

Using data in evidence-based decision-making

Launch of DevInfo version 6.0 in Asia and the Pacific

Siem Reap, Cambodia - 2-5 February, 2010

Report

From 2nd to 5th February 2010, some 90 participants representing policy makers, data producers and United Nations officials from 20 countries from Asia and the Pacific came together in Siem Reap, Cambodia for a regional consultation on using data in evidence-based decision making and the regional launch of DevInfo version 6.0.

A DevInfo Inter-Agency Taskforce for Asia and the Pacific, which comprised about 17 staff members from 9 UN agencies at regional level (Bangkok and Colombo), as well as the RC's office, UNFPA, UNICEF and the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) in Cambodia organized this event. UNICEF acted as the convener agency and also provided the Secretariat.

One of the main outcomes of this event was the endorsement of an Agenda for Action on the Use of Data in Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Asia and the Pacific. This regional agenda was prepared by a drafting committee based on the discussions held during the two first days of the event and specific inputs provided by the moderators of various thematic parallel sessions (see recommendations below). During the final plenary session, all participants in Siem Reap endorsed the text by applause¹. The Agenda for Action² refers to the key principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action guiding the development and strengthening of national monitoring and evaluation systems. It highlights the need to strengthen national statistical systems to ensure that relevant, accurate and reliable data is regularly collected, analyzed and widely disseminated in user-friendly ways. The Agenda highlights DevInfo as one relevant tool for the generation of information for decision making purposes. The Regional Agenda for Action stresses the need to foster increased coordination between data producers and data users and encourages strong collaboration between national governments and development partners.

The Siem Reap Agenda for Action is also in line with the regional strategic intent for DevInfo which is based on the idea that in order to achieve successful implementation of DevInfo, this tool should be placed at the centre of the decision-making process that leads to policy change.

¹ The draft text was distributed to all participants, projected on a big screen and read out loud in plenary. Comments made by various participants were recorded and participants accepted that the text would be revised after the regional consultation. After the meeting, the Taskforce incorporated comments made by participants and made minor editorial changes before finalizing and distributing the text to participants. The Agenda for Action can also be found on the event's webpage on <http://www.unescap.org/stat/di6launch>.

² See Annex 1 for the full text of the Agenda for Action

Recommendations from thematic panel discussions

The following recommendations provided by the moderators of the six parallel sessions on the use of data for evidence-based policy making were integrated to the extent possible in the draft text of the Regional Agenda for Action on the Use of Data in Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Asia and the Pacific.

1. Global economic and financial crisis

- Governments to implement monitoring systems for timely impact assessment of external shocks such as food and oil crisis, global economic crisis and natural disasters, including through the use of innovative data collection, analysis and dissemination methods;
- United Nations System and other development actors to support countries in building their national capacity to timely collect, analyze, disseminate and use data to support evidence-based policy response to external shocks.

2. Decent Work Agenda

- To ensure the sound design and monitoring of development policies and plans which can support achievement of decent work and the MDGs;
- Countries to regularly collect and disseminate reliable, disaggregated labor market and employment data, based on internationally-accepted concepts and definitions;
- At the national level, to strengthen institutional linkages among all stakeholders involved in the production and utilization of labor market data in order to ensure that data collected are relevant and applicable to monitoring key decent work indicators, particularly those identified under MDG Target 1b.

3. Demographic transition

- To support and strengthen vital/civil registration systems which is a source of population data provided on a timelier basis than Census;
- To adopt innovative population data collection methods and new technologies to obtain data at the household level, such as the use of the internet to distribute census questionnaires;
- UN agencies to play a greater role and make increased efforts in convening data producers and decision makers to understand and resolve the causes for discrepancies between national and international estimates on key demographic variables in order to move towards greater convergence and harmonization of data sources;
- The UN to adopt a pivotal role in sharing country experiences, lessons and good practices under a broader knowledge management strategy.

4. MDGs

- National governments to participate in international indicator estimation processes, in order to promote ownership of data used for international comparison;

- To encourage policy analysis to feed back into the cycle of evidence-based policy making for national development priorities;
- To promote achievement of MDGs/national targets with equity through the use of disaggregated data to identify geographic, socioeconomic and other forms of disparities while enhancing standards and quality of such data;
- Given the methodological challenges, to concentrate on progress indicators at sub-national level rather than measuring results indicators at national level; sub-national planners to focus on outputs rather than outcomes.

5. Aid Effectiveness

- Country led monitoring and evaluation systems to be promoted by both national governments and UN Agencies.
- Country led monitoring and evaluation systems to include indicators and data collection methods that will allow countries to monitor and evaluate their level of compliance with the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action.
- UN Agencies to support countries to establish country led monitoring and evaluation systems at the national and subnational levels.
- UN Agencies to support countries to produce evidence based analysis and to report on their progress towards advancing the Accra Agenda for Action and on the achievement of national development goals.

