



National Reporting for the Sustainable Development Goals

**Using open data and interoperability
to maximize impact**

International Open Data Conference,
Buenos Aires, September 27-28, 2018

IODC¹⁸

The International Open Data Conference brings together the diverse members of the global open data community to learn, share, plan, and collaborate on the future of open data. Participants come from the northern and southern hemispheres to define strategies to advance open data both globally and locally. Alongside our partners – the United Nations, World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, International Development Research Centre, PARIS21, and Open Data Watch – Open Data for Development aims to strengthen the links between the open data and official statistics communities, specifically focusing on national reporting for the Sustainable Development Goals.

This brochure describes the opportunities for interoperable and open data solutions to advance progress toward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We invite you to join us and our partners from national statistical offices at the IODC events and pre-events listed here as we explore the challenges and work towards a global, open, and interoperable data ecosystem.



INTRODUCTION

Working with the World Bank, PARIS21, Development Gateway, and Open Data Watch, Open Data for Development (OD4D) convened several sessions on open data and official statistics at the 2016 International Open Data Conference (IODC) in Madrid. It marked the first-ever inclusion of country representatives from national statistical offices (NSOs) at the IODC. The aim was to strengthen links between the open data and official statistics communities; create a space for shared dialogue; and better match demand for open data solutions at the government level with tools and agencies building statistical capacity.

Sparking conversation between these two communities at the 2016 IODC was the first step in strengthening links, improving coordination, and sharing knowledge. Working with the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD), International Development Research Centre, PARIS21, and Open Data Watch, OD4D will bring NSO representatives to Buenos Aires to participate in the conference sessions and pre-events. Building on last year's discussions on how to leverage open data and official statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this year's agenda will expand to focus on the intersection of open data, interoperability, and national reporting and dissemination platforms for the SDGs.

- Strengthen links between the open data, interoperability, and official statistics communities;
- Create a space for shared dialogue, and better match demand for open data solutions at the government level;
- Create a mutual understanding of the interoperability and open data standards and glean feedback on the work being undertaken by the Interoperability Collaborative convened by the UNSD and GPSDD;
- Learn about best practices for reporting on the SDGs from NSOs and countries that are on the front line of this process;
- Link ongoing initiatives at the international level, such as outcomes from the UNSD conference on national platforms for SDG reporting, the ongoing work of the “Friends of the Chair Group on the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics,” and the Collaborative for SDG Interoperability, with those at the national level.

BUILDING ON PREVIOUS INITIATIVES

The data requirements to measure the SDGs are an unprecedented challenge for NSOs and a unique opportunity to mobilize resources and leapfrog in the modernization of national statistical systems. While all UN member states have signed on to the goal of producing quality, accessible, timely, and reliable disaggregated data to measure progress on the SDGs and ensure that no one is left behind, they are moving at an uneven pace. Some countries have made great advances in the compilation and dissemination of indicators and the follow-up to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, while others are still grappling with how to report on their progress. Countries must carefully navigate this new space: balancing capacity constraints, information gaps, privacy concerns, and other institutional challenges with the need to ensure that high-quality and disaggregated data are open and interoperable, so their impact on decision and policy-making is maximized.

In January 2018, the UN Statistics Division organized a meeting of experts from NSOs, international organizations, as well as donors and solution providers to examine how countries can establish and manage national reporting and dissemination platforms for the SDG indicators. The meeting highlighted the need to find solutions for monitoring and reporting and to assist the countries who have yet to implement fully functioning national reporting platforms. Its outcome document, which was submitted to the 49th session of the UN Statistical Commission in March 2018, proposed a set of guidelines for such platforms: principles of clear institutional arrangements, fitness for purpose, sustainability, and interoperability and recommended that national reporting platforms be consistent with open data principles and best practices.

The Collaborative on SDG Data Interoperability, co-convened by the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data and the UN Statistics Division, is exploring new solutions to interoperability challenges and developing hands-on recommendations and guidance to improve SDG data interoperability. The collaborative is working within and across organizational and national boundaries, with the shared vision of a global data ecosystem in which multiple sources of sustainable development data can be easily accessed and integrated in applications that enable improved analysis, decision-making, and accountability.

Whoever the end audience is for the data, making data **open and interoperable** is critical to increasing the **impact** of data.

