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Data for Policy (D4P) Initiative

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The Data for Policy (D4P) initiative (D4P) is a new World Bank engagement to improve National Statistical Systems (NSS) by enhancing the availability, timeliness, quality, and relevance of key data for evidence-based decision making. Working at national and regional levels, the D4P "package" includes production of a core set of economic, social, and sustainability statistics essential for monitoring and evaluating public policies and programs. Good quality, timely, and relevant statistics are crucial to monitor social and human development outcomes. They can also help identify what policies work, and which do not, in promoting inclusive growth and eradicating poverty. Having reliable, timely data is particularly important for poor countries to allow them to allocate limited resources most efficiently. At the same time, the World Bank's support for countries' statistical capacity has become even more critical as the world strives to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Statistical systems in developing countries often face challenges such as inadequate and unreliable financing, limited use of statistical evidence by policymakers, poor coordination and insufficient institutional capacity, low public access to data and perverse political incentives. Constraints are typically more pressing in the poorest and conflict-affected states.

The D4P initiative exemplifies the next generation of World Bank engagement to support the development NSS development. The initiative is geared to enhance the availability, timeliness and quality of key data for evidence-based decision making. Specifically, it aims to support:

a) Key NSS enabling factors to improve performance and productivity of statistical agencies (for example: quality assurance, data integration, and institutional resources and management.

b) Production of a core set of economic, social, and sustainability statistics used to monitor national development plans and the 2030 SDG agenda.

c) Access and use of key data for monitoring and evaluating public policies and programs.

In practice, the D4P package uses 5 core statistical operations plus 2 complementary data systems:

1. **Household surveys and census**: Living Standards Measurement Surveys, Demographic and Health Surveys, labor force surveys, population census design.

2. **Enterprise surveys and census**: firm surveys, establishment census, registries.

3. **Agricultural surveys**: household-based surveys, agricultural census design, updates.

4. **Administrative data**: Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, education system data, environmental data.

5. **Price data**: price surveys including regulated prices and expanded data collection in rural areas.

Complementary data systems: **National Accounts** and **Big Data**.

These core operations and systems are based on the data necessary to monitor the progress of policies, National Development Plans and the SDGs, taking into consideration the recommendations of the United Nations Statistical Commission.[i] In addition, the D4P

initiale builds on the World Bank's 2015 success in supporting household surveys in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Leveraging resources from the International Development Association (IDA) with technical assistance, the Bank's effort delivered substantial results over a short period of time, even surpassing the initial goal. As a result of these efforts, 41 SSA countries conducted household surveys between 2015 and 2018, compared to just 18 between 2012 and 2015.

Data Gaps

Despite recent progress on improving data availability, particularly household surveys, many of the world's poorest and conflict-affected countries—many of which are in SSA—still suffer from acute data gaps. Map 1 illustrates statistical availability by SSA country, based on an index that measures gaps according to the D4P package. The higher the D4P index, the fewer the gaps, reflecting more statistical operations conducted recently and within the timing international standards recommend. As of 2018, the regional D4P index for SSA was 0.497—where 1 means no gaps in the core set of statistics in all the countries in the region.

Data Accessibility

The D4P also promotes open access and data utilization. The D4P builds on evidence that the World Bank has been more effective at fostering country data production capacity than at promoting its use.[ii] In addition to the well-known issues of insufficient capacity and financing, statistical systems in many poor countries frequently suffer from limited decision makers' use of data, and lack of access—by both policy makers and the public—to statistical evidence.

Besides data collection, the D4P will support countries to improve their wider NSS to be fit-for-purpose for the data revolution: promoting an adequate skill mix among technical staff, investing in physical infrastructure and software, and addressing legal frameworks for statistics and data sharing. The D4P emphasizes investing in sustainable systems that

countries can maintain over time without donor assistance. The D4P will also support activities that put data at the center of policy making, such as setting up policy units in planning and finance ministries to increase accessibility to policymakers, as well as managing disclosure risk for open data and encouraging public dissemination.[iii] Data is a public good that is most valuable when shared.

