
Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting
Data Revolution in North Africa:
Putting Data at the Service of Structural Transformation
30-31 October 2018, Tunis (Tunisia)

Aide Memoire

I. Context

In the run-up to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, member states and the United Nations System widely acknowledged the critical need to strengthen at all levels the capacity of statistical systems to produce reliable data for assessing the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets. The 10-year plan (2014-2023) to implement Africa's Agenda 2063 also requires African countries to produce a wide range of statistical data. The demand for disaggregated data increases the level of complexity for developing countries, many of which are already struggling to produce basic statistics that meet international standards.

Another challenge that countries face is the development of a national indicators framework. Discussions on indicators should be conducted on the basis of national priorities as reflected in development policies, plans, and programmes. Countries have committed to implementing the SDGs and adopting all the goals that are relevant to them; as for African countries, in addition to the SDGs, the continent has also adopted Agenda 2063, which is becoming another benchmark in the development of the national indicators framework.

Given African countries' significant need for support in the field of statistics and data, the UN Secretary General has set up a High-Level Group (HLG) consisting of eminent personalities. The HLG report highlighted a new partnership between governments, development partners and, most importantly, civil society to revolutionise the data and statistics needed to achieve the SDGs and Agenda 2063. Since the publication of the HLG report, an appeal was launched to promote the data revolution, including the High-Level Conference (HLC) held in Addis Ababa in March 2015, during the Eighth Joint Annual Meetings of the African Union Commission (AUC) and Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The ministers decided, based on the outcomes of the HLC, "to lead the African data revolution, bringing together diverse data communities and using a wide range of data sources, tools and innovative technologies ..." (Resolution 923 [XLVII], 2). Also, at the Ninth Joint Annual Meeting, the ministers recommended the establishment of a coherent strategy and an integrated monitoring and evaluation framework for both 2030 and 2063 agendas.

Reports recently produced by international or regional institutions have led to a growing recognition that the exploitation of the data revolution is essential to accelerate sustainable development in the continent. In this context, the ECA report focused on the mapping of the data ecosystem with reference to the production, distribution, and use of data by public, private, and civil society actors, with regard to the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals. It has drawn upon in-depth case studies of national data ecosystems in ten African countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Swaziland, and Tanzania. No country in North Africa has been selected and it is necessary that this state of affairs be examined in this part of the African continent in order to know the potential, the difficulties, and the actors in the field of data production.

III. Rationale

The first United Nations World Data Forum, held in January 2017, in Cape Town, South Africa, was a platform for increased cooperation between national statistical offices, information and geo-spatial technology managers, scientists, government representatives, intergovernmental organisations, and civil society.

Organised under the direction of the United Nations Statistical Commission, with the support of the Statistics Division, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), and the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda, the Forum brought together more than 2,000 data specialists from national statistical services, the private sector, international organisations, scientific and academic circles, as well as political leaders and advocates for sustainable development, to respond to the challenges countries face in meeting the SDGs/Agenda 2063 requirements.

The Forum resulted in the adoption of a global data action plan, which was endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission in its 48th session in March 2017. This plan identified six strategic areas, each associated with several objectives and implementation actions which are:

- Coordination and strategic leadership in the field of sustainable development data;
- Innovation and modernisation of national statistical systems;
- Strengthening basic statistical activities and programmes, namely to meet the monitoring and evaluation needs of the 2030 Agenda;
- Dissemination and use of sustainable development data;
- Multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development data; and
- Resource mobilisation and coordination of statistical capacity-building efforts.

North Africa remains one of the leading sub-regions in statistical development compared to others. However, levels of advancement vary from one country to the other, depending on the available capacity, skilled human resources, and the technologies used in the field. Nevertheless, some countries have developed policies to promote open data or big data in preparation for the data revolution. We can mention Tunisia as a model in the 2015 Open Data Watch (ODW) report, which ranked it 14th out of 125 countries, the first North African country, the first Arab country, and the second African country in analysis production and official statistics dissemination (Open Data Index).

