EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mobilising the data revolution for sustainable development

Data are the lifeblood of decision-making and the raw material for accountability. Without high-quality data providing the right information on the right things at the right time; designing, monitoring and evaluating effective policies becomes almost impossible.

New technologies are leading to an exponential increase in the volume and types of data available, creating unprecedented possibilities for informing and transforming society and protecting the environment. Governments, companies, researchers and citizen groups are in a ferment of experimentation, innovation and adaptation to the new world of data, a world in which data are bigger, faster and more detailed than ever before. This is the data revolution.

Some are already living in this new world. But too many people, organisations and governments are excluded because of lack of resources, knowledge, capacity or opportunity. There are huge and growing inequalities in access to data and information and in the ability to use it.

Data needs improving. Despite considerable progress in recent years, whole groups of people are not being counted and important aspects of people's lives and environmental conditions are still not measured. For people, this can lead to the denial of basic rights, and for the planet, to continued environmental degradation. Too often, existing data remain unused because they are released too late or not at all, not well-documented and harmonized, or not available at the level of detail needed for decision-making.

As the world embarks on an ambitious project to meet new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is an urgent need to mobilise the data revolution for all people an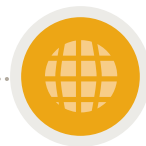d the whole planet in order to monitor progress, hold governments accountable and foster sustainable development. More diverse, integrated, timely and trustworthy information can lead to better decision-making and real-time citizen feedback. This in turn enables individuals, public and private institutions, and companies to make choices that are good for them and for the world they live in.

This report sets out the main opportunities and risks presented by the data revolution for sustainable development. Seizing these opportunities and mitigating these risks requires active choices, especially by governments and international institutions. Without immediate action, gaps between developed and developing countries, between information-rich and information-poor people, and between the private and public sectors will widen, and risks of harm and abuses of human rights will grow.

An urgent call for action: key recommendations

The strong leadership of the United Nations (UN) is vital for the success of this process. The Independent Expert Advisory Group (IEAG), established in August 2014, offers the UN Secretary-General several key recommendations for actions to be taken in the near future, summarised below:

1. **Develop a global consensus on principles and standards:** The disparate worlds of public, private and civil society data and statistics providers need to be urgently brought

together to build trust and confidence among data users. We propose that the UN establish a process whereby key stakeholders create a "Global Consensus on Data", to adopt principles concerning legal, technical, privacy, geospatial and statistical standards which, among other things, will facilitate openness and information exchange and promote and protect human rights.

2. Share technology and innovations for the common good:
To create mechanisms through which technology and innovation can be shared and used for the common good, we propose to create a global "Network of Data Innovation Networks", to bring together the organisations and experts in the field. This would: contribute to the adoption of best practices for improving the monitoring of SDGs, identify areas where common data-related infrastructures could address capacity problems and improve efficiency, encourage collaborations, identify critical research gaps and create incentives to innovate.

3. New resources for capacity development:
Improving data is a development agenda in its own right, and can improve the targeting of existing resources and spur new economic opportunities. Existing gaps can only be overcome through new investments and the strengthening of capacities. A new funding stream to support the data revolution for sustainable development should be endorsed at the "Third International Conference on Financing for Development", in Addis Ababa in July 2015. An assessment will be needed of the scale of investments, capacity development and technology transfer that is required, especially for low income countries; and proposals developed for mechanisms to leverage the creativity and resources of the private sector. Funding will also

be needed to implement an education program aimed at improving people's, infomediaries' and public servants' capacity and data literacy to break down barriers between people and data.

4. Leadership for coordination and mobilisation:
A UN-led "Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data" is proposed, to mobilise and coordinate the actions and institutions required to make the data revolution serve sustainable development, promoting several initiatives, such as:

- A "World Forum on Sustainable Development Data" to bring together the whole data ecosystem to share ideas and experiences for data improvements, innovation, advocacy and technology transfer. The first Forum should take place at the end of 2015, once the SDGs are agreed;

- A "Global Users Forum for Data for SDGs", to ensure feedback loops between data producers and users, help the international community to set priorities and assess results;

- Brokering key global public-private partnerships for data sharing.

5. Exploit some quick wins on SDG data:
Establishing a "SDGs data lab" to support the development of a first wave of SDG indicators, developing an SDG analysis and visualisation platform using the most advanced tools and features for exploring data, and building a dashboard from diverse data sources on "the state of the world".

Never again should it be possible to say "we didn't know". No one should be invisible. This is the world we want – a world that counts.

For more information on the composition, terms of reference and work of the IEAG, see www.undatarevolution.org