



Transparency, Accountability
& Participation in Post-2015

www.tapnetwork2015.org

Non-Official Data for SDG Monitoring and Accountability

To meet the ambition of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) it is essential that they are matched by an equally comprehensive and inclusive monitoring and accountability framework. While National Statistical Offices (NSOs) and governments will be the primary bodies responsible for monitoring SDG progress, data being produced by other actors will also play a crucial role in providing a robust and accurate picture of progress at all levels. Therefore in addition to [recommendations for improvements to key indicators](#), the TAP network urges the IAEG-SDG and NSOs and governments to recognise the importance of 'non-official' data sources to effective monitoring and accountability in its final report to the UNSC.

What is “non-official data”?

Non-official data comes from a range of sources, inter alia, the UN, other multilateral institutions, civil society organisations, research institutions, academia the private sector and citizens themselves. It ranges from global surveys (e.g. Transparency International's [Global Corruption Barometer](#) and the [Open Budget Survey](#)) and indices (e.g. UNDP's [Multidimensional Poverty Index](#)) to personal, qualitative data generated by some of the world's most marginalised people at the local level (e.g. citizen-generated data project [Map Kibera](#)). It also includes data translated from publicly available (open) data sets to track a specific phenomenon/issue (e.g. Publish What You Fund's [Aid Transparency Index](#)) and information collated through expert assessments (e.g. CIVICUS' annual [State of Civil Society Report](#)). All of these data sources will play a critical role in measuring progress against the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

The value of “non-official data”

There is a compelling case for the creation of a pluralistic ecosystem of data production which includes the use of non-official data:

Filling data gaps and capacity: Non-official data can complement official sources of data, fill data gaps that exist in a timely way and supplement official reporting when data quality is insufficient. It can therefore help take the burden off NSOs whilst ensuring that we're comprehensively measuring progress towards the SDGs, at all levels. In particular, civil society and citizen-generated data can help provide an accurate snapshot of progress in local contexts, including amplifying the perceptions and voices of those typically marginalised and hard to reach.

Fulfilling commitments to multi-stakeholder partnerships: The private sector is being called upon to help finance the SDGs. UN agencies and civil society groups are being called up for help to implement them. Why should this multi-stakeholder approach not apply to measurement and monitoring?

Driving Innovation and build capacity: Innovation will be richest when it involves a diverse range of actors working together as part of an open and dynamic ecosystem of data production. Collaborative working between NSOs and non-official data producers can also help build one another's capacities, skills and shared practices, especially if secondments and fellowships are utilised.

Broad ownership and accuracy of data: Country ownership is about much more than state ownership; Pluralistic, inclusive data production will also mean data ownership across society and help make public engagement in the SDGs agenda more meaningful. Non-official data can also help improve the accuracy and impartiality of official reporting, and raise the alarm if these processes become politicized. This will play a key role in ensuring legitimacy of our collective data, and painting a truly accurate picture of progress towards the SDGs.

Accountability: Policymakers not only need data to make decisions, but civil society, opposition politicians, activists and the media need it to hold them to account. Non-official data offers a crucial check and balance that can help ensure that official data portrays the genuine reality within society. Especially when it comes to issues like justice, the rule of law or human rights, should official bodies be given the sole responsibility for monitoring state performance? Use of a balanced range of sources could be important to build public trust and credibility in the SDGs and how they are being monitored.

What the 2030 Agenda says about "non-official data"

While the 2030 Agenda contains some positive language about creating an inclusive framework for action on sustainable development at all levels, there is insufficient appreciation of the vital role that non-official data can play in measuring and monitoring the SDGs. It does state that the SDG follow-up and review process will be rigorous, based on evidence, timely, reliable and disaggregated by a different groups in society - all of which non-official data can make a crucial contribution to making a reality. Indeed, the 2030 Agenda states that, while the global review should be "*primarily based on national official data sources*", it will also "*promote transparent and accountable scaling-up of appropriate public-private cooperation to exploit the contribution to be made by a wide range of data, including earth observation and geo-spatial information, while ensuring national ownership in supporting and tracking progress.*" As such, there is a strong foundation for partnership between official and non-official data producers outlined by the 2030 Agenda.

Challenges and opportunities to tackle in partnership

Despite the large amount and often high quality of non-official data, it is usually sector-specific and generated through a wide range of uncoordinated initiatives. Only a relatively small

number of large international organisations and initiatives are currently able to effectively aggregate data generated in different local contexts. Utilising and aggregating the rich data generated by a diverse range of actors – including data collected at the sub-national level – is a big challenge given the significant variance in focus, format and quality.

But an inclusive follow-up and review process which includes clear mechanisms for governments and civil society stakeholders to work together in partnership would help increase the coherence, coordination and utility of this data for SDG monitoring. And if non-official data producers follow the same methodological standards as NSOs – and are open to similar levels of scrutiny – then there is every reason to view their data as equally valid.

To realise the full potential of non-official data NSOs and other data providers must work together. Some governments will still need convincing that civil society organisations and citizen-generated data initiatives can provide data that is both useable and credible. It will be necessary, therefore, to concretely demonstrate the value and viability of collaboratively using this data in practice.

But ultimately, if the final indicator set proposed the IAEG-SDGs is to adequately measure progress against all SDG targets, it will require non-official data to be leveraged for reporting processes at all levels. The ideal SDG monitoring system would therefore draw on multiple sources of data in a complementary way, leveraging the comparative advantages of each data type.

The TAP Network and all other CSOs look forward to working with NSOs and a diverse range of other data producers to turn this vision into a reality.