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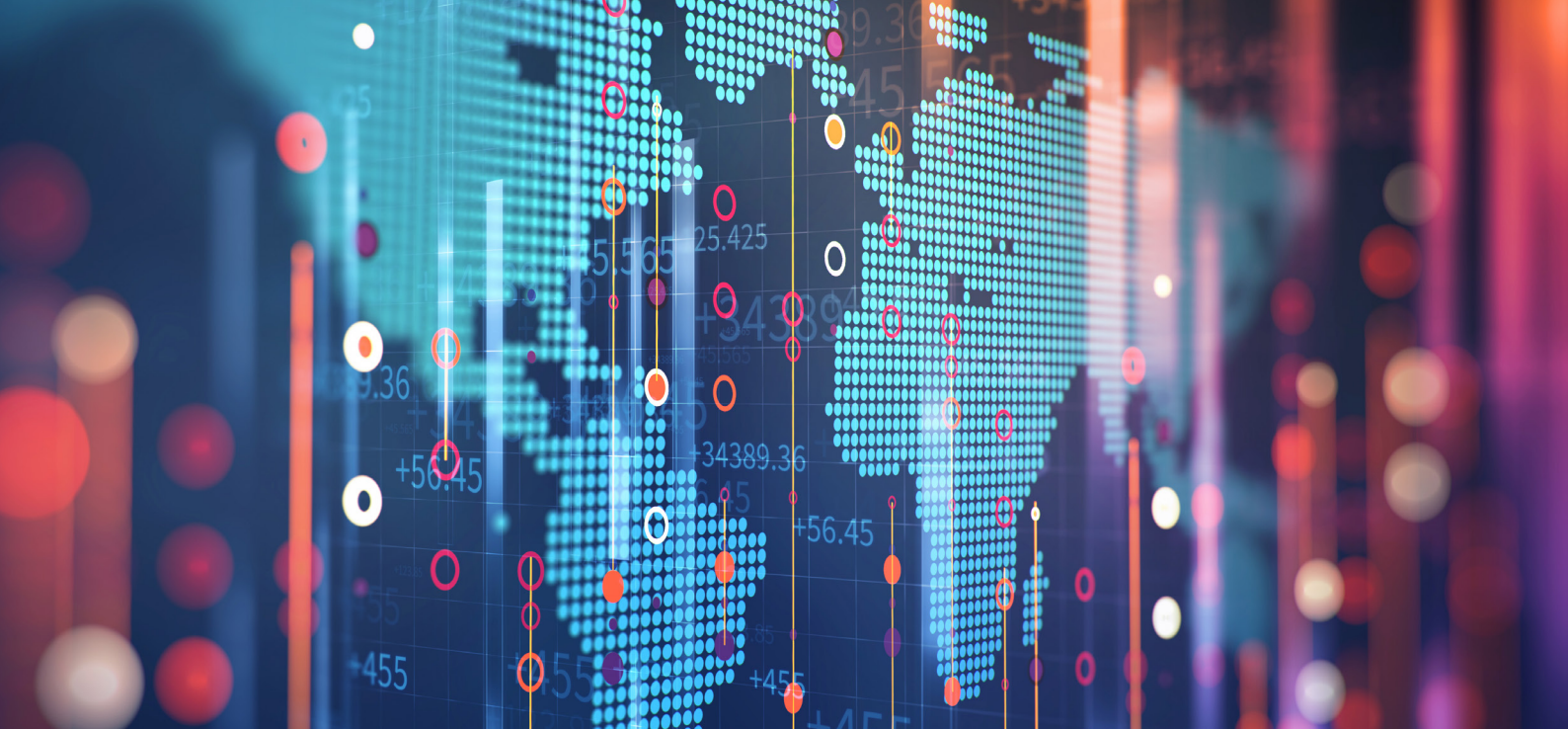
**2021 ANNUAL
MEETINGS**

**DATA AS A PUBLIC GOOD: BUILDING
RESILIENCE FOR A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD**

29 MARCH - 01 APRIL 2021

CONCEPT NOTE





SETTING THE SCENE

Recent years have seen a surge in data and data-related activities in the economy. Data allow for optimised processes, informed decisions and adequate planning. Governments too, have recognized that data can become the “lifeblood of decision-making” and search for approaches to provide data as a public good (OECD, 2019[1]). In this context, a public good refers to a commodity or service that is made available to all members of a society. Typically, these services are administered by governments and paid for collectively through taxation (Samuelson, 1954[2]). Governments choose to provide public goods in cases where their provision brings greater value to society, including businesses, academia and citizens. Data used with a concrete vision and governed by strong institutions may translate into greater productivity in the economy and drive firm dynamics, as well as contribute to better decision-making and service delivery in the public sector (OECD, 2019[3]).