Map 1. SSA Data gaps, D4P Index for 2018[iv]
D4P Index (0-1 scale) (D4P Field Survey)

D4P Index
- ■ 0.8 - 0.9
- ■ 0.6 - 0.8
- ■ 0.5 - 0.6
- ■ 0.4 - 0.5
- □ 0.3 - 0.4
- □ 0.0 - 0.3
- □ No data
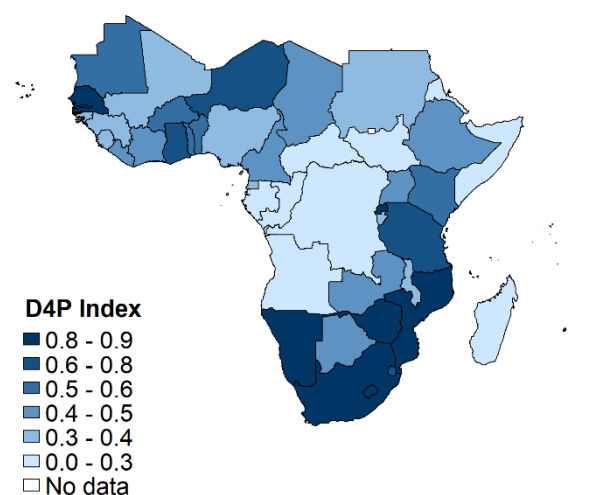
Source: Author's calculation based on the latest available D4P statistical operations

Nationally-Tailored Data Collection

The D4P approach is tailored to each country's capabilities, objectives, and priorities of National Statistics Offices (NSOs)—there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Countries can prioritize data collections and the D4P will not ask a country to abandon any well-functioning survey program.

While each country will pursue national priorities, D4P projects are ideally regional—recognizing the economies of scale in peer-to-peer learning, software licenses, and training, among others. The D4P initiative encourages regional cooperation to create comparable statistics across countries based on international methods and standards. Harmonized statistics are preferable because they tend to be useful for cross-

country comparisons and less subject to interference, and they also allow exploit economies of scale and cost-sharing of products such as software licenses.

Data collection under the D4P package will also aim to improve the quality and availability of gender-relevant and sex-disaggregated statistics, as well as, where feasible, disaggregating disability data. Survey data can be used, for instance, to obtain gender disaggregated information on assets, human capital indicators, employment, and labor markets outcomes to investigate gender gaps. Disability poses several challenges for measurement, such as varying approaches and operational measures. Yet, collecting accurate and nuanced information about people with different levels of disability, often lacking in developing countries, is crucial to identify unmet needs, barriers, and inequalities to inform development policies.

Leveraging New Technologies

The D4P also encourages using new technologies to collect, manage and analyze data. Within the D4P, interested countries can explore use of non-traditional data sources such as high-resolution satellite and remote sensing data, call detail records, social media, and financial transaction data, among others. This can provide valuable lessons over time to countries not yet ready to integrate them. Data from weather stations, satellite imagery, and drones can present low-cost options for regular updates and real-time monitoring of conditions on the ground, as well as to capture environmental sustainability data.

Satellite data can help monitor and predict movements of internally displaced people in conflict settings, as well as to help track poverty with increasing granularity and scope, in combination with machine-learning approaches. **Analysis of call detail records** also shows promise to estimate poverty quickly and inexpensively. **Crowdsourcing** can help track commodity prices, while construction of consumer price indices using **high-dimensional data** can complement traditional data collection.

The pledge to improve the availability of more and better data for policy making in developing countries is demonstrated in IDA19's commitment to support at least 30 IDA countries under the D4P agenda.[v] Benefits will be measured by the number of IDA countries supported to produce at least two of the core statistics included in the D4P package.

