Friday Seminar on Emerging Issues: Open data - Adding value by matching access with privacy and security

3 March 2017

Summary

The 2017 Friday Seminar on Emerging Issues[i] dealt with Open data initiatives as one of the latest innovative and progressive trends in statistics. The Seminar focused on taking stock how countries around the world are advancing on open data and showcased best practices.

The keynote address was delivered by Shaida Badee, Partner and co-founder of Open Data Watch. Ms. Badee highlighted the importance and legitimacy of Open data for official statistics and emphasized the need to integrate Open data into national statistical programmes to support modernization and efficiency. She informed that 75 countries are currently part of the Open Data Charter. Open data platforms create increased citizen access to official statistics thereby increasing public trust in data produced by national statistical offices.

The event was organized in four substantive panels covering the various aspects of the development and use of open data platforms: Partnerships; Technology; Legislation and institutional environment; and Capacity building and resource mobilization. The presentations of each panel session and the subsequent discussions articulated the diverse viewpoints of the various partner communities.

The Seminar brought together heads of national statistical offices, Chief Statisticians of regional and international organizations with technology companies and other private sector and civil society members of the growing open data community.

In the panel on **Partnerships**, the Seminar proposed to continue the strategic dialogue on developing and maintaining open data initiatives under the aegis of the Statistical Commission and through close collaboration between national statistical offices and other government agencies, regional and international statistical organizations, private sector companies, academia and civil society partners. In this context, collaboration with civil society is critical in such areas as principles, readiness and evaluation of the openness of data. Panellists and participants emphasized that collaboration with academia and technology companies is essential for building portable and interoperable common technology

infrastructure as a public good. The Seminar expressed the view that collaboration and partnerships in open data initiatives contribute to unlocking the transformative potential of technology and data in an open platform environment in support of sustainable development and good governance.

The panel on **Technology** recognized the need to promote innovative tools and information technology solutions, open source applications, and advanced computing capability. These innovations should supplement existing statistical methodology and contribute to the availability and sharing of latest technologies for data storage, processing, analytics and dissemination at country level, including through cloud based platforms. An emerging theme across the presentations was that some of the more advanced, innovative technologies and approaches to data architecture and management were supportive to making data more open.

The panel on **Legislation and institutional environment** discussed a critical aspect of open data initiatives and emphasized the importance of ensuring that the principles of data rights and access are matched with strict ethical and security protocols as well as secure technology platforms. Taking into due consideration the relevance and implications of open data initiatives, the Seminar supported that the principles of the Open Data Charter should feed into the implementation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. It held equally important asking the Statistical Commission to support efforts and strengthen capability at the country level to ensure that appropriate statistical legislation is in place, Codes of Practice for official statistics are followed to facilitate data right and access while protecting data confidentiality and the privacy of persons, private and public sector and civil society organizations.

In the panel on **Capacity building and resource mobilization**, it was emphasized that core elements of building knowledge and elevating professional skills for efficient open data operations require increased attention. The Seminar considered essential to raise awareness of the official statistical community about the available latest legislative, technological and capacity building expertise and facilitate resource mobilization through traditional and innovative financing mechanisms, including public-private partnerships.

The **closing panel session** concluded that the best practices of the open data initiatives presented at the Seminar demonstrated considerable progress on open data in countries around the world. The benefits of the open data platforms in providing free access and use of

data for purposes of transparency, accountability and daily decision making were recognized. The Seminar agreed to take forward to the Statistical Commission a proposal on the need to encourage national statistical offices to embrace open data initiatives, explore ways to utilize the benefits of open data platforms and lead and support the various levels of government and other partners in their contributions to the national open data initiatives. Panellists and interventions from the floor supported the view that national statistical offices should have central and strong leadership role in the expanding data ecosystem.

The Seminar recognized the close connection and interrelationships between the emerging issue of open data platforms and other relevant, new initiatives included in the agenda of the 48th session of the Statistical Commission. Those include primarily the items Data and indicators for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Big data for official statistics, Transformative agenda for official statistics and Quality assurance in the global statistical system. Therefore, in conclusion of the Friday Seminar proposed improving the coordination across these interconnected activities in order to create synergies of the various emerging issues.

The Friday Seminar generated a wealth of ideas on which the statistical community can take further actions to move the use of Open Data in official statistics forward, utilize the benefits of open data platforms and enhance the capacity of national statistical offices to embrace open data initiatives.

In an oral report under agenda item 3(a) Data and indicators for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the outcome and proposed follow-up actions of the Friday seminar were brought to the attention of the 48th session of the Statistical Commission by a statement of the representative of Mexico on behalf of the moderators of the Friday Seminar for the consideration by the Commission.

The Statistical Commission welcomed and supported the conclusions of the Friday Seminar that is reflected in the relevant decision adopted on 10 March as part of the report on the 48th session of the Commission. Specifically, the Commission acknowledged that Open Data initiatives that are explicitly referenced in the Cape Town Global Action Plan can play a critical role in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Moreover, the Statistical Commission encouraged groups working on big data, transformation and modernization of official statistics, fundamental principles of official

statistics and quality frameworks to take relevant aspects of Open Data into account in their respective work programmes. The Commission also agreed to include Open Data as an item on the agenda of its 49th session in 2018.

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[i] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/48th-session/side-events/20170303-1M-friday-seminar-on-emerging-issues/