

# Catalyzing the Use of Official Statistics for Sustainable Development

A joint project by AidData, PARIS21, and Open Data Watch

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To close the gap between the production of official statistics and their dissemination and use, development partners and funders need a better understanding of the barriers that national statistical offices (NSO) face in disseminating data and increasing their use. To assist the modernization of statistical systems, it is equally important to analyze usage statistics from national data portals and NSO websites. Open Data Watch (ODW), AidData, and PARIS21 have collaborated to address these needs in an exciting two-part research study, with financial support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

In the first part of the project, ODW and AidData fielded short surveys of senior and mid-level officials in NSOs and five ministries in 140 low- and middle-income countries. In the second part, ODW and PARIS21 collected and analyzed web traffic data from the data portals of seven cooperating NSOs. The insights from these studies provide producer (NSO) and user (government ministries) perspectives on barriers to data use that should inform future capacity-building initiatives to improve dissemination and monitoring of official statistics. The recently launched report *Counting on Statistics: How can national statistical offices and donors increase use?* presents the findings from the surveys and recommendations for both NSOs and donors to increase use of official statistics and be more responsive to the needs of one domestic user group: government ministries. The soon-to-launch report *Measuring Data Use* will present an analysis of data portal web traffic, which provides an example for analyzing web traffic on NSO websites and data portals, along with recommendations for improving the collection of these data.

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## Understanding Data Use: The Snap Polls

The snap poll sent to NSO officials asked them to identify the most important and frequent users of their data and to describe their practices for monitoring official statistics, dissemination of the data they produce, improvements to spur uptake of their data, and actions for NSOs to make necessary improvements. A second snap poll with similar questions was sent to officials in five ministries to assess whether NSOs' strategies and perceptions were aligned with the needs and preferences of their government users. Together, these two perspectives can inform future efforts of NSOs, development partners, and funders to bolster the use of official statistics.

## Measuring Data Use: The Data Portals

Most NSOs maintain websites or data portals to provide access to official statistics for measuring and tracking development progress. Analyzing user activity on these websites using Google Analytics can inform NSOs about who accesses their website and what their needs are. Although NSO managers identify web analytics as the most important way of monitoring their data dissemination programs, the study found that most participating websites were not configured to make optimal use of the available web analytics data. This study analyzed web traffic data from seven countries, providing example analysis and recommendations that can be applied to any context.

## Combined Insights for a Holistic Understanding

Together the two parts of this project offer a holistic understanding of the barriers to the access and use of official statistics and what NSOs can do to overcome them. This project is timely as governments and their development partners have recognized the need for pooled financing mechanisms rather than ad hoc, bilateral investments in discrete datasets. The Cape Town Global Action Plan calls for greater coordination and cooperation between those who produce, fund, and use official statistics. Our findings shed light on how domestic and international actors can provide financial or technical assistance to NSOs in a way that builds capacity, increases the supply of official statistics, and bolsters the likelihood that this information will be used effectively by domestic stakeholders.

To access the *Counting on Statistics* report visit:  
<https://aiddata.org/publications/counting-on-statistics>

To access the *Measuring Data Use* report visit:  
<https://opendatawatch.com/publications/measuring-data-use>  
(coming soon at this link)

