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Sustainable data, sustainable systems

Opening remarks to the Uganda High
Level National Data Forum

Bill Anderson

Honourable Second Deputy Prime Minister, Executive Director of UBOS,
fellow data revolutionaries

My colleague, Bernard Sabiti, who has, I understand, been an indispensable member of the programme committee for this forum, has given me instructions to say a little bit about Development Initiatives as this is a question he is regularly asked. What is DI doing on this platform?

I hope it is not an exaggeration to say that DI is one of the biggest users of UBOS data. Our business is data: data on poverty; data on the deployment of resources to eradicate poverty; and, increasingly, the data revolution itself.

Today, as part of our online global Development Data Hub, we are releasing the latest version of our Spotlight on Uganda visualisations which contain a wealth of the most recent district-level data produced by UBOS, as well as the ministries of Agriculture, Education, Finance, Health and Water & Environment.

This afternoon we will demonstrate an innovative tool that we are developing – the Development Data Assessment. It empirically maps the data collected from all primary sources against national, regional and global indicators.

And this week we have also released a report on the pro-poor orientation of the 2017/18 budget.

Over the last couple of years DI has increasingly become involved in the politics of the data revolution - both in Africa and globally. Our approach to this work has been informed primarily by our work in Uganda.

I would like to pose a question: What is so **revolutionary** about this data revolution? Is this just **rhetoric**? Or are we in fact just involved in a data **evolution**?

A central cornerstone of the 2030 agenda is that no one should be left behind. How we can achieve this if we don't know who the excluded and dispossessed are and where they live? In other words, we need to count people. All the people. All the time.

The census does a good job of this. But only every ten years. Household surveys produce useful national estimates, but they are of little use to a District Chief Administrative Officer who needs accurate and timely information about those most in need under his or her jurisdiction.

In countries like Denmark the bureau of statistics does not conduct a census. It does not conduct household surveys. It can however produce current census-type data any day of the year at the flick of a button. How is this possible? Through years of investments in data infrastructures, registries and administrative systems.

If this is best practice in the developed world, why is this approach not at the heart of investments in the developing world? Is there, in addition to the global digital divide, a moral divide?

Donors and policy makers, by and large, live in a short-term world. They make investments for which they expect returns in 3 to 5 years. The World Bank, for example has committed itself to raising 1.5 billion dollars for household surveys over the next 15 years. Its fund for civil registration and vital statistics, however, has failed to attract a quarter of this.

This is why we do indeed need a revolution. To leave no one behind we need to count people. All people, all of the time. To count people we need sustainable data infrastructures supported by sustainable funding.

To **monitor** the SDGs we can produce national estimates that will satisfy global institutions. To **meet** national development plans and the SDGs we need to build sustainable systems, sustainably funded that tell the story of every parish and every village.

Is this possible?

I think two things are necessary.

Firstly, we need to make the argument for long-term investments in a short-term world. DI is committed to fighting this battle wherever we get the chance.

The work being done in Uganda to build CRVS systems and to integrate all identity registries needs all the support it can get. As does UBOS's

Community Information System which has the potential to deliver a census every year at roughly the same cost as the existing 10-yearly census. Our Spotlight on Uganda also shows the wealth of district-level statistics emerging from administrative systems in many ministries.

Secondly, we need partnerships. We need an inclusive community of data producers and users. An inclusive national statistics system.

Here is a definition of a national statistical system. It is one that “includes **all** agencies ... whether **Government or not** responsible, whether under any enactment **or otherwise** for gathering statistical data directly through surveys or through administrative action.” I am of course quoting from the UBOS Act of 1998. In this, as in many areas, Uganda leads the way when it comes to statistical development in Africa.

This revolution has a long and hard path to travel to reach its goals. We in DI are committed to going on this journey with you.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to work with you on this ground-breaking National Data Forum.

Development Initiatives (DI) is an independent international development organisation working on the use of data to drive poverty eradication and sustainable development. Our vision is a world without poverty that invests in human security and where everyone shares the benefits of opportunity and growth.

We work to ensure that decisions about the allocation of finance and resources result in an end to poverty, increase the resilience of the world's most vulnerable people, and ensure no one is left behind.

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