NATIONAL REPORTING FOR THE SDGS

The UN SDGs, adopted in 2015, are a historic commitment to take on the world's most pressing development challenges. National governments are now developing plans to address their countries' own priorities in the context of this major global effort and are beginning to assess and report on their progress. SDG reporting, the publishing and disseminating of data and statistics on the SDG indicators for key stakeholders, is most commonly done through national reporting platforms. According to the UNECE's Task Force on National Reporting Platforms, twenty-three countries have SDG reporting platforms online.¹

SDG reporting requires significant coordination across government ministries and departments. Typically, one government body serves as the policy focal point, while another, usually the NSO, serves as a data collection and coordination lead. In some cases, one office may serve both roles in SDG reporting. The exact institutional arrangement varies from country to country. The data hosted on these platforms can be reported to international agencies and viewed by other stakeholders to track countries' progress towards the SDGs and to make adjustments if needed. The data can also be accessed by citizens who are interested in their country's progress on the SDGs. Whoever the end audience is, making the data open and interoperable is critical to increasing the impact of the data.

¹ UNECE Task Force on National Reporting. Available at: <https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/Task+Force+on+National+Reporting+Platforms>

OPEN DATA

Open data, according to the open definition is: content that can be freely used, modified, and shared by anyone for any purpose.² In practical terms, open data should be machine readable, in non-proprietary formats, accompanied by descriptive metadata and export options that allow for customization and bulk download. It should also be free to be used and reused for any purpose without limitations other than acknowledgement of the original source.

The Open Data Inventory (ODIN) incorporates the open definition in its assessments of the openness and coverage of official statistics. The ODIN methodology, which is available for countries to use for self-assessment, is based on five elements of openness: (1) machine readability; (2) use of non-proprietary format; (3) availability of multiple download options; (4) availability of “metadata” providing sufficient context to understand the data; and (5) free/unrestricted terms of use.

Open data is advancing at the international level. Discussions at the 49th United Nations Statistics Commission resulted in the designation of a subgroup to recommend changes to incorporate open data concepts in the Fundamental Principles of Statistics. The outcome report³ details work on open data for the SDGs thus far and shares the outcomes of the international seminar on open data for the SDGs, held in the Republic of Korea in September 2017. The report also includes a review of country initiatives on open data platforms and highlights recommendations on open data principles for national statistical offices.

Making data open facilitates greater information-sharing and increases transparency, accountability, and citizen participation.⁴ These benefits of openness are particularly relevant to the SDGs, as open data provides public insight into a country’s progress in a way that allows a variety of stakeholders to contribute data, expertise, and resources. But openness is only one step towards maximizing impact. Even data that are open may be difficult to join up and work with across different platforms and that is where data interoperability comes in.

2 Open Knowledge Foundation, n.d., Open Data Definition. Available at: <https://opendefinition.org>

3 United Nations Statistics Division, Open data Report of the Secretary-General. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/49th-session/documents/2018-6-OpenData-E.pdf>

4 World Bank Group, 2015, Open Data for Sustainable Development. Available at: <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/999161440616941994/Open-Data-for-Sustainable-Development.pdf>

INTEROPERABILITY

Being able to join-up data across systems and organizations, and ensuring the people working in different fields have a common understanding of the structure and content of data for development, is an enormous challenge, but one that is central to efforts to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda. Data interoperability, put simply, is the ability to easily join-up and utilize multiple data assets without losing their meaning. In essence, interoperability is a characteristic of good quality data.

Interoperability requires adequate institutional and governance frameworks for producing and sharing high-quality data from authoritative sources; the adoption of common standards and vocabularies for structuring, classifying, describing, and disseminating information; and the use of modern web-based technologies to enable decision makers to find, link, and integrate data assets from different sources.

For instance, sharing data and information across the professions and sectors of the sustainable development field necessitates that professionals working in the field have a common understanding of what particular technical terms mean in different contexts. Government ministries, departments and agencies, national statistical offices, intergovernmental organisations, including United Nations agencies, non-governmental organisations, and other communities all have to be able to interpret and share information in the context of their own values, needs, and priorities. This often requires coordination, organisational oversight, and accountability to drive through changes to long-held institutional behaviours. Similarly, as the fields of statistics and data science edge closer together, statisticians are having to learn new ways of structuring and integrating data from non-traditional sources — such as satellites, mobile phones, and social media — and leverage new technologies to disseminate their knowledge products to different communities of users.

New technologies can make the work of joining up, finding, and linking data much easier. Taking advantage of new technologies is important because the amount of data that are created and needs to be analyzed is constantly rising. Tools such as open APIs and JSON-statcan be used to join and update new datasets as they become available. Further, standardized interfaces and bulk downloading options can make it easier for users to find data on websites. Even these tools and solutions, however, bring challenges in implementation due to different architectures, incomplete documentation, and capacity issues. Care should be taken to plan for behavior change, the creation of new processes, and increasing capacity to implement these solutions.