The D4P initiative represents the most current thinking on how to support IDA countries in pursuing data-driven policy to measure and monitor progress towards the 2030 SDGs. D4P looks beyond a single statistical operation and to core data sources needed to understand the constraints of poor and vulnerable groups, thinking about statistical capacity building in a comprehensive way, and leveraging technology, country ownership, peer-to-peer learning, and expansion of the use of data to promote sustainability of these efforts.

Early D4P Adopters

Pacific Island Countries (PICs)

The initial Pacific Statistics program includes 2 country-level projects in Kiribati and Tonga, as well as a regional organization project with the Statistics for Development Division of the Pacific Community (SDD-SPC), with plans to expand to other countries in the region. Both country-level projects include at least one round of the national Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES), including harmonized estimates for poverty and other important socioeconomic indicators. Beyond the HIES, however, the projects diverge with activities geared towards country needs. The Kiribati project includes review of national statistics legislation and recommendations reflecting the new data landscape, as well as expanding data collection in remote areas to understand the effectiveness of government price controls and policies related to copra (agricultural commodity produced from coconuts) markets. In Tonga, the project will include satellite national accounts focused on understanding effects of the growing tourism industry, and funding to upgrade census hardware to "geo-locate" each household in the

country—key information for disaster preparedness and risk mitigation in urban planning.

The regional project mixes traditional and new data activities. The project will fund organizational capacity expansion to assist countries in survey design and analysis, and strengthen regional institutions related to standards and data quality. The project will also, however, provide nearly US$1 million to fund innovation. The Pacific region poses unique challenges, and international standard approaches not be the most effective. Possible innovations include crowdsourcing price data collection for remote areas, using satellite imagery to estimate well-being and other key socioeconomic indicators, and combining census and household survey collection into an efficient long-form census.

West Africa

Valued at over US$350 million, the ambitious West Africa project includes 7 SSA countries: Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Togo. The project aims to:

- Increase comparability of core statistics

- Improve availability of quality, up-to-date core social, economic, and administrative statistics
- Improve price data and national accounts
- Increase accessibility to statistics and data
- Build institutional readiness and capacity for data production, dissemination, and usage

Similar to the Pacific, activities will be implemented at the country level as well as through regional organizations: Economic Community of West African States and the African Union.

This balance between regional harmonization and collaboration and tailoring to individual country needs exemplifies the D4P approach. Harmonized regional indicators strengthen data quality and decrease the chances of political interference. At the same time, the D4P does not replace well-functioning national systems, instead adapting those activities to the regional framework and targeting gaps. For example, Burkina Faso has long been implementing the Enquêtes Permanentes Agricoles annual agricultural survey, but has asked for assistance with economic statistics and national accounts. Five countries are interested in incorporating the use of big data, four want to strengthen their administrative statistics, and three target upgrades to their price data measurement.

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[i] See "Data for Development: A Needs Assessment for SDG Monitoring and Statistical Capacity Development." Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2015.

[ii] World Bank (2018). Data for Development. Independent Evaluation Group, Washington, DC: World Bank.

[iii] Specifically, Devarajan (2013) suggests implementing standards whereby all statistical activity is filtered through countries' National Statistical Development Strategies (NSDS) and encouraging donors to utilize countries' NSDS. Devarajan, S. 2013. "Africa's Statistical Tragedy." *Review of Income and Wealth,* 59: S9–S15.

[iv] The D4P index is the ratio of the sum of recently available statistical operations divided by the number of statistical operations under the D4P, excluding administrative and price data (which focus on quality rather than availability). For each country the D4P index assigns a "1" if statistical operation was conducted recently and within the timing recommended, and "0" otherwise.

[v] 'IDA19: Ten Years to 2030: Growth, People, Resilience,' Report from the Executive Directors of the International Development Association to the Board of Governors, Additions to IDA Resources: Nineteenth Replenishment, 2020. (p. 61).

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