

African Data Consensus: Key Stepping Stone to Achieving the Data Revolution

Bill Anderson, April 2015

It is rare to leave an international conference very satisfied with my participation, even better, happy that my organisation's contributions and that of other communities really mattered. Yet I did, during the High Level Conference (HLC) on the Data Revolution in Africa held March 27-29 in Addis Ababa Ethiopia. This is a conference that was unique in many aspects. In Africa, the geographic extent and socio-economic, political and cultural diversity of the continent presents very unique opportunities and challenges. An Africa-sensitive data revolution needs to embrace these contextual challenges and opportunities – socio-economic, cultural and political – in order to design or define interventions that are relevant. It must be consciously aware of existing inequalities, digital divides, poverty dynamics and their drivers, and priorities for both government and citizens.

“Revolutions are not for the faint hearted. Revolutions are about taking apart the past and constructing the future. We need to cast the future for ourselves on the African continent.” – Mr. Trevor Manuel, Deputy Chairperson of the South African branch of the Rothschild Group and former Finance Minister

Process and Approach

Earlier in the year the [co-organisers](#) of the HLC; UN Economic Commission for Africa, the African Union, the African Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme, reached out to a range of organisations through a survey to identify their work, data activities, and the priorities in the data revolution, including thoughts on the structure of the HLC itself. The result of the survey resulted to what would eventually be 15 “[data communities](#)” comprising groups with common interests related to the objectives of the data revolution. The groups self-organised with leadership from a convening organisation that mobilised stakeholders to contribute ideas to the final [African Data Consensus](#) (ADC) document – a key output of the HLC that was adopted by the 8th joint ECA-AU Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development on 30th March 2015.

As a [partner](#) to the organisers, alongside [PARIS21](#), [South African Statistics](#) and [World Wide Web Foundation, Development Initiatives](#) (DI) also convened the “Development Data Community.” In the lead up to the HLC, DI Africa Hub in partnership with [Hivos East Africa](#) and [Local Development Research Institute \(LDRI\)](#) planned a meeting of Kenyan participants to discuss effective ways to engage during the HLC. The meeting held on Tuesday 10th March provided more information on the conference and brainstormed on ideas for effective engagement. The main outcome was a vision and set of principles shared with a group of organisations across the continent during a meeting held on 20th March, and also shared with the conference organisers.

As a convener of the development data community, DI drafted a paper responding to a set of questions presented by organisers and shared this with over 50 stakeholders across the continent

for input. Their feedback was compiled into a final draft shared with organisers, other communities, and tabled on the first day of the conference on 27th March as an official community paper for deliberation and further input. DI invited Mr. Alex Ezeh, Executive Director at APHRC, and Dr. Bitange Ndemo, former Permanent Secretary in the ICT Ministry in Kenya, among other high profile individuals, to join community discussions and further enrich the paper. Pleasantly surprising, the organisers did not have a draft ADC document prior to the meeting and relied on the communities' input for content – a first for this nature of conference. We also discovered there were no separate meeting rooms for the communities, and we had to find space within the conference room for the discussions. Given the importance of the subject it didn't really matter – any space, including under a tree would have sufficed.



Dr. Bitange Ndemo (in the background) makes his point while DI's Africa Regional Director Charles Lwanga-Ntale (standing on the right), and other development data community members listen during discussions at the HLC. Photo: Davis Adieno – DI Africa Hub



The Community and Citizen Data community (foreground) organised by Hivos East Africa and other communities (see white flip charts in the background) engage their members during the HLC conference. Photo: Davis Adieno – DI Africa Hub

People Count: The Importance of Development Data

The development data community paper recognised the importance of **making people count by counting them**. This, it proposed, could be achieved by developing and strengthening civil registration systems and making improvements in administrative data – with particular emphasis on health, education, land and agricultural management information systems in Africa. It further proposed that National Statistics Development Strategy (NSDS) encompass all activities relating to the collection of data and compilation of statistics.

The paper further emphasised the important **role of development data in driving evidence-based development decision making**. Beyond monitoring development the community recognised the need for Development data to drive development. Decision makers therefore need usable information based on data that is disaggregated down to the local level and is both timely and accurate. Those who hold them to account also need this information (and the data upon which it is based) to be openly accessible. The community was happy that most of its recommendations were taken on board in the final consensus document.

Charting the way forward

On the last day of the conference (30th March), DI was tasked by community members to convene a stakeholders meeting to reflect on the immediate outcomes of the conference, find practical ways to engage beyond the conference, and forge a loose network to share materials, experiences and ideas. A steering committee was established comprising of INDEPTH Network-Ghana, ONE Campaign-South Africa, IPAR-Senegal, CDD-Ghana, Hivos East Africa-Kenya, and DI Africa Hub-Kenya. Each organisation was tasked to lead regional engagements and draw more institutions that were not

part of the HLC. A series of meetings and intense discussions are currently underway. A Google Group (Data Revolution for Africa) has also been created to facilitate engagements. The key action points in the ADC document are providing direction, and guiding country level engagements on the DR in the lead up to the Financing for Development Conference to be held in Addis Ababa in July 2015.

At the national level in Kenya, DI is partnering with Hivos East Africa and other like minded organisations to plan a series of stakeholders meetings, including a national roundtable forum within the second quarter of 2015, to assemble government, development partners, CSOs, media, private sector, among others to define practical models for implementing the data revolution – drawing on their individual strengths, programme areas and any other complementarities that may further and sustain the DR agenda.

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