# Data Revolution Roundtable – Event Summary

On the 4th December 2014, Open Nepal and Development Initiatives convened a High Level Roundtable to discuss what a 'data revolution for development' means for Nepal. The event was attended by representatives from the Central Bureau of Statistics, National Planning Commission, Ministry of Finance, Nepal Rastra Bank, Office of the Auditor General, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Government, Ministry of Roads, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, private sector, parliament and civil society organisations. The following document provides a top line summary of the issues discussed and suggests next steps for the group towards a shared action plan for delivering the data revolution for Nepal. For further information please contact: Pavitra Rana, pavitra.rana@opennepal.net or Joshua Leslie, joshua.leslie@opennepal.net

Why a data revolution is needed in Nepal

The discussion highlighted a range of the current challenges experienced in sharing and using of data in Nepal. The issued raised by the participants can be broadly grouped into three areas – data collection, data sharing and data use:

- **Problems with data collection:**
    - **Gaps in the availability of data:** some data is not available as it is not collected. In particular this applies to social data, which prevents the monitoring of the success of inclusion policies.
    - **Lack of good quality data**: where data is available it is often of poor quality, having been collected using sub-standard or biased methodology. There have been instances where some organisations have produced "national statistics" based on non-representative surveys.
    - **Lack of timely data**: the available data is often out of date, and there are long gaps between data updates. Because of this, data users have to either use outdated data in their work, or rely on estimates.
    - **Lack of disaggregated data**: the available datasets are often not disaggregated at a useful level, for example, broken down by geographical area, gender and ethnicity. This prevents useful analysis except at a broad national level.

- **Problems with sharing and accessing the data:**
    - **Limited capability to share data:** data users are not always able to obtain the data they require from the data suppliers because there is a lack of adequate human resources and skills within data suppliers to disseminate the data.
    - **Lack of willingness to share data:** in addition to this, data users face challenges in gaining access to data due to a lack of incentives for some data suppliers to share their data.
    - **There is limited accessibility of data:** where data is available for sharing, it is often available only in a format that makes it difficult for analysis, for example PDFs or as website text, rather than in the machine readable formats.

- **Problems with using the data:**
    - **There is a lack of skills capacity from data users:** to effectively use data, users need data literacy and analytical tools. Sometimes the interpretations made from data are unreliable, as the data users have not the adequate skills and experience to analyse, interpret and contextualise data.
    - **The lack of standards prevents comparability:** A lack of agreed standards means it is not possible to compare data across time and location or identify trends. This means that data cannot be compared either within Nepal, or regionally, for example in the SAARC region.
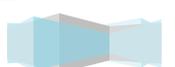
o **There is a lack of interoperable data:** Different government departments are preparing their data in different ways, meaning that two departments may have different statistics for the same issue. The system is not interoperable and the data cannot be joined up, leaving data users questioning the reliability of their analysis.

What a revolution in data could deliver in Nepal

The participants presented a strong vision of the potential of a data revolution in Nepal - to deliver better production, sharing and use of data and information. They saw the data revolution as a way to deliver:

- **More effective policy:** the data revolution would enable evidence-based design of policy, and informed debate to refine policy.
- **More effective programmes:** the data revolution would enable evidence-based design and targeting of government and civil society programmes.
- **More effective monitoring:** the data revolution would enable more effective monitoring of policy and programme implementation
- **More efficient spending:** the data revolution would enable more targeted and aligned spending of limited funds.
- **Future wealth creation:** the data revolution would create wealth by bringing new skills, technology and opportunities to the population.

The road to progress

The participants highlighted a number of broad challenge areas that could be worked in order to improve the production, sharing, accessibility and use of better data:

- **Improving the data:**
  o **The quality of statistics needs to be improved and maintained:** a data revolution will require reliable, verifiable and triangulated data – with a strong national statistics system. A key priority is ensuring that data is collected and produced using accurate methodologies and sampling techniques.
  o **Data needs to be collected and stored at a higher level of granularity:** a data revolution will require more in-depth and detailed data that can be disaggregated by geographic location and by social categorisation.
  o **More data needs to be produced data and on a wider range of topics:** a data revolution will require the collection of more data, including social data and data on impact. Policy makers will need to ensure that data is collected that can enable the monitoring of their policy's effectiveness.
  o **Standards will need to be adopted to allow comparability**: a data revolution will require the adoption of standards to make Nepal's statistics nationally and internationally comparable.

- **Sharing the data:**
  o **Data needs to be shared more willingly and effectively:** a data revolution will require the sharing and dissemination of data more readily, willingly and efficiently, by all stakeholders, including government and civil society.
  o **Incentives for sharing data need to be identified and applied:** a data revolution will require the identification of incentives and use of sanctions to encourage people to share information, so that data suppliers understand the benefit of sharing data.
  o **Adequate human resources for data sharing need to be developed:** a data revolution will require more adequate resources, both human and financial, for the sharing of data.
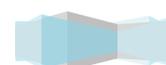
- o **The perceived risks need to be addressed and managed:** a data revolution will need to ensure that data is accessible to those offline, so that it does not empower just those on one side of the digital divide.

- **Using the data:**
  - o **People will need to be encouraged to use data:** a data revolution will need to focus on the use of data as well as the supply. It will need to raise people's awareness of data sources, and of the potential of data to support their work.
  - o **The capacity of data users will need to be improved**: a data revolution will need to increase the people's ability to use data – data suppliers, intermediaries and users – so that analysis and interpretation of data is valid.
  - o **Civil society will need to play an important role:** a data revolution will require civil society to support government by raising questions, and helping them to identify gaps. They can also lead by example, affirming their accountability by sharing their own data.
  - o **People's mindsets towards data and technology need to change:** a data revolution will require a change in mindsets for those who do not believe that they themselves can use data, or the data revolution will not take root.

A commitment to action

The participants recognised that for an inclusive information system to emerge from the data revolution, it will require collective action from government, parliamentarians, donors, INGOs, civil society, academia and the media.

As an immediate result of the roundtable the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) offered to join a session the following day (Friday 5th December) organized by Open Nepal. This event provided the opportunity for the CBS to explain to civil society organisations working on access to information and data about the new National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) and what this might mean for a data revolution in Nepal. This event was the first opportunity for the many CSOs to engage in the strategy, which is due to be published next year.

Further suggested action for the group to take as next steps included:

- **Delving deeper into the short, medium and longer term solutions for the data revolution in Nepal.** Through follow up interviews with the roundtable participants, conducted by Open Nepal, the challenges, incentives and actions required to shape the data revolution will be further identified.
- **Forming an open, inclusive group to shape plans for Nepal's data revolution.** Reconvening of the roundtable participants to identify goals, commitments and implementation plans. In addition, organise a wider public event to raise the profile and understanding of the data revolution with a broader group of stakeholders.
- **Agreeing a statement of government and civil society data priorities and commitments.** Collaboratively developing a data revolution action plan, linked to and to compliment the NSDS, for Nepal and committing to an implementation plan that will guide delivery of the Nepal's data revolution.

"To move ahead, let's try to find out workable solutions. Opening data isn't enough. Quality, availability and access are all equally important,"

Hon Gagan Thapa MP