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Conference Summary

Society in a data-driven world: Ensuring no one is left behind

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This document contains a summary of the Conference "Society in a data-driven world: Ensuring no one is left behind", which took place on 2 April 2019 in Paris, France. More information on the conference is available on the PARIS21 website.

I. Welcome
Lisa Bersales, National Statistician, Philippines Statistics Authority
Johannes Jütting, Manager, PARIS21

Mr Jütting opened the conference, welcomed all participants and outlined the agenda for the two days of Annual Meetings. Ms Bersales highlighted the timeliness and urgency of the conference`s topic given the emergence of disruptive data-driven technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Mr Jütting expanded on these points by explaining the rationale behind the conference's theme against the backdrop of past conference topics. The urgency of the topic arises as trust in official statistics is waning due to the spread of alternative facts and fake news positively affected by the ever-increasing digitalisation worldwide. Mr Jütting linked the timeliness of the conference's debate to the 2019 World Economic Forum and the OECD's recently published *Going Digital* report. Mr Jütting stressed that there are opportunities and challenges for societies as data-driven technologies emerge. Data can either support development and decrease inequalities within and between countries, or further divide countries through benefitting only the privileged few.

II. Opening address: The emergence of data-driven societies- is the Global South left out?
Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

Ms 'Utoikamanu delivered the opening address on the question whether the Global South is left out in the "data revolution". Today, data is at the forefront of public debate, whether in its potential use for driving economic progress, issues around data security and privacy or demands from SDG monitoring. The statistical community is called upon to inform the public about the societal impacts of data as well as design inclusive strategies to build a critical mass of data-literate and connected citizens, and to deliver on the Leave No One Behind agenda. Ms 'Utoikamanu highlighted that the role of policy makers needs to aim at fostering trust and resilience in increasingly digital economies, especially in SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs facing limited capacities and high levels of data vulnerability. What is worrying, she stressed, are the persistent, major disparities within and between countries in electricity and internet infrastructure, which constitutes a major barrier to advancements in connecting digital economies to leave no one behind. Ms 'Utoikamanu closed the opening address by stressing the need to encourage NSOs to produce data that meet users' needs for informed decision-making and educating citizens for mitigating risks of data abuse and privacy violations.

III. Setting the scene
Jen Schradie, Assistant Professor, Sciences Po Paris

Ms Schradie set the scene for the conference by focusing on "the Digital Divide". Digital divide research has focused on three different themes during the last 30 years: access, participation and impact. In the 1990s, sociological research focused on access to the internet as the first level divide. Today, around 80% of the population in developed countries have access to the internet, while in developing countries only 40% of the population is connected, with a high concentration of low

levels in Africa. In the 2000s, sociological research emphasised differences in participation as the second level divide. Persistent inequalities by demographic (such as race and gender) and capacity (such as skills and speed) are leading to different levels of digital consumption and production. In the 2010s, sociological research centred around the impacts of digitalisation on social aspects, such as work, health, housing and politics. Ms Schradie stressed her own research on digital activism gaps and the marginalisation of social groups caused by inequalities in the costs of participation. Ms Schradie closed the keynote presentation with some implications for PARIS21: the Digital Divide is more than just a question of access. It requires better and even bigger data to rise to the challenges of data-driven and digitally divided societies to deliver on the premise of leaving no one behind. The following discussion highlighted the need for balanced approaches and policies in all dimensions of life to reap the benefits and mitigate risks of the digital transformation for well-being worldwide, as mentioned in the OECD`s recently published *How`s Life in the Digital Age?* report. Ms Schradie concluded the session with words of caution. Dystopian examples of the digital revolution tend to represent outliers and exceptions rather than the general well-being of society. Nonetheless, alarming developments of fake news and digital inequalities threaten the beneficial impacts of digitalisation on societies worldwide and require effective policy responses and regulation.

IV. Panel discussion: The digital revolution and its impact on people: unpacking "leave no one behind"

Moderator: **Eric Anvar**, *Head of Smart Data Practices and Solutions Division, OECD Statistics and Data Directorate*

Panellists: **Kristofer Hamel**, *Chief Operation Officer, World Data Lab;* **Raziye Buse Cetin**, *AI Policy Researcher, The Future Society;* **El Iza Mohamedou**, *Deputy Manager, PARIS21;* **Jen Schradie**, *Assistant Professor, Sciences Po*

The panel discussion focused on the impact of the digital revolution on people and societies, a topic, which was also a subject of discussion during the 2018 UN World Data Forum in Dubai and the OECD Going Digital Summit in March 2019.

There was a striking dichotomy in the panellists' approach to the impact of the digital revolution, as they positioned themselves in either the optimists' or the pessimists' camp. The first group pointed to the undeniable achievement of fast digitalisation: the fact that people have access to more information and data than at any other point in history, the arrival of new tools to tackle financial inclusion, climate change and rapid urbanisation. The positive examples related also to a better exactitude when addressing poverty, improved predictability of social sciences, and better forecasting techniques at the service of science, which can then inform better policies and change them from being reactive to proactive.

