

Final Record of the Proceedings

Moderator: Dane Rogers, ITAD

1. From 27–29 April 2011, PARIS21 held its Annual Meetings in Paris. A first session of the Board was held on the afternoon of 27 April. The following morning, PARIS21 held a seminar on the use of and access to data, followed by the second session of the Board in the afternoon. Finally, on the morning of 29 April, PARIS21 held a Meeting of Statistical Capacity Development Donors. All documents, presentations, and records from each session are available for download on the PARIS21 website (<http://www.paris21.org/PARIS21annualmeetings2011>).

I. Opening and Introductions

2. The moderator opened the seminar by introducing the five panellists and outlining the structure of the proceedings. Two overarching questions will be asked: (i) what are the key barriers to the use of statistics and (ii) what are data producers doing to address these barriers? Two data users (one from a developing country and one from a donor country) will address the first question and three data producers (one from a developing country and two from donor institutions) will address the second. To set the scene, the moderator highlighted PARIS21's five strategic axes and specified that the seminar would focus on the axis of stimulating demand for data.

II. Key Challenges to Accessing and Using Data

3. Mr. Sékouba Diarra from Mali discussed his country's strategic framework for growth and poverty reduction which has an indicator matrix covering 60 indicators. Data users appreciated the opportunity to participate in annual reviews of the framework but felt weak points in the Mali statistical system included a lack of capacity across the system and a need to analyse, disaggregate, and explain the statistics better.

4. Mr. Rob Swinkels from the Netherlands discussed the difficulties donors faced in finding indicators of real results (or outcomes) in areas like poverty, food security, reproductive health, sanitation, education, and crime. Data on perceptions — in areas like service delivery, safety, and governance — were also becoming increasingly important. These data are important for reporting development results to Dutch taxpayers, but also vital for improving the quality of evidence-based debate in countries. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs wants to use a country's own statistical system to demonstrate progress but often those data are unavailable or not disaggregated by basic socio-demographic variables. The speaker discussed the importance of trying to build bridges between the statisticians (from both the statistics office and beyond, including the private and NGO sector) and users. He urged the Partnership to look for new solutions.

Discussion

5. Discussion from the floor highlighted the importance of making the links between the process and outcome indicators (vital for policy making) and the role of the statistical community. The speaker from the Netherlands agreed and suggested that users in particular needed to be clearer in their thinking around the intervention logic that linked objectives to programmes and to engage statisticians in the discussion. There was a consensus that the statistical community needed to be better engaged in the process of indicator design and selection in key areas and help to manage priorities. The speaker from Mali described how effective the participative process has been in his country: both users and producers need to work together to define monitoring mechanisms and clarify indicators. The representative from the World Bank noted that statisticians do not always have the answers. There was a key role for others, such as civil society, in doing some of this work (the checkmyschool.org in the Philippines was cited as an example). The role of the statistician was sometimes to enable intermediaries to make the links between process and outcomes or spark a public debate. It was also agreed by several countries that it was important for countries themselves (rather than donors) to decide on how best to match demand and supply of data, using mechanisms like user–producer co-ordination committees.

6. Seminar participants then worked in groups to discuss their key lessons around the barriers to access and use of data. The ideas resulting from this group work are available in the annex.

III. Statistical Community's Response to Users' Needs

7. Mr. Yakob Mudesir from the Ethiopian Central Statistical Authority (CSA) highlighted the growing needs expressed by users both in terms of statistical products and their delivery modes. The CSA routinely identifies user needs through the organisation of user–producer workshops and monitoring user feedback. The CSA website was presented as the cornerstone of the agency's dissemination policy: with tools such as ENADA for survey microdata and metadata, Ethioinfo and CountrySTAT for indicators and aggregated data, prices, and GIS databases. Lessons learnt by CSA include the importance of keeping IT infrastructure up-to-date to reach users and the challenges of managing different tools and standards in agencies with limited capacity. The importance of good metadata was emphasised to assist users in finding and understanding data. Dissemination was also recognised as instrumental for data quality improvement in the midterm. Sustainability of these activities is critical, the NSDS being the instrument for anchoring this progress within the national development agenda.

