Towards A Strategy for the Data Revolution:
Outcomes from the July 11 – 12 Experts’ Workshop

We are in the midst of a data revolution. Technological innovation has led to a massive increase in the availability and use of data. But there is no guarantee that this will lead to improved development outcomes without a concerted effort to invest in the production, disclosure and use of high quality data.

An unprecedented interest in data for development presents a huge opportunity to improve the quality, availability and usefulness of information shaping the well-being of people, but there is an urgent need for new official data to monitor the implementation of new development goals after 2015 but it goes beyond that –new reliable, regular data, provide governments the capacity to design better policies and programs. Data accessible to the public could catalyze effective action at many levels.

To take advantage of this interest, experts from international and bilateral development agencies, civil society, governments, and academia met to chart a course towards solving existing problems and ensuring that the data revolution is beneficial to development outcomes. This note describes the outcomes from the workshop that provides the foundation for action over the next two years.

What is the data revolution?

A Data Revolution for development requires a leap forward in the quality and availability of information that is useful for – and used for – decision making at all levels. It must combine both evolution and revolution.

- **Towards more and better data:** The revolution requires major improvements in the number, quality and reach of traditional statistical systems, such as censuses, civil registration and vital statistics, administrative data from government run programs such as social protection schemes, and household surveys, as well as the generation and use of data from new innovative sources (e.g. consumer transactions, satellite imagery, patterns of social networking).

- **Data that is used for action and accountability:** A partnership that draws on the best assets of public and private sectors would engender a change in the collective understanding of the value of data, its disclosure to the public in useable formats, and the importance of ethical data capture and use. It could transform the enabling environment for using the best available data for sound decisions, and accountability for those decisions, ultimately improving social and economic outcomes globally.

Principles for sustained improvements and to maximize value of development data

- **Maximize value from the data produced:** Data that is collected needs to be the most relevant for decision making and available in a format that can be easily used for multiple purposes; it should be open, disaggregated and interoperable. Governments, civil society, and the private sector need technical capacity and the means necessary to use data for planning, measurement and accountability.

- **Continuously improve data production and use:** Continual improvement requires strengthening the capacity of traditional actors and welcoming new partners, including the private sectors and citizens/non-profit organizations. Feedback loops between these actors
are necessary to ensure the right data is produced at the right time for course corrections and decision making. Distorted incentives that hinder quality, coverage or relevance of data production should be minimized. A new generation of leaders in data production, analysis, visualization and use should be fostered.

- **Ensure improvements are sustained:** Predictable resources from governments and international institutions are required and should be used to support country systems, to produce data that can make a difference at the national and local level – while also monitoring international commitments. Funds should be invested in new cost-effective ways to produce the essential data countries need to make basic development decisions, and people need to hold governments accountable.

- **Balancing technological innovations with institutional change:** A technology revolution alone will not be sufficient to produce more timely data for effective policy use. Changing institutional structures and mind-sets of decision makers to take account of new kinds of information will be critical. Concerns regarding ethics and privacy should be addressed: the data revolution should not be a new extractive industry.

**What binding constraints need to be overcome?**

- **Inadequate capacity to produce, use and interpret data:**
  - In many low-income countries, the demand for statistics has originated from the international development community.
  - Limited capacity for analysis and use has tended to undervalue the importance of statistics, and led to a lack of domestic resources for statistical programs. Similar constraints are faced by governments opening up other sources of data.
  - The net effect on statistical producers has been inadequate budgets and problems in attracting and retaining qualified staff. Universities and professional training centres are also finding it increasingly difficult to maintain and expand training programmes.

- **Lack of political leadership to invest in and use statistics:**
  - A lack of stable funding for national statistical systems, minimal checks and balances to ensure that the data are accurate and timely, and the lack of autonomy of national statistical offices are not only a cause of poor quality data, but a signal that independent and reliable data is not valued by political leaders.

- **Failure to make the case:**
  - Increased demand for tracking and accountability for results has led donors to increase investments in monitoring and evaluation for individual projects, rather than investments in data and statistics as a public good.
  - Evidence for the intrinsic value of statistics for economic and social development is lacking. There is a need to make the case for why statistics and data is an investment worth prioritizing over other interventions.

- **Not turning data into information for policy making & action:**
  - Many of the incentives, created by donors and statistical agencies have been towards data collection, rather than improving domestic capacity for analysis and use.
  - This has often been at the expense of developing analytical products and tools that substantiate the investments in data systems by informing policy decisions and helping the public in conducting day to day decisions.

- **Lack of harmonization of methods and standards**
Coordination within the international statistical system remains limited, both in terms of international data programs and the provision of technical assistance and the development of standards and recommendations.

Too much data collection is driven by the needs and interests of external agencies, is not done in a way that different sources can be combined to give a bigger picture (e.g. the different household survey instruments),

Data collection is focused on particular sectors or regions, not giving policy makers the full range of information on which to act.