The camp of sceptics, on the other hand, pointed to the threats brought about by artificial intelligence and automation, which can lead to dehumanisation, with examples of corporations

intruding deeply into the personal lives of consumers and employees or authoritarian regimes controlling their citizens. The pessimists were also worried about the actual increase in inequalities due to digitalisation, both within and between countries. The most common examples of dangers related to widening gender- and income gaps, but also to the future of work and threats to democracy. Some discussants wondered also about the actual representativeness of big data ("small variance but huge bias").

There were also voices that found the digital revolution being neither a utopia nor dystopia, but a reality to be approached with common sense: by taking advantage of the undeniable opportunities for societies and economies, but at the same time remaining cautious of the threats. In case of the latter, some panellists pointed to a necessity to look at people who design and deploy algorithms – who, where, why, and for whom they do it. Some voices pointed to the need of demystifying the buzz vocabulary of the digital revolution (e.g. big data and algorithms), since some of ideas behind it may be unnecessarily demonised. Multiple discussants highlighted the new role of the statistical community, who should act as quality guardians, helping to provide structural support and to ensure that the new data reflects the reality and priorities of countries. Others pointed to the urging need of addressing the statistical legislation for a better digital governance. There was a common agreement that policymakers have a great role to play in leveraging these technological developments and in mitigating their risks. Finally, it was stressed that international organisations need to work with governments, academia and private sector partners to put technology and information into the hands of the least advantaged to prevent the widening of the digital divide.

V. Panel discussion: Data for the people: What needs to be done?

Moderator: **Marie-José Kolly**, *Data Journalist, Neue Zurcher Zeitung*

Panellists: **Louise Shaxson**, *Senior Research Fellow, Overseas Development Institute;* **Elieza Paul Milonga**, *Country Coordinator, International Statistical Literacy Project;* **Eleanor Carey**, *Technical Manager, Data2X;* **Matias Bianchi**, *Director, Asuntos del Sur;* **Fabrice Murtin**, *Head of Well-being and Housing Conditions Section, OECD Statistics and Data Directorate*

The panel reflected on the opportunities and risks of producing more data through new technologies. The discussion addressed the role of new data sources to leave no one behind and their tendency to create and reinforce existing inequalities.

To start, Eleanor Carey expressed concern over the presence of gender bias in new data sources such as under-representation of women, for example in big data, and ingrained inequalities in algorithms. She emphasised that these biases exist because algorithms are man-made and thus, they reflect societal beliefs. Ms Carey highlighted two broad approaches to the problem:

1. Technical: oversampling, weighted observations, and a combination of traditional and big data sources
2. Political: ethical assessment of the algorithms to correct their conduct

Matías Bianchi agreed that the patterns in algorithms replicate or even worsen structures of inequality. He highlighted that the number of companies involved in artificial intelligence is minimal and they are concentrated in certain regions, which thus allows only a few actors to benefit from the technological revolution. Mr Bianchi recognised the need to promote the active role of citizens, particularly since new technologies can threaten people's privacy rights and can be used for political surveillance.

Fabrice Murtin described the opportunities new data sources provide for measuring complex dimensions of human well-being such as access to education, consumption behaviour, transportation, and others. He also addressed the shortage of global skills related to technical knowledge, but also in terms of co-ordination, emotional capabilities and other skills that are crucial for the positive use of digital technologies. He called for adding training on these topics in the education of future generations and current workers, including those in low-skilled positions.

More specifically, Elieza Paul Milonga discussed the need to promote the use of technology in the daily lives of young people and to raise awareness on how data and statistics are useful in their lives. He emphasised the role of NSOs in helping people understand the impact of statistics and how their data is being used, particularly by providing easy access to information and data. In this regard, he stressed the need to involve news outlets in statistical processes and to invest in statistical literacy in the broader community.

Finally, Louise Shaxson pointed out the importance of building trust in statistics and how this is a personal matter to each individual. She highlighted that quality data should accurately represent reality, respond to peoples' needs and be cost effective. She explained how these three aspects relate to trust because citizens need to see that governments are asking appropriate questions and that the data collected and their interpretations are meaningful.

VI. Closing Remarks
Shaida Badiee, *Managing Director, Open Data Watch*
Johannes Jütting, *Manager, PARIS21*

Shaida Badiee closed the session by reflecting on how the technological revolution is a moment, like others in history, which makes people think fast and react to changes. Ms Badiee summarised the conference in three areas:

- The question marks: everything that it is not known and that mirrors the need for investment in research and evidence-based policy

- What we know: particularly that capacity is not organic and it needs to be fostered through investment at the country level, and by building skills for data science and technologies to avoid forming elitist groups
- Moving forward: getting better data, building trust in NSOs, and improving infrastructure and co-ordination to build partnerships to leave no one behind.

Overall, Ms Badiee recognised a need to balance government and market, commercial and social, and to have multi-stakeholder conversations that include international organisations, donors, and civil society organisations. She concluded by stating that there are challenges ahead but the opportunities of what can be done for leaving no one behind, with more data and an evidence-informed culture, outweigh them.

Echoing these concerns, Mr Jütting emphasised the urgency of discussing data production with all parts of society to look for consensus on grey areas. He highlighted the role of statistics and statistical communities in unveiling who is being left behind, particularly through advocacy for statistics and by examining the role new technologies can play in data collection.