

<h1>A data revolution for poverty eradication</h1>		2013 October
		Development Initiatives exists to end absolute poverty by 2030
	www.devinit.org	

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 lead to more effective, efficient and equitable management of scarce public resources. Increased openness of data has the potential to democratise access to information, empowering people with the knowledge they need to tackle the problems 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 on elements of, but should not be viewed as being synonymous with, the **digital revolution** – technology that leads to millions of computers and mobiles; **big data** – processing vast amounts of data 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** – publishing raw data in a reusable, open format.

Step 2: Improve the data that already exists

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. But at the same time, 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. ¹	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 fixing, improving, disaggregating and expanding the data 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

Step 3: Join up data to make usable information

Transparency initiatives in sectors such as 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. But 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. It means 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 to deliver better results and enable citizens to have usable, meaningful data. To advance this agenda, we need urgent investigation into data standards. This requires a number of activities to take place to find the intersections, use the same definitions, and adopt interoperable protocols.ⁱⁱⁱ

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 that need both encouragement and thorough due diligence. The movement has changed how people use and interact with data significantly. The digital era means that data no longer just refers to statistics or numbers in a database but now includes website page visits and tracking of social interactions. Likewise, people who produce data used to be from organisations that produce statistics for their own needs; now a growing number of individual people want data to solve their own problems.

Step 5: Build the capacity to create and use data

Despite the potential that more data holds, it is important to recognise that publishing data on its own is not enough. More data does not always mean better information. Data needs combining, contextualising and explaining, if it is to be turned into information on which people (whether governments, politicians, business, civil society or individual citizens) can act. . Too often published data 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 must therefore support an investment in developing the capacity of infomediaries to create and use data. This will involve supporting a wide range of infomediaries who 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, very few people 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.

ⁱThe 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.

ⁱⁱDevelopment Initiatives (2013) *Counting the Poor: Methods, problems and solutions behind \$1.25 a day global poverty estimates*, Written by Laurence Chandy.

ⁱⁱⁱDevelopment Initiatives (2013) *Joining the revolution: Turning more data into better information to end poverty*.

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