

OPEN DATA TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Providing an opportunity to connect key stakeholders from national statistical offices, open data experts, and other partners



The 2016 International Open Data Conference (IODC) and pre-conference sessions took place in Madrid, Spain from October 3rd to 7th. Under the theme “Global Goals, Local Impact,” IODC aimed to build stronger relationships between open data initiatives and establish a dialogue between governments, data journalists, policy makers, private companies, civil society representatives, and activists. We were particularly pleased by the first-ever inclusion of country representatives from national statistical offices in this year’s conference.

Alongside our partners--World Bank, The Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21), and Open Data for Development--Open Data Watch convened several sessions at the IODC connecting the open data community to NSOs. Through our ongoing work, Open Data Watch, with its partners, seeks to foster and strengthen linkages between these two critical actors, to create an open space for shared dialogue, and to better match demand for open data at the government level with current supply of tools at the agency level.

On Wednesday October 5th, the pre-conference workshop “Openness and National Statistical Offices: A review of Available Tools and Methods” took place. This workshop session examined the supply of open data tools and the needs and challenges facing the NSOs at the country level. During this session, government representatives discussed their experiences, challenges, and plans for implementing open data principles, while international agency experts provided information on the innovative tools and approaches they are using to support open data efforts. Each representative – whether from a NSO or agency – shared this information in “flash presentation” format. Everyone then participated in an interactive discussion to consider the identified country needs and the offerings from the agencies.

This outcomes paper provides a short summary of the challenges and needs presented at the workshop, the tools which aim to provide solutions to these challenges, and recaps the closing discussions and pathways forward.

DEMAND SIDE: NSO NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

Country representatives from national statistics agencies from all over the world participated in this session to share current challenges their countries face in implementing open data principles and standards. We thank Markus Nabernegg (Ecuador); Yosr Ahmed Ibrahim (Egypt); Driart Elshani (Kosovo); Maria Onea (Moldova); Mohamed Salimi (Morocco); Noel G. Perez (Philippines); Aboubacar Sedikh Beye (Senegal); Yeama Thompson and Musa Koroma (Sierra Leone); Risenga Maluleke (South Africa); Cholpon Adishova (Kyrgyz Republic); and Ruth Minja (Tanzania) for joining us.

The challenges to countries, as identified during the workshop, can be organized into the following four categories.¹

Technical Challenges

Several country representatives from NSOs cited technical challenges in their ability to implement open data principles within their agencies. Technical challenges include the absence of an automatization process for opening data, conversion to open data formats, identifying data gaps, maintaining standards and quality of the data while protecting anonymity, and creating and managing data portals. The lack of technical infrastructure such as computers, software, or reliable internet is also a common problem which must be solved before other technical issues can be addressed.

Capacity Challenges

Country representatives shared that a lack of both human and financial capacity hinders open data at the country level. Such issues include the lack of staff training and data literacy, adequate salaries for the level of expertise needed, and the financial resources needed to implement new plans.

Legal and Political Challenges

For many, there are political and legal constraints that mean NSOs lack the mandate for open data or to be the main gatekeeper of the data. Outdated statistical acts were cited as a hindrance to embracing new principles. The statistical systems can be very rigid, and for that reason, injecting change within these systems can be difficult. Coordination may not be strong enough; new legislation may be necessary. NSOs need to ensure statistical legislation can support innovation. Alongside these issues, receptivity to new changes within the organization itself and a leadership regime which champions these changes is critical.

Coordination and Planning Challenges

Planning and coordinating the implementation of open data principles is a grand task. NSOs must work to identify data gaps and adapt their data collection and dissemination programs to the SDG framework. NSO representatives cited the lack of strategy documents to guide these processes as a challenge. In addition to the political and legal challenges regarding an NSO mandate cited above, lack of coordination among government ministries and the NSO has been a barrier to sharing and opening data across the wider government.

User Needs

A part from the immediate challenges faced by the government internally, NSOs have difficulty receiving feedback from the data user. User-centered designs are minimal. The digital divide is also of concern.

¹ This list is a comprehensive collection of all the challenges presented at the workshop; not every country experiences every one of these challenges.

NSOs worry about the digital literacy of their citizens and what role they can play in advancing their access to and use of new technologies. For some countries meeting the needs of their users in multiple languages is a further challenge to ensuring no one is left behind.