6. Education for All

- Each line ministry to coordinate among its departments, with other ministries, the National Statistics Office and other relevant institutions in order to improve the quality of data and promote their use for evidence-based policy making and result-oriented programme implementation;
- Line ministries to use Household surveys and Census data should with the support of international development partners;
- Development partners to share among all potential stakeholders good practices and experiences in the use of DevInfo, such as the Asia and Pacific EFAInfo.

Summary of plenary discussions

Acting as the Master of Ceremony, Ms. Hang Lina, Deputy Director General of the National Institute of Statistics in Cambodia opened the event and introduced the presiding committee³ as well as the various speakers of the morning session

In his opening remarks, H.E. Chhay Than, Senior Minister the Minister of Planning of Cambodia set the tone by placing the ensuing discussions on the use of data in evidence-based decision making in the framework of the 2005 Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness and the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action. National governments and development partners now view nationally-owned results-based management systems to be central to the development process. In this new aid environment, commitment to achieving national goals and supporting national statistical systems for regular, accurate monitoring of these goals is more important than ever. In this regard, the Minister highlighted the importance of having appropriate, high quality data in order to measure progress and make the necessary policy choices.

The UN Resident Coordinator in Cambodia, Mr. Douglas Broderick, made his opening remarks on behalf of the regional UN team. Reminding the audience that the United Nations is committed to the principles of transparency, accountability, respect for human rights, and equity, he stressed the importance of sound statistical data and the need to focus on how that data can be used to inform and influence policy making, to educate citizens, to advocate for the marginalized and vulnerable people, and to plan future interventions.

*“Data-based decision making
or
Decision-based data making”
Prof. A.K. Shiva Kumar*

The Resident Coordinator then proceeded with the official launch of DevInfo version 6.0 in Asia and the Pacific by handing over the new software package to the Minister of Planning of Cambodia. **DevInfo was commended as an invaluable tool for assisting Governments and development partners in planning and monitoring progress toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals and as a way to disseminate information that can be used in productive policy dialogue.**

The first keynote speaker, Prof. A. K. Shiva Kumar⁴, discussed a paradigm shift that needs to take place in how human development is monitored. The progress of societies cannot be

³ The Presiding Committee comprised 6 members: H.E. Chhay Than, Senior Minister, Minister of Planning, Cambodia; H.E. Rin Vireak, Undersecretary of State, Ministry of Planning Cambodia; H.E. San Sy Than, Director General of the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), Ministry of Planning, Cambodia; H.E. Douglas Broderick, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Cambodia; Professor A.K. Shiva Kumar, invited as keynote speaker from the Institute for Human Development and Adviser to UNICEF, India; H.E. Mr. Velayuthan Sivagnanasothy, invited as keynote speaker and Director General, Department of Foreign Aid and Budget Monitoring, Ministry of Plan Implementation, Government of Sri Lanka.

measured any longer by only looking at output-based MDGs, income poverty, and GDP growth. The measurement of poverty and inequality should rather focus on freedoms, capabilities, choices and human rights. This has implications on the type of data to be collected to inform policy making, on how the data is transformed into knowledge, how knowledge translates into action which finally should lead to positive outcomes.

The second keynote speaker, Mr. Velayuthan Sivagnanasothy⁵ presented on the Managing for Development Results (MfDR) system of the Sri Lankan Government. He too mentioned a shift in focus saying that “The aim of MfDR/RBM is to change culture of national Public Management from one that is process oriented (rule focused) to one focusing on the results that matter to citizens”. He highlighted the role of monitoring and evaluation in improving decision-making and the role of national statistical systems in improving resource allocation and budgeting.

The keynote addresses were followed by a presentation on using census data for informing policy: the example of Cambodia, in which Mr. San Sy Than, the Director General of NIS Cambodia, presented CAMInfo as an effective tool for monitoring the National Strategic Development Plan, the Cambodian MDGs and sectoral development plans. CAMInfo helps disseminating information to measure progress towards achieving the goals set out in these documents, thus supporting decision makers at policy level. The use of census data for policy-making in Cambodia was showcased through the presentation of certain indicators together with their policy implications. CAMInfo version 4.0, which includes the results of the General Population Census 2008, will soon be released using the DevInfo version 6.0 platform.

