

## Towards **evidence-based** policymaking

If statistics improve and policymakers use them to inform their decisions, the result is better policy design and better outcomes. And enhanced investment in statistics will pay for itself many times over by improving the efficiency of governments and donors in allocating resources and monitoring outcomes.

How then to promote evidence-based policymaking? By increasing the demand for good statistics—and by encouraging more dialogue between the producers of statistics and the users.

### National strategies for the development of statistics

PARIS21 is an international partnership promoting better use of statistics to reduce poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Without baseline data and information on trends, it's tough to put a target-driven development strategy into gear. Yet, with the Goals' time horizon of 2015 rapidly approaching, many countries still do not collect the statistics they need to track progress. In more than 50 countries policymakers don't know how many people are living in poverty, and in 100 countries they don't know whether the number is growing or shrinking.

#### PARIS21 helps developing countries:

- Assess their national statistical systems and prepare national strategies for the development of statistics.
- Integrate statistics into national policy frameworks, such as Poverty Reduction Strategies.
- Set objectives for building the national statistical system.
- Outline current and future data needs, including data for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals.

PARIS21's advocacy, facilitation, and resource mobilisation are making a difference, but more needs to be done to make better statistics available to decisionmakers.



For more details, contact the PARIS21 Secretariat at: [contact@paris21.org](mailto:contact@paris21.org) or visit the website at: [www.paris21.org](http://www.paris21.org).

The U.K. Department for International Development supported the production of this flyer, drawn from Christopher Scott's *Measuring Up to the Measurement Problem*.  
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Better **statistics**  
Better **policies**  
Better **development outcomes**

Better **statistics** lead to better **policies** and better **development outcomes**

More developing country governments and donors are recognising that the better use of better statistics is essential for good policies and good development outcomes.

Better statistics lead to more successful policies. They make it possible to analyse complex social and economic problems in detail, helping policymakers choose the best interventions and monitor their effects.

But in many of the poorest countries, statistics are weak and policymakers seldom use them, leading to poor decisions and poor outcomes.

**PARIS21**  
Partnership in statistics for development in the 21st century



Statistics can confirm what might be suspected—and reveal what has not even been considered.

## Identifying big issues

- **In Uganda** a public expenditure tracking survey showed that funds budgeted for education weren't reaching schools. Making those data widely available to the public increased the share of non-wage funds received by schools from 13% in the early 1990s to 80–90% in 2000.
- **India's population census** results revealed regional discrepancies in the number of women compared with the number of men. In seeking to explain this, further research highlighted the importance of female literacy and women's participation in the labour force in reducing female disadvantage in child survival. It also revealed the importance of good policies—in states that promoted the empowerment of women, survival rates of girls were higher.
- **In Malawi** in 2002 inaccurate official estimates of food production—and a lack of transparency in managing the country's strategic grain reserve—delayed an effective response to famine, leading to thousands of deaths. Government and donors were sceptical when civil society statistics showed a threefold rise in maize prices, but subsequent survey data showing a three-month increase in malnutrition galvanized them into action.



Data to map poverty can show governments where best to target interventions to reduce it.

## Informing the design of policy

- **After Mozambique's devastating floods in 2000** a recent population census helped the government and international agencies allocate aid where it was most needed. Data on the number and location of people in the south were mapped against satellite imagery showing the extent of the flood zone to guide the relief effort. The same system was used in later efforts to eradicate land mines and map poverty.
- **In Tanzania** information on cost-effective health interventions was combined with data on local disease burdens and the distribution of local health expenditures to make health spending more efficient. In one year in two pilot districts, infant mortality declined 28% and under-five mortality declined 14%; neighbouring districts showed no such improvement. Recent data showing four-year declines in under-five mortality of around 45% support the new policies.
- **In Mexico** statistics have been crucial in designing and monitoring the Oportunidades poverty reduction program. Cash transfers go to mothers, not fathers, because statistics show that mothers allocate more money to children's health and education. And girls get larger grants in secondary school, to counter their higher drop-out rate. Evaluation showed the program has a positive impact—leading to its extension to urban areas.



Forecasting can evaluate the long-term success of a policy—or indicate where policies should be focused to prevent future problems.

## Forecasting the future

- **Forecasting indicates whether a short-term measure will be successful in the long term.** In 1996 the external public debt in 40 of the world's poorest countries averaged more than four times their annual export earnings. International donors offered debt relief, hoping to end rescheduling. Statistics on the debt stock, commercial interest reference rates, and macroeconomic indicators show policymakers how likely countries are to sustain post-relief debt burdens over the following 10–20 years.
- **Forecasting a country's ability to sustain its debt** relies on timely, accurate, and consistent macroeconomic statistics in each country's national accounts. The overwhelming majority of debt-burdened countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa, but only eight countries there have developed their national accounts in line with the latest international standards (the UN System of National Accounts). This is the lowest rate in the world, so improving national accounts in Africa is a priority.
- **In the early stages of an epidemic** accurate data on disease prevalence are crucial to forecasting future prevalence. But HIV/AIDS surveillance systems don't cover most of the rural population in southern Africa—where most high-prevalence countries are—although most people there live in rural areas. Instead, they focus primarily on young pregnant women at urban clinics. Insufficient data make it hard to predict the disease's likely spread—and harder still to target interventions effectively.



Careful monitoring shows policymakers when key indicators are going off track and prompts investigations that re-align policy for better results.

## Monitoring policy in action

- **The Uganda Demographic and Health Survey** revealed that infant mortality rates had not changed between 1995 and 2000, despite the country's rapid economic growth and declining poverty. Data showed that declines in immunization coincided with decentralization of the health budget and withdrawal of a program grant. Further analysis prompted a revitalization of the national immunization program, raising diphtheria-pertussis-tetanus coverage of children under the age of one from 48% to 65% in one year.
- **Irregular disclosure of key figures on Mexico's foreign currency reserves** hindered foreign investors' evaluation of the problems facing the exchange rate regime in 1994. That exacerbated problems with the subsequent devaluation of the Mexican peso. To improve such reporting of macroeconomic data, the International Monetary Fund established the Special Data Dissemination Standard. Evidence shows that committing to greater transparency, by subscribing to the standard, lowers developing countries' borrowing costs for sovereign debt.
- **Civic monitoring can also improve government performance.** Citizen Report Cards prepared by the Public Affairs Centre in Bangalore led to a marked increase in citizens' satisfaction with water, electricity, transport, and hospital treatment services over five years in the 1990s. The first report cards showed that only 10.5% of citizens were satisfied. Publication of the numbers inspired agencies to change training and procedures, leading to a fourfold increase in satisfied citizens.

Better Statistics