8. Mr. Neil Fantom from the World Bank presented the recent changes in the way his institution makes data accessible to users, in the context of the Open Data Initiative. Open data implies free, accessible, and searchable data. The website was made simpler, and metadata are available in five languages. New applications have been made available. New datasets have been made accessible, like the geo-referencing of Bank-funded projects, or survey microdata. User response has been very positive. Evidence was given that providing free and improved data increases their use. The Bank reaches users through various means, with the data channelled through non-specialised portals (like Google) to reach the non-expert users, and the installation of specialised services (API) for expert users. Providing data to the people who need them in the format they need them costs money but is an investment for better development outcomes.

9. Ms. Francesca Grum from the UN Statistics Division delivered a presentation on UNdata, a internet-based data service launched in 2008 which provides free and easy access to data resources of the UN system through a single entry point. This one-stop shop provides open access to 33 key international databases from 16 specialised agencies, covering 19 statistical areas

(including agriculture, crime, education, employment, energy, environment, health, HIV/AIDS, human development, industry, information and communication technology, national accounts, population, refugees, tourism, trade as well as the Millennium Development Goals indicators). It contains 200 country profiles and more than 60 million records. Through an easy interface, users can search, browse, and download data for their reuse without any restriction or fee. Usage patterns are monitored to assess popular search terms and series and to identify queries with zero results, that usually lead to additions of databases in the system. UNSD is currently implementing a project to also bring into UNdata key development indicators databases from selected developing countries. UNdata is a marketplace for official statistics — a simple and flexible environment where a big volume of authoritative data from a variety of sources can be accessed for free and consumed without restrictions.

Discussion

10. The discussion allowed many participants to comment on the recent development of these databases and to point out some duplication between the World Bank and UNSD initiatives which both offer free access to country data. Other questions were raised on the methodology of the data collection and also the data quality. The representative from Ethiopia insisted on the necessity to promote and disseminate country data where they exist, especially for census data. Representatives from the World Bank and the UNSD underlined the necessity to develop such online databases which offer harmonised data allowing comparisons across countries. The World Bank representative insisted on the fact that the challenge of Web 3.0 will be to offer free access to data (with metadata) as a public good.

11. Seminar participants then worked in groups to discuss their key lessons around how the statistical community should respond to users' needs. The ideas resulting from this group work are available in the annex.

IV. Conclusions & Way Forward

12. The moderator congratulated the participants on the rich, lively discussions over the course of the seminar and encouraged them to keep the dialogue open and frank. He commented that not all that emerges from Pandora's Box is necessarily good but pointed out that these discussions are the first step in addressing those prickly issues.

ANNEX: Results from Group Work

THEME: What are the main lessons concerning access to, and use of, data?

What improves access and use?

- Storytelling: improve media channels.
- Reliable and trustworthy information.
- Clearly defining user needs (what do they really want?)
- Le rôle des médias pour rapprocher les producteurs et les utilisateurs et atténuer les barrières entre eux.
- Increase statistical literacy of users (increase understanding of data and methodology).
- To make our system transparent!
- Good communication between users and producers at planning stages.
- Marketing importance of stats.
- Partner political leadership to drive local capacity and resources. Political demand for data.
- Up-to-date IT system. Reliable website. Qualified staff. Incentives. Feedback from users. Quality of data.
- Inclusivity of design of M&E strategy is key. Transparency / ownership.
- High-level agreement on purpose for data collection.
- If ministries produce their own statistics, put in place statistics-based policy management system.
- Decentralised production but centralised dissemination (via NSOs).
- Using national development plans as a reference point for indicators to promote national ownership and avoid over-burdening countries.
- Improve parliamentary oversight of government spending.
- Adequate priority for statistical work and statistical offices and systems.
- Relevance of statistics to public/political concerns.
- A better articulated demand-driven agenda for statistics through improved communication / coordination between users and producers.
- Leadership both on the side of the users (politicians / civil society) and of the producers.
- It is a necessity to strengthen the capacity of data producers and of users to use statistics.
- Agreement between donors and recipients on priorities within available resources.
- Separating the processes and outcomes.
- Consultations among all stakeholders – needs analysis.
- Clear definitions of outcomes.
- Trained / qualified analysis.
- Trust and openness.
- Technology!!!
- The participatory process in statistical production (from NSDS, national statistical coordination groups).
- Much more and improved dissemination of data to civil society.
- Ownership.
- Improve advocacy to high-level targets (ex: presentation in Parliament – Costa Rica).
- Better use of statisticians. Visual dissemination (storytelling). Data consistency in terms of reliability reasons. Should not be too complicated to understand when disseminating. Be realistic – measurable / effective.

