



DATA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A Statement for World Statistics Day 20/10/2015

In September, at the United Nations General Assembly, heads of states and governments came together to launch a new and ambitious agenda for world development from 2016 to 2030. The Sustainable Development Goals set out 17 goals with 169 targets and more than 300 indicators to monitor progress. In the lead up to the launch of the goals, a report by a High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons set up by the UN Secretary General to advise on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, recognised that for too long development efforts have been hampered by a lack of the most basic data about the social and economic circumstances in which people live.

If the world is to live up to the promises made by our leaders then more and better data will be essential. To abolish poverty everywhere, in all its forms, the world will need to ensure that everyone is counted, that progress is being monitored and that this information is made available in an accessible and useable form as widely as possible. This will require a true data revolution, one that makes use of the possibilities provided by new technology, but also one that keeps the information about individuals confidential and which provides information that is trusted and credible.

The signatories to this statement support the call for a data revolution and recognise the importance of data for policy making and for accountability in all countries of the world. The challenges of the new development agenda require new approaches including a much greater emphasis on open data and the use of new data sources. We have to take advantage of the opportunities provided by new technology and big data and national statistical systems are central to this effort. These systems – set up and financed by governments to collect, process and disseminate the information needed to manage government activities – are crucial. They operate within a framework of legislation and ethical principles that promote objectivity, independence, confidentiality and accountability. These principles are likely to be even more important in the next 15 years than they have been in the past.

Considerable progress has been made throughout the world in building and strengthening the capacity of national statistical systems since the launch of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, but much still remains to be done. Too many countries operate under severe financial and human resource constraints. To meet the data challenges of the sustainable development goals, national statistical systems must be properly financed, the development of statistical skills and expertise must be supported, and access to new tools and technology must be provided. Also, support must be provided not just to the collection of data, but to its transformation into useful and actionable information. Above all a true data revolution that puts useful and useable information into the hands of everyone who needs it, especially the poor and the marginalised, must be pursued.

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