Creating public value through data poses challenges

Unlocking the value of data as a public good still poses unique challenges. Theoretically, the same people can use data at the same time without reducing the data’s utility. For instance, satellite data can help policy makers to understand population density better in times of crisis. At the same time, it might help businesses to look into electricity grids and improve their services. Yet, creating wider social value through greater data openness is inhibited by the sensitivity of certain data. Providing sensitive data to the public without adequate safeguards in place can cause harm to people (Coyle et al., 2020[4]). Moreover, public data infrastructure comes with high costs and management responsibilities. Developing countries, in particular, struggle to mobilise resources for such investments. Recent data show donor’s support to statistics remains low and highly fragmented (PARIS21, 2020[5]) A greater understanding of the value of data would thus help identify where the benefits of greater investment in and sharing of data occur.

A renewed importance on data and digital governance in times of a pandemic

The current COVID-19 pandemic shed light on the importance of data-driven decision-making and digital governance. Governments, businesses and citizens all over the world shifted rapidly towards mobile communications, digital payments and administrative e-processes. In the public space, decision-making relied more than ever before on data integration; and governments in many high-income countries started launching COVID-tracing applications to quickly source-in data on contact patterns of their citizens. Emerging online data hubs and integrated systems identified most deprived sub-populations that needed immediate policy response (OECD, 2020[6]).

However, in least developed and fragile states, government data systems were not yet ready to operate in a digital-first approach. As countries adopted stringent containment measures, national statistical offices and other institutions struggled to adopt teleworking arrangements. Traditional, face-to-face data collection stalled in the first months of the pandemic reducing frequency and timeliness of data available, and many countries had to postpone their censuses. A majority of national statistical systems indicated that they required more and better support in dealing with the consequences of the pandemic while maintaining statistical operations in their countries (World Bank, UNSD, 2020[7]), (Misra, Schmidt and Harrison, 2020[8]).

The urgency to fill immediate information gaps created a reliance on external capacity support and data reuse, often involving data from non-traditional sources. Development cooperation providers stepped in and launched high-frequency phone surveys and big data initiatives to fill the emerging data gaps. The World Bank for instance, launched a series of phone surveys in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria and Uganda to track responses to and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. (World Bank, 2020[9]). The digital giants, Google, Apple and Microsoft have all made some of their data available. Google published Community Mobility Reports to trace the crisis outbreak better and Microsoft Bing collated open data resources (Coyle, 2020[10]).

Structural weaknesses require action by the global community

Overall, the crisis led bare core weaknesses in today's data systems that require further action by policy makers, development cooperation partners and international organisations:

Firstly, legal frameworks and governance processes are the backbone of data-driven policymaking. With new data sources emerging, statistical systems need to find ways to modernize and use those sources while protecting citizen's privacy (Pisa et al., 2020[11]). Yet, adequate regulations and safeguards to govern the modern data ecosystem are still lacking (Verhulst and Zahuranec, 2020[12]). Such safeguards are especially important in the context of developing countries, where a deficiency of legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms for coordination, regulating data-sharing and protecting privacy and confidentiality hinder the sustainable use of new technologies and inter-government data sharing.

Secondly, the crisis underscored the need for new skillsets and competencies. In many low-and middle-income countries, a highly skilled workforce capable of collecting, producing, and disseminating official statistics is a rare resource (PARIS21 and Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2021[13]). Many statistical systems are understaffed and their employees insufficiently trained. In addition, many institutions within the NSS suffer from high turnover of their skilled workforce. Potential reasons might be a lack of opportunities to learn on the job or limited career development prospects. Skilling up and re-skilling the workforce, particularly civil servants, and national statistical offices, in order to adapt to the 'new normal' is thus imperative (Melhem, Lawal and Bashir, 2020[14]).

Thirdly, the crisis unveiled latent mistrust in data and evidence. Emerging new data actors published data on infections, fatality and recovery rates during the pandemic. Yet the quality remained largely unchecked and led policymakers and citizens astray (Misra and Schmidt, 2020[15]). A contemporary scepticism towards expertise coupled with low trust in public institutions further exacerbates this trend (Dimock, 2020[16]). An analysis from Edelman's Global Trust Barometer points to a mounting trust gap between the informed public and mass population, between 2007-2020, for all key institutions: businesses, non-governmental organisations, government and media (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2020[17]). Participation and engagement with local data actors have become pivotal in designing inclusive solutions that uplift the most vulnerable and foster trust in data and the institutions that produce them (PARIS21, 2021[18]).