What undermines access and use?

- Misuse of information.
- Too much donor-directed data not aligned to local / national needs.
- Lack of trust in government leading to lack of trust in official statistics.
- Lack of statistical culture.
- Independence from the political pressures and to make statistics as a priority in the government policies.
- Unaligned donor monitoring systems.
- Lack of support to stats staff in sector ministries.
- Inaccessible language of statisticians.
- Lack of clarity from users.
- Too many demands for data : not prioritised = perfection vs. adequacy.
- Lack differentiation between availability of data and accessibility of data.
- M&E itself as driver rather than to meet priority needs (M&E inertia).
- Poor data quality. Unreliable website. Lack of independence (politicking). Lack of incentives. Unreliable staff.
- Lack of sufficient definitions of objectives. Lack of front-end analysis. Disconnect between policy-makers and programming (users). Commitment / capability gap.
- Lack of capability of NSS to produce high-quality data (timeliness, reliability, appropriate level of disaggregation, covering a broad spectrum of sectoral concerns) with metadata.
- Resources constraints faced by data producers, both manpower (qualified) and financial.
- Lack of capacity of users to translate statistics into policies and programmes which makes it difficult for them to “look for” the data that they need.
- Lack of capacity of users to analyse.
- Absence of institutionalised processes for dialogue.
- Independence of statistical offices is good but it can reduce communication with government / politicians / ministries.
- Are the questions / indicators the right ones?
- Data need to reflect developing country priorities or will not be collected.
- Lack of capacity to make data accessible.
- Lack of capacity to understand the data.
- Lack of training in communicating results (Statisticians are not good communicators).
- One-way communication! No feedback from users.
- No adequate relation between the way of communication and the target on the use of statistics.

THEME: What are the main lessons about strengthening user–producer dialogue?

What strengthens effective dialogue?

- Metadata: easily accessible and differentiated.
- Good structure.
- Quick wins. Proving that producers have something useful to offer — to provide an incentive for users to engage.
- Identifying all data users.
- Target different types of users and offer them specific products.
- Ensuring the whole statistical system (producers) coordinates (and communicates).
- More free data (public good). More national consultations (on conflicting data). User-friendly gateways with easy access.
- The more users, the higher values created! (IO's data service seems fine).
- Publish data for various audiences (plain reports, databanks, Gapminder).
- Plain language explanations of how data are produced would reduce confusion and increase trust (metadata, paradata) and foster dialogue.
- Publish both national official statistics and global “official” statistics, Explain how the national data are adjusted.
- Understanding supply and demand from both sides. Trust and credibility. Strong partnership.
- Integrity of national statistics.
- Recognising national stats and international comparative data treatment.
- Ownership of data legitimacy of international data.
- Commitment of both users and producers to push statistics in decision-making.
- Levelling / better management of expectations that recognises constraints of both users and producers.
- Utilise existing systems / mechanisms in countries in strengthening user–producer relationship.
- Openness and understanding of data.
- Easy communication channels.
- Well-designed NSDSs, with good methodology (workshops at each stage...).
- Multiple sources and relevant metadata.

What undermines effective dialogue?

- Unclear priorities.
- Political agendas.
- Language, jargon, transparency.
- Donors with conflicting demands approaching stats offices in an uncoordinated way.
- Sometimes statisticians struggle to communicate with non-statisticians.
- Low status (and credibility) of statisticians in government systems.
- Mistrust of government / official statistics, NSS.
- Lack of appreciation of the importance of statistics by policymakers.
- Exploitation. Misunderstanding. Lack of trust and transparency. Resource constraints.
- Links between country/regional statistical providers and international collators are weak.
- High staff turnover in countries hinders lasting and constructive dialogue.
- Multiple sources and misunderstanding of final aim.
- Not many co-ordinated approaches within international community, thus failing to recognise national development priorities.