“Evidence-based policy making is an approach that helps people make well informed decisions about policies, programmes and projects by putting the best available evidence at the heart of policy development and implementation”

In his presentation on enhancing evidence-based policy making through Country-Led M&E Systems, Mr. Marco Segone⁶ first recognized that although M&E should be instrumental in ensuring effective decision making, by providing strong evidence, it does not play its full potential because other factors influence the decision-making process. Putting the quality of evidence in relation with the policy environment, Mr. Segone presented country-led M&E systems as a strategy to increase the role of evidence in policy making and to match technical rigor with policy relevance.

⁴ Prof Kumar from the Institute for Human Development is Development Economist, Visiting Professor at the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government and Indian School of Business in Hyderabad and Adviser to UNICEF India.

⁵ Mr. Sivagnanasothy, Director General, Department of Foreign Aid and Budget Monitoring of the Ministry of Plan Implementation, Sri Lanka. He was one of the core members of the group that conducted the global evaluation on implementation of the Paris Declaration, in 2008/09.

⁶ Mr. Marco Segone is Senior Evaluation Specialist, Systemic Management, Evaluation Office, UNICEF NY

The role of DevInfo in the evidence-based decision-making cycle was presented by Ms. Astrid Marschatz⁷. She demonstrated how DevInfo can be used to analyze a situation, to determine priority areas for intervention, to identify disparities and priority groups as well as for monitoring and reporting. She then presented CensusInfo, an adaptation of DevInfo as well as the new DevInfo website using interesting features for social networking, such as di Wiki or di Forum.

Country experiences in the use of DevInfo

The experience of India⁸

DevInfo has been implemented in India since 2002. DevInfo India v.2.0 is managed by an inter-agency taskforce under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, and CensusInfo India v.2.0 is under the responsibility of the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner. More recent adaptations include CrimelInfo, which is the official data source of the National Crime Records Bureau, and Madhya Pradesh Info v.1.0, which was developed to track State level commitments. New versions of DevInfo India and CensusInfo India are planned for in the near future as well as additional State adaptations.

Use: So far, DevInfo India has been mainly used as a dissemination and advocacy tool but also for sub-national level policy making.

Large-scale capacity-building efforts in India have targeted statistical officers of key central ministries, State Government partners, NGOs, other UN agencies, as well as researchers and academic institutions. Senior civil officers have also been exposed to the use of DevInfo India. As a result, more and more line Ministries, academics and State Governments are expressing interest in using/adapting the technology.

***Lessons learnt from India:** Strong Government ownership, be it at national or at sub-national level is key to the effective institutionalization of DevInfo. Therefore the Government's commitment should be assessed before moving forward with DevInfo implementation. Regarding the institutional framework, the body responsible for the DevInfo initiative needs to group statisticians, IT staff as well as programme officers and people who can provide good analysis in order to implement DevInfo successfully.*

Challenges: One of the key challenges in India is related to the timeliness of data dissemination: there is a need for a simplified data reporting and clearing mechanism which would allow for an annual update of information. Another challenge is linked to the capacity in database

⁷ Ms Marschatz is DevInfo Project Manager, UNDOCO

⁸ Connecting Data Producers to Policy Makers Evidence of DevInfo Use by Mr. Dhrijesh Kumar Tewari, Joint Director, Central Statistical Organization and Mr. Raj Gautam Mitra, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, SPPME, UNICEF

administration, especially at sub-national level. Capacity building efforts will have to be pursued in the future.

The experience of Mongolia⁹

The Mongolian National Statistics Office presented the MDG online database which provides users with a unique source of information on MDG indicators as well as an efficient MDG monitoring system.

In 2009, the NSO in Mongolia adopted a "Regulation on the use of the MDG database" under which sectoral Ministries/Agencies are provided with authority to maintain and update their sector specific data online in DevInfo, while the NSO acts as a clearing house before releasing the data. This system allows for the timely dissemination of

Use: The MDG database has been used for the preparation of the 3rd National MDG report, for local MDG reports (capital city, 6 aimags and 2 districts), as well as for local planning and monitoring.

Next steps: There is an increased number of data users and more and more government organizations show interest in using DevInfo. The NSO also plans to further build the capacity of policy makers in using DevInfo based data for policy making and planning as well as to advocate for the use of DevInfo in evidence based policy making.

The experience of Vietnam¹⁰

The Vietnam General Statistics Office presented their National Statistical Indicator System (legal framework, data sources and role in the decision-making process) and highlighted the contribution of VietInfo to decision-making. VietInfo v.5.0 has been updated with 2009 data and is available online. It includes NSIS and sectoral databases and allows for the monitoring of MDGs and Vietnam Development Goals.