WORKING TOGETHER TO REALIZE THE BENEFITS OF OPEN DATA AND INTEROPERABILITY FOR THE SDGS

NSOs have a unique role as leaders within governments to coordinate and release open data as well as monitor and report on the progress towards the SDGs. As countries embark on or continue their reporting efforts for the SDGs, it is critical to ensure open data and interoperability are featured prominently within the creation, implementation, and execution of the platforms.

Bringing official statistics and NSOs into the conversation around open data and interoperability is a positive step. However, there are many more opportunities to harness the potential of open data and interoperability for the data revolution. OD4D and its partners are working closely to leverage those opportunities while addressing questions such as:

- How can countries align national priorities with international agendas? What are the best practices for alignment and reducing the reporting burden?
- How can countries leverage partnerships and resources to make their SDG reporting programs sustainable?
- What are the barriers that countries face in monitoring use of data portals? How do they account for user demand in shaping data policies and practices?
- What is needed at the national level to build capacity to implement open data and interoperability practices?
- What are the main challenges facing national statistical systems to report on the SDGs and implement standards in open data and interoperability?

It is critical to ensure **open data and interoperability** are featured prominently within the creation, implementation, and execution of the **platforms**.

JOIN US AT THESE IODC SESSIONS

Several sessions, aiming to strengthen the links between open data and official statistics community, will take place throughout the IODC. Hosted by a range of partners, the sessions will tackle issues such as global commitments, national reporting for the SDGs, and interoperability.

Tuesday, September 25th, 2PM-6PM

Open Data Charter - #ODCRefresh Workshop

Palacio Parque Lezama, Avenida Martín García 346, C1165ABP CABA

Following a global consultation process and subsequent analysis of all the feedback received from open data communities, ODC is hosting this workshop together with the Open Data Institute and the Buenos Aires City's government to engage the open data community on the recommendations and suggestions provided by the three expert groups tasked with analyzing all the feedback received from the review process. The purpose of the workshop is to gather inputs from the open data community of practitioners and implementers on the proposed changes to the Open Data Charter Principles, before the updated Charter is officially launched later in the year.

Wednesday, September 26th 9AM-12PM

National Reporting for the SDGs: Addressing interoperability and open data with NSOs

Facultad de Derecho, Salón Verde, Av. Pres. Figueroa Alcorta 2263, C1425CKB CABA

This pre-event — co-hosted by the UN Statistics Division, World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, Open Data for Development, Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, and Open Data Watch — will bring together relevant stakeholders, including the representatives from the ten sponsored national statistical offices, to discuss how to ensure national reporting platforms for the SDGs integrate the principles of open data and interoperability.

Thursday, September 27th, 12PM-1PM

Strengthening Global Commitments to Open Data

Usina del Arte, Room A, Av. Don Pedro de Mendoza 600, C1156ACS CABA

Bringing together key stakeholders from international agencies and national statistical offices, this session will take stock of the global commitments to open data and investigate the extent to which international initiatives have been supportive of the expansion of open data. Key questions for the session include: How have such initiatives provided strategic direction and encouragement to the open data movement? What else is needed to harness and strengthen international support and commitments to open data? This session will bring together diverse perspectives from the panelists before opening up the floor for a discussion with the audience.

Friday, September 28th, 11AM-12PM

Putting Open Data Measurement to Use

Usina del Arte, Room 2, Av. Don Pedro de Mendoza 600, C1156ACS CABA

The co-existence of open data measurement tools prompts many questions. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each tool? What are the implications of their coexistence? Is it beneficial that multiple measurements exist? Do they contribute to the advancement of open data practices? And, based on these insights, what steps could be taken to alter the measurement landscape? This session will first explore the strengths and limitations of different measurement tools as well as their audiences. Based on these insights, the session will discuss methodological possibilities to more strongly align these tools.

Friday, September 28th 12PM-1PM

National Reporting for SDGs: Open Data Priority Actions

Usina del Arte, Room E, Av. Don Pedro de Mendoza 600, C1156ACS CABA

This Action Track session will bring together national statistical offices, open data experts, and donor representatives to discuss the main priority areas for implementing open data standards in national reporting initiatives for the SDGs. Selected based on the UNSD National Reporting Workshop in January 2018 and previous discussions with NSOs, four priority areas will be presented by the appropriate stakeholders with expertise in the area: governance; user-centric strategy; statistical capacity and literacy; and funding and resources. Session panelists will present the current problems and follow the problem-oriented discussion with a description of action items or solutions.



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