It is within this development context that the ECA Office for North Africa took the initiative to carry out a study on the state of affairs of the data ecosystem in North Africa to identify good practices, good initiatives in statistical development, the innovative tools and technologies used in statistics production and dissemination, the challenges faced, and the solutions introduced to make the data revolution effective.

The Expert Group Meeting (EGM) will provide the sub-region with a new opportunity to continue the debate following the findings of the study that was themed: “the Data Revolution in North Africa: Putting Data at the Service of Structural Transformation”; a theme that has been at the heart of the discussions of the first UN World Data Forum, which took place from 15 to 18 January, 2017, in Cape Town, South Africa.

IV. Objective

The main objective of the Expert Meeting is to conduct a comprehensive review of the data ecosystem in the context of the emerging data revolution based on the high-quality economic and social statistics needed for the economic transformation and the achievement of the SDGs/Agenda 2063 in North Africa. Based on this review, the Meeting also aims to identify the common problems facing the countries and propose action plans applicable in the sub-region’s context. Thus, the Meeting will allow to identify and support stakeholders in the data-production chain in North Africa, who work to meet the new requirements of the SDGs and Agenda 2063 Data.

The data revolution in North Africa will contribute to strengthening the capacity of the national statistical system to collect, assemble, and analyse data. In return, this will ensure a reliable supply of the basic economic statistics necessary to monitor and evaluate the progress towards the SDGs and the structural transformation for North Africa:

- a) Assess the current situation of the data ecosystem across North African countries. This state of affairs will be a reference against which the progress of the data revolution could be evaluated during the next years.
- b) Assess infrastructural needs, their nature, and their impact on the protocols governing data production, openness, analysis, confidentiality, and ethics in North Africa, based on open data systems, big data, and innovations.
- c) Analyse new data needs to monitor the SDGs and the Agenda 2063, and identify the shortcomings and the new data sources.
- d) Analyse the role of new technologies, the use of mobile networks, as well as the Geographic Information Systems and their impact on the way data is collected, analysed, shared, and disseminated.
- e) Identify data communities in the countries during the assessment, and the existing or potential areas of new possible cooperation and deliberate on the ways to guide the components of the data ecosystems in order to create a better environment for partnerships.
- f) Share the good practices of the data revolution and evaluate innovations.
- g) Promote the role of coordination between national statistics offices in the data ecosystem.

V. Expected Outcomes

The expected immediate outcome of the ad hoc expert meeting is to produce a revised comprehensive report on Data Revolution in North Africa, including good practices, lessons learned and recommendations for improving the production of statistical data to better report on the implementation of SDGs and the 2063 Agenda. Thus, the meeting will identify:

- Additional information to improve the study report on the Data Revolution in North Africa as an asset for structural transformation;
- Good practices and challenges for implementing the Data revolution in North Africa and monitoring of SDGs are shared;
- Areas of capacity building and recommendations needed to guide public policies and reforms needed in counties and key actors;
- Validation by experts of the study report.

These recommendations will be presented to the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts of the ECA North Africa Office (October 2018).

VI. Meeting Organisation and Format

The meeting will consist of plenary sessions. The report on Data Revolution in North Africa: Putting Data in Support of Structural Transformation will be presented to the participants, to allow them to take cognizance of and discuss the presentations of different experts. Member countries will later receive the final version of this report.

VII. Participation

Participation at the meeting is open to ministries, national administrations and institutions in charge of economic and social development, statistics and sustainable development, to representatives of private sector organisations, universities and research centres, UN agencies and other development partners in the sub-region.

VIII. Documentation

The meeting documents will include: this checklist, the programme of the meeting, the presentations to be made by the experts and the study report prepared by the Office.

IX. Date and Venue of the Meeting

The meeting will take place on 30 and 31 October 2018 at the Headquarters of UTICA in Tunis (Republic of Tunisia).

X. WORKING LANGUAGES

The working languages of the meeting are French, English and Arabic.

XI. CONTACTS

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