Briefing note

A Data Revolution for Poverty Eradication

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Working towards ending poverty by 2030

Development Initiatives

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Overview

The High Level Panel on the Post–2015 Development Agenda called for a **data revolution** for sustainable development, with a new international initiative to improve the quality of statistics and information available to citizens. It recommended actively taking advantage of new technology, crowd sourcing, and improved connectivity to empower people with information on the progress towards the targets. Development Initiatives believes there a number of steps that should be put in place in order to deliver the ambition set out by the Panel.

Step 1: Sell the vision and develop political commitment

The data revolution should be seen as a basis on which greater openness and a wider transparency revolution can be built. The openness movement – one of the most exciting and promising developments of the last decade – is starting to transform the citizen-state compact. Rich and developing country governments are adapting the way they do business, recognising that greater transparency and participation leads to more effective, efficient, and equitable management of scarce public resources. Increased openness of data has potential to democratise access to information, empowering individuals with the knowledge they need to tackle the problems that they face. To realise this bold ambition, the revolution will need to reach beyond the niche data and statistical communities, sell the importance of the revolution to a wide range of actors (governments, donors, CSOs and the media) and leverage the potential of open data to deliver more usable information.

It is important to outline that the data revolution will draw upon elements of, but should not be viewed as being synonymous to the **Digital Revolution** - technology that leads to millions of computers and mobiles; **Big Data** – vast amounts of data processed to produce undiscovered patterns through extensive number crunching; **Social Data** – sharing personal information through social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter; and **Open Data** – the publishing of raw data in a re-useable, open format.

DI's current activity: Promoting the vision at country level in East Africa and Nepal; to donors especially DFID; and within the Post-2015 debates.

Proposed activity: Further work to sell the 'vision'. Investment in practical proof of concepts to make the vision a reality in specific countries/sectors and learn more about what works and what doesn't.

Step 2: Lots of data already exists. We should improve it.

Lots of data exists already. The availability and quality of poverty data has improved dramatically over the past two decades. Development, social and health indicators are, and have been, in the public domain for many years. Similarly most countries have national statistics offices that collate national level data. At the same time, however, certain weaknesses within the data have crystallised. Data are often of poor quality, untimely,

insufficiently disaggregated and often remains difficult to access. The following table highlights some top line challenges:

Strength of current data	Weaknesses of existing data
Development, social and health indicators have been in the public domain for decades	Poor quality. Poor provenance. Insufficiently disaggregated.
Consistent CRS data exists since 1973.[i]	Narrow scope. Insufficiently disaggregated.
Most countries have a national statistics office.	Poor capacity. Under resourced. Poor outputs.

The Post-2015 data revolution must start by looking to fix, improve, disaggregate and expand upon what data are already there. Significant scope exists to improve the quality and usefulness of poverty data. This will involve a combination of immediate reforms and longer term investments, including developing the capacity of national statistics offices that are too often under resourced.[ii]

DI's current activity: Developed an open data standard for aid based on user needs (International Aid Transparency Initiative). Understanding demand and the experience of using data. Work on evidence of using data / impact of not having it.

Proposed activity: Establish user-groups and effective feedback loops between data users and data providers; increased communication on the evidence and demand for data.

Step 3: Joined up data will lead to usable information

Transparency initiatives in sectors such aid, extractives, construction and budget are leading to a step change in the amount of data being published on the resources that can help end poverty. However, as this trend accelerates there is a risk of building silos within different initiatives, sectors and issues. Investing the limited resources available to end poverty wisely means building a complete picture that reflects the reality of people's lives - combining information on financial resources with accurate service information, census data, poverty statistics, broader human development indicators, population demographics, administrative infrastructures, policy information and feedback from citizens – in order to deliver better results and enable citizens to have usable, meaningful data. To advance this agenda, urgent investigation into data standards needs to occur. This requires a number of activities to take place:[iii]

- **Find the intersections:** Financial data, demographics, social and economic indicators contain intersections that allow disparate datasets to be combined and for one to enrich the understanding of another.
- **Use the same definitions:** If the intersecting fields are commonly defined and categorised across datasets, i.e. global standards creating common reporting codes and protocols for time, money, geography, organisation identifiers, functional classifications, joins between datasets become possible.
- **Do it the same way:** If the authors of standards and reporting languages adopt interoperable protocols it will become possible for these joins to be executed automatically.

DI's current activities: Promoting the vision for joined up data. We have just launched a conversation to bring sector-specific transparency initiatives closer together, identifying priority areas for action in both governance and technical collaboration. We will be conducting a feasibility study in early September and will be hosting a workshop at the Open Government Partnership meeting in London in November 2013.

Proposed activities: Further developing the above activities.

Step 4: Realise the potential of new sources of data and new approaches

The open data movement – the publication of data in an open, timely, comprehensive and comparable manner that allows users to easily combine and analyse the information – offers new opportunities which require both encouragement and thorough due diligence. The movement has brought a significant change in the ways that which people use and interact with data. The digital era means that data no longer just refers to more statistics or numbers in a database but instead includes a website page visit or the tracking a social interaction. Likewise, traditionally people who produce data are from organisations that produce statistics for their own needs; instead we are now seeing a growing number of individuals wanting data to solve their own problems.

DI's current activity: Working to understand the new sources and new approaches as part of our analysis work.

Proposed activities: Considering conducting work about the potential of the emerging data ecosystem and how it relates/differs from the old/existing world.

Step 5: Build the capacity to create and use data

Despite the potential that more data holds it is important to recognise that the publication of data on its own is not enough. More data does not always mean better information. Data needs combining, contextualising and explaining in order for it to be turned into information that people (whether governments, politicians, business, civil society and individual citizens) can act upon. Too often data publication meets the needs of producers rather than users of information, for whom it is inaccessible or too complex. Instead the data revolution needs to ensure it promotes inclusivity and avoids deepening the information divide.

The Post-2015 data revolution therefore has to support an investment in developing the capacity of infomediaries to create and use data. This will involve supporting a wide range of infomediaries that can translate to a diverse range of audiences. Infomediaries are individuals such as 'techies', journalists, policy researchers, communications professionals and statisticians who can interpret data and convert it into usable and understandable formats such as infographics, policy analysis and messages. Without stimulating the demand for and use of data there are very few people that are going to engage with it or use it. Investing in building the data literacy of infomediaries will provide communities with greater access to meaningful information – leading the way to providing everyone with the right information at the right time.

DI's current activity: Capacity building on access/ use of information for civil society groups in East Africa and Nepal. Developing demand profiles based on needs analysis of users. Developing a toolkit to support infomediaries.

Proposed activities: Further developing the above activities.

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i The OECD's Creditor Reporting System (CRS) is maintained by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD, which has been collecting information on international aid since 1960, and on activity-level aid since 1973.

[ii] Laurence Chandy, *Counting the Poor: Methods, problems and solutions behind $1.25 a day global poverty estimates*, June 2013

[iii] Development Initiatives, *Joining the revolution: Turning more data into better information to end poverty,* June 2013

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