportunity for governments and other stakeholders to commit.

We hope that you will join the Bern Network, to shape its direction and to become involved in one or more of the actions above. Through a collaborative effort, the goal will be to develop a joint set of commitments that could be shared and signed at the World Data Forum 2020 in Bern.

Only ten years remain until 2030. Without the right data, the Decade of Action will be a decade of empty promises and half measures. Join the Bern Network today.

⁷ <https://chm.cbd.int/>

⁸ For instance, the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) offers an opportunity to bring data into the development effectiveness conversation at the national and global level. Use and strengthening country data systems is one of the GPEDC's core indicators of effectiveness.

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