Efforts to link new mechanisms for collecting data through technology with official statistics are in a nascent stage.

The agenda for action

The expert group agreed the following deliverables are necessary (under 5 themes) and will work towards making them a reality in the next two years. The participation and engagement in partner country governments, agencies, academia, and think tanks is an essential ingredient for effective implementation:

Accelerating progress on basic activities at the national level

- Support Governments in x countries to include in Open Data Portals:
  - Documentation of data sets, particularly administrative data
  - Geo-reference existing survey and admin data, mapping key indicators and services at relevant political levels
  - Create inter-operable existing data sources and deploy analytical techniques such as small area estimation to produce estimates of marginalized or uncounted groups.
- Modernize the NSDS
  - Modularize and sequence NSDS prep and implementation
  - Reform legal frameworks where necessary
  - Create opportunities for non-governmental and media tracking and feedback on progress
- Empower new initiatives or collaboratives to deal with the thorny problems:
  - Rebasing GDP - “if you commit to a rebase, you get xyz”
  - Create a forum for CSOs to validate official statistics.

Innovation

- A scoping document (published at the Global Open Data Conference in Mexico in December 2014) which would:
  - define innovation types and take stock of existing innovations.
  - be used to convene business, NGOs and governments to discuss the integration of official statistics and these innovative approaches with a view to launching new initiatives at the World Forum on Development Data.
- Expand networks and collaborations to unleash the full potential of data and digital assets held by the private and public sectors. Here, developing the incentives to sustain these collaborations will be key.

New partnerships and financing

- A financing facility would utilize a range of financial mechanisms (lending, grants, private sector funds, etc).
A competitive application process that leads to some financial incentive could create quality, multi-stakeholder proposals.

The type of financing would vary based on proposed approach and incentivize the commitments of domestic resources,

It should be available to more than just country governments, but include citizens, civil society, and private sector.

Funding would, at first support, three streams – core/basic data, innovation, and open data/accountability.

- An Innovation Lab would foster and facilitate innovative approaches and investment in development data.
  - This could include a challenge fund or grants around a defined problem set.

**Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals**

- Influence the global panel of data experts convened by the UN Secretary General to inform his Synthesis Report and ensure the views of regional commissions are included
  - Draft a set of 2-page concept notes on specific issues to be developed to inform the UNSG's high level group.
  - Ensure that key elements of disaggregation of indicators, and investment in statistics and tracked indicators (input from stats community) remain in the SDG political outcome document.

- Influence the UN Financing For Development conference to secure adequate funding from tracking the SDGs.
  - Develop a baseline, involving external stakeholders, including civil society organisations, as well as the UN Statistical Commission
  - Conduct costing exercise which maps required funding for investment in official statistical capacity.

**Political Strategy**

- Convene the inaugural World Forum on Development Data on World Population Day (11th July 2015). This would:
  - Secure a ‘data compact’ with commitments from business, NGOs and governments with a clear accountability framework. This would:
    - Secure commitments to an open source data manifesto which seeks to establish global norms on the ethics, ownership and use of data in government, business and civil society with accompanying commitments from businesses and donors.
    - Build on National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS): the main vehicle for prioritising data according to national needs, and to coordinating donor support.
    - Secure Presidential level commitment to “good data”, political leadership around national level action plans on mutually agreed (modularized) goals on what progress towards good data looks like
    - Secure commitments to flexible, long-term funding to NSS against progress on mutually agreed goals in the form of challenge grants, requiring counterpart funding from governments –
      - Secure funding of quality standards, core infrastructure, processes, i.e. sampling frame.
• Create a CSO window for data analysis and use to influence debate and policy (developing “intermediaries” to make data digestible).
• Include commitments to a payment by results approach
  o Create an annual event to track commitments and channel energy/attention around particular problems.

**Next steps:**
Workshop participants will continue to refine and circulate specifics with a view developing key messages and will establish working groups that seek to deliver on agreed concrete actions. The group will also develop ways to ensure actions developed under the five themes are, to the extent possible, mutually reinforcing to ensure the collective effort is greater than the sum of its parts.
## Timeline:

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<th>Partnerships</th>
<th>2014 (Q4)</th>
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<td>Embed partnership into UNSG’s Synthesis Report</td>
<td>Davos launch of partnership idea</td>
<td>Embed partnership in UN Financing for Development outcome</td>
<td>Launch global partnership on development data in NY</td>
<td>First Annual World Forum on Development Data</td>
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<th>Political Visibility</th>
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<td>Convene data revolution advocacy group; Launch a Data manifesto on the ethics and norms of data collection and use at UNGA.</td>
<td>High level Action Forcing Moment on World Population Day (11th July 2015)</td>
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