SUPPLY SIDE: AGENCY TOOLS

The tools that were presented by their host agencies at the session include:

- **Open Data Readiness Assessment (ODRA):** ODRA, a tool created by the World Bank, can help countries conduct an action-oriented assessment of the readiness of a government to evaluate, design, and implement an Open Data initiative. This tool addresses the challenges countries face regarding planning and coordination.
- **DIGICOM:** Created by Eurostat, DIGICOM is one of eight projects from the European Statistics Strategy (ESS) Vision 2020 portfolio that aims to modernize communication and dissemination of European statistics. Working package 3 focuses on open data dissemination. The objective is to facilitate automated access to European aggregate data and to improve access to micro-data. The tool will first look at the linkages between open data and data consumption to inform the development of re-use policies, harmonization of APIs, open data strategies, and the publication of official statistical in data portals.
- **SDG Monitoring and Analysis Program (SDGMAP)** – Produced by Development Gateway, this tool allows the Government of Tanzania, development partners, civil society and the public to follow the country's progress towards 2030 global targets. The tracker incorporates and visualizes key indicators across sectors, pulled from diverse datasets. Users may view national progress by goal; for individual indicators; and disaggregated at the sub-national level.
- **Open Data Inventory (ODIN):** Created by Open Data Watch, ODIN assesses the coverage and openness of data provided by national statistical offices through their principal websites. ODIN can assist countries in finding gaps in data availability and highlight opportunities to increasing their openness.
- **Project EU-US:** A joint initiative by Eurostat and US Department of Commerce, Project EU-US is an open data partnership aimed to harmonize economic data and create a linked open metadata store.
- **Open Data Impact Map:** A project of the Open Data for Development (OD4D) Network and the Center for Open Data Enterprise, the impact map is a public database of organizations that use open government data from around the world. By mapping cases of open data use, the aim is to better identify demand of government datasets.
- **Advanced Data Planning Tool (ADAPT):** Developed by PARIS21, ADAPT is a web-based planning tool developed and supported by PARIS21. It is a consultative tool that brings development stakeholders together defining the measurement context within an indicator framework for monitoring development such as the SDGs and national, sectoral, and sub-national development plans.

In addition, the individual tools presented by agencies, the Global Partnership presented several resources which are of a part of their broader effort to harness the data revolution for sustainable development. These resources include the Data4SDGs toolbox and its Data Roadmaps module and the Digital Marketplace.

- **Data4SDGs Toolbox:** The toolbox is a set of tools, methods and resources developed by Data Champions from around the world to address institutional, policy, technical, resources and capacity issues. It will help countries to address challenges and seize new opportunities in the

collection and use of real-time, dynamic, disaggregated data to achieve and monitor the SDGs and their own sustainable development priorities. One such tool is the Data Roadmaps Module. These roadmaps are country-led initiatives to engage stakeholders and map out the steps a country will take to begin collecting data to monitor the SDGs in their context.

- [The Digital Marketplace](#): The Digital Marketplace is an online platform connecting a wide range of stakeholders in the ecosystem of sustainable development data. It aims to provide solutions to problems within both the demand and supply sides of data. In the digital marketplace, users can connect and find or offer solutions to data challenges. Information on various resources, including useful tools, case studies, technology platforms, reports, and methodologies are also available. The Communities of Practice forum allows users to discuss and collaborate with peers. As a living, online platform, users can also submit feedback to turn their needs into action.

OUTCOMES

The workshop was an important opportunity for national statisticians to share the challenges facing their countries. Through the presentations and discussions, attending agencies within the open data community gained an improved perspective of the difficulties an NSO faces and how their tools can better serve as solutions to these problems. Although the available tools address several crucial needs, particularly in terms of technical and planning challenges, there remains a gap between the needs of the NSOs and the sample of tools presented at this workshop. Implementing open data principles and standards is a complex challenge for NSOs. As the list of needs and challenges provided above shows, these challenges span a range of sectors from social to political and from technical to financial. It is important that NSOs continue to be a part of similar conversations with the open data community to ensure solutions are matched to needs.

But it was not only challenges that were heard. While the workshop provided a platform for challenges to be shared, it also provided the opportunity to solve these problems. Country representatives increased their understanding of available open data tools and capitalized on the opportunity to forge relationships and start conversations with other members of the open data community. During the workshop, the World Bank announced financial support to Sierra Leone to further develop and implement the Data Roadmap, which was produced at the national workshop on Data Roadmaps for Sustainable Development in June. Yeama Thompson expressed immense gratitude for the financial support as financial resources were a major hindrance to meeting the statistical needs of the country.

PATHWAYS FORWARD

National Statistical Systems are at the core of our development data ecosystems. Following their key role as core producers of data for the 48 indicators of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), their role in producing data to measure and track the 229 indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is critical. Beyond the SDGs, official statistics are a fundamental component of the information system of democratic societies. Bringing official statistics and NSOs into the conversation here at the IODC was a success in itself. Sparking the conversation between these two communities is the first step in creating greater coordination and more connection between the supply of open data tools and the needs at the country-level. This conversation will help increase the overlap between official statistics and open data until the two are synonymous. We hope to continue these conversations beyond the IODC, and we expect the UN World Data Forum in South Africa in January will advance the dialog between official statistics and open data.