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Dear Enrico,

It is our pleasure to transmit to you a "Joint contribution by the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) on Data Revolution for Sustainable Development".

We hope the Independent Expert Advisory Group will find this a valuable input for their work.

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Prof. Enrico Giovannini
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on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development (IEAG)



16 October 2014

Joint contribution by the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) on Data Revolution for Sustainable Development

The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) comprises 43 international and supranational organizations promoting the inter-agency coordination and cooperation on statistics. The Committee is ready to play a lead role in measuring sustainable development in the context of the post-2015 development agenda. Committee member will therefore continue to contribute to the data revolution by engaging in a dialogue on ways forward and by implementing related actions. In that regard, we would like to state the following:

(1) More efficient use of existing and new, non-traditional sources of data and metadata

The data revolution is about more effectively using existing data sources as well as new data sources in support of development. Existing, traditional data sources (including administrative data) must be used more efficiently. In addition, new, non-traditional sources of data and metadata - including “big data”, proxy data or possibly social and economic models - will have to be leveraged to satisfy the data needs, especially in new development areas. To this end, for traditional and non-traditional data sources in the same way, the innovative and transformative power of ICT must be harnessed: from the data collection (e.g., the use of mobile devices and satellites), through data organizing, processing and data analysis to the dissemination stage (e.g., open data portals and advanced visualization tools, such as geo-location data and the use of maps).

However, we recognize that the existence of data is not sufficient, nor is the availability, which can be hindered by cost, legal, cultural or other barriers. True “empowerment” lies only in the ability to access, understand, analyse and use such information. This implies the importance for people to have media and information literacy competencies. It also shows the need for data to be disseminated via different media, including community and social media.

In this context, we are offering our full cooperation with all stakeholders to improve the suitability and quality of such non-traditional sources (e.g. transparency, accessibility, coverage, representativeness, timeliness, confidentiality)

In this regard, we note that the data revolution holds particular potential for enhancing the availability and use of localized data that is useful for local planning purposes in addition to

progress monitoring. We also expect that the complementary use of non-traditional data to fill existing data gaps will benefit marginalized population groups by providing data on these groups.

(2) Strengthened governance, coordination and partnerships

The increased role of international organizations in global monitoring together with an increased use of non-traditional data and tools requires the strengthening of governance, improved coordination and new partnerships.

At the institutional level, there is a need for strengthened and more transparent governance structures that promote ownership, commitment and accountability of member states and improve coordination of statistical capacity development.

The data revolution also necessitates improved coordination between institutions and to leverage partnership arrangements for optimal use of resources

In particular the use of new, non-traditional data sources, is a welcome opportunity for the statistics community to enhance and widen its engagement with non-official data producers, such as the private sector. The statistics community is ready to embrace the data revolution to manifest its relevance as the primary producer of official statistics. To this end, we welcome the data revolution as an opportunity for national and international statistical institutions to enhance their collaboration with the private sector, to modernize their business operations and to strengthen their capacity.

(3) Fostering the necessary statistical capacity building

We firmly believe that making use of the emerging opportunities of the “data revolution” will pose a large financial burden on both, advanced and less developed statistical systems and should, therefore, result in a revolution in statistical capacity, especially in developing countries. This refers, in particular, to national capacities not only to collect and compile data but also to use, analyse and disseminate it. It includes the need for training the next generation of statisticians and a substantial increase in the mobilization of external and domestic resources. The data revolution, thus, represents a unique opportunity for building statistical capacity and infrastructure in innovative methods and data science skills as well as in traditional methods in many National Statistical Systems.

In this context, we note that in many statistical areas studies of the utility and representativeness of non-traditional data such as “big data” are still at a pilot stage. It is important that resources for exploring the exploitation of non-official data should complement rather than supplant increased investment in traditional sources. We are committed to continue to explore the use of new technologies that can increase the effectiveness and coverage of traditional sources.

4. The role of the international statistical community

We recognize that the global statistical system will continue to play a lead role in the data revolution. Based on this, we strongly believe that the data revolution will strengthen the critical role that international organizations play in the global monitoring of the internationally agreed Sustainable Development Goals.

It is, therefore, crucial to consolidate the current advances and we believe that CCSA is in a unique position to contribute. CCSA and the Meeting of Chief Statisticians of the UN System have already taken a number of steps, for example developing “Recommended Practices on the Use of Non-Official Sources in International Statistics” and committing to develop a UN common data quality framework.

CCSA members are actively engaged in providing technical assistance to national statistical systems and are prepared to employ our unique position to advise the partner-countries on how best to utilize the advantages of the data revolution in the planning and implementing of official statistical programmes. In this regard, CCSA will be able to facilitate the exchange of experiences and best practices of using external data in combination with official data.

We are committed to supporting the data revolution through the following practical actions:

- (i) reaching out to national policy makers to maintain the political momentum and to mobilize domestic resources and political will in order to support the data revolution;
- (ii) reaching out to funding organizations and public and private donors to mobilize the necessary resources at the global level to support national statistical capacity building;
- (iii) realigning our individual agencies’ work to increase the institutional support for the collection, analysis and use of development data, thus improving the availability, quality and disaggregation of data as well as their integrated nature allowing social, environmental and economic issues to be considered together and measured comprehensively;
- (iv) reaching out to relevant non-state actors to build broad public-private partnerships, with business, civil society, academia and other relevant actors, based on existing networks and partnerships; creating opportunities for a diverse group of experts to engage in data collection and analysis including the promotion of wider use of technologies (such as mobile technologies, satellite imagery, crowd-sourcing, software for data visualizations etc.) to monitor and measure changes in the environment and society;
- (v) coordinating statistical capacity-building efforts at country level, for example in the critical areas of institutional building, census taking, supporting household surveys and civil registration programmes, basic economic statistics, environmental-economic accounting systems, etc.;
- (vi) supporting the development and improvement of standards and norms to guarantee interoperability, data and meta data quality and data consistency over time/space for national and global reporting; ensuring that the right balance is struck between security concerns, and the right to privacy and enabling innovation while ensuring that data collection does not violate human rights. Here the role of the United Nations Statistical Commission will be fundamental;

- (vii) sharing key sectoral data among the various international agencies effectively;
- (viii) adopting and promoting an open access to data policy, i.e. to the dissemination of data in ways that makes data and knowledge accessible and useable to all and promotes multi-stakeholder engagement;
- (ix) supporting initiatives to define and harmonize common languages for data exchange, including between the humanitarian and development fields;
- (x) strengthening relevant coordination mechanisms, such as the Inter-agency and Expert Group on MDG indicators, which builds on the existing specialized expertise of the broad UN family and beyond, in order to continue to produce a coherent stream of data at the global level for the purpose of monitoring the new development agenda
- (xi) promoting the use of data on the local, national, regional and global level and by various types of users.