Questions around data governance, technical infrastructure, skillsets and civic participation thus call for a greater vision of managing the "digital commons" – a term used by economists to describe the problem of organizing the distribution and ownership of information and technology in a community (Ostrom, 2009[19]).

A pathway to more resilient data ecosystems

Approaching data as a public good, organised around principles of inclusive data governance, can help to build national data ecosystems that are more resilient in the face of crises. Modern legal frameworks will enable them to take ownership of the data that are produced in their country. Systemic training programmes will strengthen the capabilities to analyse, and disseminate the data quickly and accurately. Finally, more participatory approaches to data collection, production and dissemination and a larger engagement with local data holders and the civil society will forge trust in data and strengthen accountability throughout the data ecosystem.

The development community has to reset priorities and define pathways to transition smartly into a fairer and a more sustainable future post-COVID-19. Strategic support to core data capacity and system-wide digital governance should become a major focus of a new development deal. Statistical capacity should be treated as a public good, with countries and the development community working towards principles of inclusive data governance (PARIS21, 2020[20]). New development strategies need to place broad-based design and risk-informed data analysis at the core of sustainable development. Programming requires system-wide and longer-term vision and should aim at the welfare of societies, underpinned by more and flexible financing (OECD, 2020[21]).

PARIS21 together with its partners is committed to work towards the building blocks of resilient and modern data ecosystems that harness the value of data for the larger social and economic value and contribute to a sustainable and inclusive recovery. This conference will provide first insights into critical debates around the three foundational pillars of a resilient data ecosystem post-COVID-19. During four days, PARIS21 will convene policy makers, digital law experts, national statistical offices, civil society and academia to discuss the state of statistical systems and commit to regional strategies in a post-COVID-19 world.

OBJECTIVE OF THE MEETING

PARIS21 collaborates with national statistical offices, development partners, multilateral institutions, and data and policy stakeholders to improve and strengthen statistical systems. For more than two decades, it has stood out as a forum and network to promote, influence and facilitate statistical capacity development and the better use of statistics.

As outlined in the PARIS21 2021-2025 Strategy, the Secretariat will leverage the experience and expertise of our partners to create interventions that are impactful, comprehensive and relevant to national statistical systems. In this way, the 2021 Annual Meetings provide a platform to amplify the voices of our partners and create synergies between new and existing global, regional, national and subnational partners to create greater combined effects in supporting evidence-based policies as well as inclusive and sustainable development trajectories.

The 2021 Annual Meetings will feature a series of virtual events over the course of four days that explore the role of data as a public good in contributing to sustainable and inclusive post-COVID-19 recovery and creating resilient societies. This year, a series of regional events will facilitate discussions between practitioners from a similar geographic area. The perspectives from those meetings will then be brought together in a global meeting.

The objectives of the meeting are to:

- **Foster understanding around data as a public good in moving towards resilient and post-modern societies**
- **Enhance mutual learning and exchange of best practices on how to build back better statistical systems on national and regional levels**
- **Explore opportunities for aligning agendas put forward by policy makers, statisticians development cooperation providers and international organisations**

OUTCOMES

As concrete outcomes of the regional discussions, the participants of the Board Meeting 2021 will report back in the global session on the following elements:

- Core elements of a legal framework and sustainable governance processes
- A set of digital skills and competencies needed to establish resilient data ecosystems
- A set of mechanisms to improve participation and engagement with different data actors



AGENDA

29 MARCH MONDAY

14:00 – 14:45

OPENING PANEL

Data as a public good

A chance to build back better

15:00 – 16:30

REGIONAL SESSION

Africa & MENA

Data leaders of tomorrow – Building skills, competencies and resources

17:00 – 17:30

FIRESIDE CHAT

Is data literacy worth it?

We know the theory, can we make the practice work?

30 MARCH TUESDAY

09:00 – 10:30

REGIONAL SESSION

Asia & the Pacific

The right approach to data governance - Elements of an enabling legal and institutional environment

14:00 – 14:45

SPOTLIGHT

The Clearinghouse for Financing Development Data

Smarter financing for development data

16:30 – 18:00

REGIONAL SESSION

Latin America

Strengthening participation – Multi-stakeholder approaches to data

31 MARCH WEDNESDAY

14:00 – 15:00

GLOBAL SESSION

Towards a joint commitment

Bringing regions together

15:00 – 15:30

CLOSING PANEL

Data as a global public good

The way forward?

01 APRIL THURSDAY

14:00-16:00

PARIS21 BOARD MEETING

Closed session for PARIS21 Board Members

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