

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Secretary General’s Independent Expert Advisory Group on “Data Revolution for Development”

Background

1. The Secretary-General’s High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development agenda called for a *data revolution* in support of sustainable development. Since then, the political momentum around the need for better data to support the development agenda has grown steadily, fueled by a vibrant and wide-ranging public debate on potential benefits and strategic priorities.
2. Data are a fundamental requirement for governments, international agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector to make evidence-based decisions. They are also a critical driver of accountability, as they allow the monitoring of the delivery of results, and are a powerful enabler of innovation for social impact. In the context of the post-2015 development agenda, it is anticipated that a sustainable flow of high-quality, timely, authoritative, and accessible data will be needed for ongoing measurement of progress towards the new goals and targets at both the national and the global level. To generate this flow, a data revolution – a transformation of how data is produced and used to drive development- will be critical.
3. It is widely understood that the broad theme of ‘data revolution’ refers to a number of specific, necessary, transformative actions needed to respond to the demands of a complex development agenda. The data revolution of necessity implies a considerable, concerted and sustained investment in national statistical capacity, both technical and institutional, to increase the coverage, quality, and frequency of data. National Statistical Systems must be in the driver’s seat for national, regional and global monitoring, supported by the latest innovations in the use of ICTs for collection, analysis, and sharing of statistical data. Another facet of the data revolution is data liberation: with the open data movement now well underway, the social value of making data available and accessible is now widely recognized, and a considerable body of best practices supported by case studies is now available.
4. At the same time, is it now widely recognized that revolutionizing development practice will require leveraging new, non-traditional -- and primarily digital -- data sources to satisfy the data needs in new development areas and for timely and detailed and disaggregated data on gender, geography, income, and disability, etc. to address inequalities. Indeed, in a very real sense a data revolution is already underway: as people buy and sell goods, search for information online, and share their experiences on social networks, they produce vast quantities of digital information, in real time. Sensors, too, from satellites to the myriad connected devices of the “Internet of Things”, are likewise contributing to what has come to be called “big data.” Once adequately

anonymized to protect privacy, big data represent an untapped natural resource with potential to support enhanced decision making in a post-2015 world.

5. Member States are currently discussing many of these issues in ongoing formal processes. The UN Statistical Commission has taken the lead in discussing various aspects of the data revolution relevant to official statistics, such as capacity development, modernization of statistical systems, big data, open data and development of new indicators. In this context it is also relevant that the General Assembly has recently adopted, in January 2014, a resolution on the “Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics”. Within the UN System, the Secretary-General’s Global Pulse initiative has played a key role in driving innovation around privacy-protecting applications of big data to challenges in public health, food security, poverty and disaster response. Moreover, around the world, efforts to develop the methodologies, technology tools, policies and practices required to safely and responsibly harness big data for development are intensifying, especially within multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, the private sector and certain government agencies.

6. Therefore there is a need to: (i) support the ongoing intergovernmental deliberations related to data revolution, building on them and adding value; (ii) assert UN leadership by effectively connecting the ongoing streams of activities under the heading of ‘data revolution’; and (iii) maintain the high visibility of the issue of the importance of good data, in order to ensure that sufficient resources are mobilized and effectively used, both at the national and the global level, to drive change.

Scope of work and key objectives

7. Building on the leadership and recommendations of the High-level Panel and the Secretary-General’s report *A Life of Dignity for All*, and in fulfilment of the mandate of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) at its Spring 2014 Session, with a view to providing political visibility to the issue and informing the post-2015 process, the Secretary-General has established an Independent Expert Advisory Group (IEAG) entitled “Data Revolution for Development.” The IEAG will craft a strategic framework and advise the Secretary-General on what the “data revolution for development” would mean in practice, how it can be funded and what institutional and governance implications it would possibly entail. Specifically, the IEAG will suggest measures to close the data gaps and strengthen national statistical capacities. In addition, the Group would assess the new opportunities linked to innovation, technical progress and the surge of new public and private data providers to support and complement the conventional national countries statistical systems to support the sustainable development agenda as well as to strengthen accountability at the global, regional and national level.

8. The IEAG will be requested to provide a report by 31 October 2014, in order to inform the Secretary-General’s Synthesis Report on Post-2015, expected later in 2014.

This study will provide recommendations on:

- a) a definition of *data revolution* and illustration of what data revolution would concretely mean at the national, regional and international level;

- b) the status of all ongoing initiatives on the *data revolution* for post-2015 and how they can best be connected to achieve maximum synergies;
- c) the means of implementation and funding to fill critical gaps in the production, dissemination and use of statistics, including by reinforcing national capacities in all of these areas and introducing innovation in the use of ICTs;
- d) opportunities to take advantage of big data, taking into due consideration the need to protect the privacy of individuals, ensure sustainability of data sharing by the private sector, strengthen the ecosystem to create an enabling environment for innovation, and support broad public sector adoption of new data sources, technologies and approaches;
- e) a proposed strategy for scaling up successful approaches to increasing the availability and accessibility of data; and
- f) possible outreach and advocacy activities to maintain the high visibility of the recommendations of the group and to facilitate their implementation.

References and Outreach

9. In the discharge of its functions, the IEAG will take into consideration all ongoing post-2015 efforts, including: the relevant work of the Statistical Commission; the report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals; the report of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing; the report of the Secretary General *A Life of Dignity for All*; the report issued by the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda; and any relevant ongoing efforts of Member States, the international community, the UN Task Team, UN Statistics, and the Special Advisor to the Secretary General on Post-2015 Development Planning.

10. The IEAG will arrange dedicated outreach and consultations with key constituencies, including, but not limited to, the ITU, WHO, ILO, FAO, UNEP, UNIDO, UNCTAD, and SDSN, in addition to governments, business, academics, civil society organizations, and the scientific community.

Expected outcomes and next steps

11. Through its report and any follow up by the end of 2014, the IEAG is expected to provide a point of reference on the discussion of data and statistics needed to underpin the new development agenda. The recommendations of the IEAG will inform the Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General and the subsequent intergovernmental process anticipated thereafter, including the work of the HLPF.