Use: VietInfo was rolled out to sub-national level to monitor the provincial Socio-economic Development Plan (SEDP) and to contribute to local level planning. It was also adapted at provincial level to monitor the Public Administration reform Process (CaoBInfo). VietInfo was used for the MDG report and UN agencies have started using VietInfo as a tool for data dissemination on urban management and disasters.

Next steps: National census results will be uploaded into VietInfo. More training is needed to strengthen capacity in the use of VietInfo and in database administration.

⁹ By Ms. B. Tserenkhand, Head, Data Processing and Technology Department, National Statistics Office and Ms. L. Khishigsuren, UN Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, RC Office

¹⁰ The use of data through VietInfo and the Vietnam Development Database for planning and strategic decision making by Mr. Nguyen Phong, Director of Social and Environmental Statistics Department, General Statistics Office

Annex 1

Agenda for Action on the Use of Data in Evidence-Based Decision Making in Asia and the Pacific

3 February 2010, Siem Reap, Cambodia

The 90+ participants of the Regional Consultation on Using Data in Evidence-Based Decision Making, coming together in Siem Reap, Cambodia from 2-3 February 2010, representing policy makers, data producers and United Nations officials from 20 countries, have hereby issued the following recommendations guided by the principles and commitments underpinning the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action:

National statistical systems are integral components of modern governments. Relevant, accurate and reliable data needs to be regularly collected, analyzed and widely disseminated in user-friendly ways in order to allow governments and civil society, including the media to monitor progress of their societies, and make fact-based decisions to inform public policy. The ongoing initiatives taking place in several countries in conjunction with the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses, and the 2010 MDG Reports, are a valuable opportunity to promote the importance of statistical data collection, analysis, dissemination and utilization.

National governments and development partners must work closely together to ensure adherence to key principles of the new aid environment when developing and strengthening national monitoring and evaluation systems. These include the promotion of government ownership, alignment to national frameworks, harmonization of development partners' support, strengthened mutual accountability, and mainstreamed management for development results.

The use of technological developments in the 21st century is making statistical data more accessible to the general population. Innovative methods should be supported for the collection, storage, retrieval, dissemination and dynamic visualization of national statistical data. One such tool that this consultation has explored is DevInfo, which is distributed royalty free by the United Nations, promotes adherence to international standards for statistical data and metadata exchange, and has been endorsed by the UN Development Group as a recommended tool for monitoring progress against the Millennium Development Goals. Countries could consider taking advantage of DevInfo's customization features to have a data dissemination tool that is tailor made to fit their specific requirements.

In bringing together data producers and data users, this consultation has made an important step forward in fostering linkages that need to be strengthened if the full power of information contained in national statistical systems is to be harnessed. Key points include:

- Participants highlighted the role of the United Nations and other development actors to support countries in strengthening national capacities to timely collect, analyze, disseminate and use reliable and accurate data to systematically support evidence-based decision making at the policy level.
- The need to institutionalize country-led Monitoring and Evaluation systems was stressed, including Managing for Development Results at national and sub-national levels in order to reinforce evidence-based decision making. This includes target setting at sub-national level to promote equitable and sustainable achievement of development goals.
- It was mentioned that in this work, coordination between Line Ministries, National Statistics Offices, and other related institutions is essential.
- Participants stressed the need to strengthen support to effective and sustained capacity development on data analysis and policy assessments, to feed back into the cycle of policy making.
- It is essential to strengthen the enabling environment, through legal and other policy frameworks, for using data in evidence-based decision making.
- Participants mentioned the importance of ensuring that information is documented and disseminated based on principles of transparency and ethics.
- There is a need to address geographic, socioeconomic and other forms of disparities by promoting the collection and use of disaggregated data. Analysts need to further explore the use of small area estimation techniques to obtain disaggregated data, in particular for hunger and poverty.
- Governments were encouraged to strengthen and/or implement monitoring systems for timely impact assessments of external shocks such as food and oil crisis, global financial and economic crisis, and natural disasters.
- Governments' openness to the use of data produced by the private sector, namely reputable firms, universities and civil society organizations was also encouraged.
- Governments were encouraged to collect data to monitor the progress on MDGs and other national goal indicators by multiple methods. For example, support for vital / civil registration systems as well as survey/census systems.
- Participants recognized the importance of linkages between all MDGs. Countries are therefore encouraged to also assess progress towards and take ownership of MDG 8.
- New features of DevInfo version 6.0 could be fully utilized to enhance knowledge sharing between countries on strengthening country-led monitoring and evaluation systems.

The participants of this consultation vow to continue striving for a greater evidence base for all strategies, policies and other decision-making processes in Asia and the Pacific, and look forward to continuing dialogue between high-level policy makers, data producers and the United Nations for this purpose.