

# **CIVIL SOCIETY AND SDG MONITORING: HARNESSING CIVIL SOCIETY AND CITIZEN-GENERATED DATA**

Draft for Comment

July 2015

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be agreed by world leaders at the Post-2015 Summit in September 2015. These goals will guide the world's priorities and actions on sustainable development for at least the next decade. As part of this process, a 'data revolution for sustainable development' has been called for, to ensure we have the information needed to make the best policy choices, hold decision makers to account on their commitments and track SDG progress at the local, national, regional and global levels.

Civil society has an opportunity, as well as a responsibility, to ensure the SDGs, and the data revolution, spur the transformational changes that are required to tackle the huge global challenges, but also leverage the exciting opportunities, that we face.

One concrete way we can do this is by harnessing civil society and citizen-generated data to monitor, promote and drive SDG progress. A huge amount of civil society data already exists. At the same time, civil society and citizens are leveraging technology to generate and use new data in creative ways.

While the current zero draft of the post-2015 outcome document is weak on the role of third party data sources for SDG monitoring, we believe that civil society needs to move forward with these efforts - whether there is space for civil society and citizen-generated data to be used in official SDG monitoring processes, or through some form of shadow monitoring which needs to be put in place.

The objective of this background note is to support conversations amongst civil society about how we can collaborate to ensure that we are leveraging civil society and citizen-generated data to monitor and drive progress on the SDGs in the best way we can.

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## THE SOURCES: WHAT DATA IS AVAILABLE?

### CIVIL SOCIETY DATA

Civil society organisations produce and use huge amounts of data. This data can be quantitative or qualitative, structured or unstructured data, and open or closed. It comes in a number of formats, ranging from traditional numerical information to text, audio or photos. This includes data that is:

- collected to understand the experiences, perceptions and needs of the communities we work with, using tools such as surveys
- produced to support the implementation of projects and programmes
- generated to monitor and evaluate the impact of interventions
- translated from publicly available (open) data sets to track a specific phenomenon/issue (e.g. Publish What You Fund's [Aid Transparency Index](#))
- collated through expert assessments of relevant regulations and the performance of government and other actors (e.g. Transparency International's [Global Corruption Barometer](#) and CIVICUS' annual [State of Civil Society Report](#)).

This data is used to support a number of different civil society activities. These activities include:

- putting an issue on the agenda and advocating for change (e.g. ActionAid's [Making Care Visible](#) report)
- giving voice to the voiceless (e.g. IDS' [Participate](#) initiative)
- understanding and assessing needs and demands (e.g. World Vision's [Citizen Voice and Action](#))

### CITIZEN-GENERATED DATA

Citizen-generated data is data produced directly by people and their organisations to monitor, demand or drive change on the issues that affect them. It is actively given by citizens and provides direct representations of citizen perspectives. It is generated in a number of ways, including surveys, SMS, phone calls, emails, reports, story-telling, sensors and social media. Like civil society data, it can come in a number of forms.

Typically, citizen-generated data is collected through a specific initiative that aims to have a positive social impact. For example, an initiative might address corruption, sexual harassment, service delivery, or environmental degradation. These initiatives often use platforms such as [Ushahidi](#) and [Crowdmap](#) to generate and display the data in an accessible way. In most cases citizen-generated data initiatives are created by civil society organisations, however they can also emerge from businesses, governments and

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international institutions (including the UN).

The DataShift recently undertook a [study](#) to better understand the number, type, scale and motivation of citizen-generated data initiatives across the world. The study highlighted 50 innovative, locally-driven initiatives which use a number of different platforms and approaches, across a range of thematic issues. Some examples include:

- [HarassMap](#), a platform for people in Egypt to report incidents of sexual harassment and assault via SMS and other means. Data is used as evidence to highlight the scale of sexual harassment and assault.
- [Caminos de la Villa](#), a platform which logs and maps rights violations in the 'villas' of the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, via SMS.
- [Check My School](#), a participatory public education monitoring program in the Philippines. Parents are encouraged to send in feedback about schools via SMS, twitter and other media and can be connected directly with the Department of Education.
- [Plankton Portal](#), which uses crowdsourcing to locate and classify different photos of plankton to help scientists better understand the function and health of the ocean from small to global scales.

Reports and photos submitted by users are verified by other citizens

Motivations for developing these initiatives included: supplementing or challenging government data and/or functions; improving access to data and information; and making data available where data does not exist or is not available to the public.

International NGOs are also experimenting with citizen-generated data. World Vision's [Citizen Voice and Action](#) is a "social accountability" methodology which aims to improve the dialogue between communities and government in order to improve services (like health care and education) that impact the daily lives of children and their families. After learning about their rights, communities produce data which compares their lived reality of service delivery against the government's own commitments. This data is then used by the communities to influence decision makers to improve services.

Similarly, international organisations are investing in citizen-generated data. [MY World](#), for example, is a United Nations survey which asks individuals to rank the issues that matter most to them. This data is being drawn on to inform negotiations and decision making on what the SDGs should be.

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## THE CASE: WHY CIVIL SOCIETY AND CITIZEN-GENERATED DATA SHOULD INFORM SDG MONITORING

There is a strong consensus, partly based on lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), that citizen and civil society engagement is critical to the design, implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. In the context of the SDGs, civil society and citizen-generated data could play an important role in monitoring and driving progress on sustainable development at the local, national, regional and global levels. Civil society and citizen-generated 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. Beyond this, it is often produced in real or near-time, is grounded in local context and can amplify citizen voices and perspectives on SDG progress, including of those typically marginalized and hard to reach. The production and use of citizen-generated data can also enable the direct, active and invested participation of people in the SDGs.

Civil society and citizen-generated data could inform the SDG follow up and review mechanisms at all levels:

- **National level:** Civil society and citizen-generated data could feed into national review mechanisms as evidence of the realities experienced by people on the ground. This could include input into national stakeholder reports and official reports on SDG progress.
- **Regional level:** Civil society and citizen-generated data could feed into regional peer review processes to learn from and spur SDG progress.
- **Global level:** Civil society and citizen-generated data could inform the dialogue on SDG progress facilitated by the High Level Political Forum, including potential thematic reviews. It could be included in the Global Sustainable Development Report and/or in a parallel civil society-led shadow reporting process.

This does not mean that civil society and citizen-generated data should be the only data that is drawn on. Official statistics have a critical role to play and other new forms of data – such as big data – need to be leveraged. But as Thomas Wheeler, of SaferWorld, has argued, 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. Pluralistic data production will also mean data ownership across society.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://post2015.org/2015/06/04/who-should-measure-the-sustainable-development-goals/>

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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 POST-2015 INTER-GOVERNMENTAL NEGOTIATIONS

The intergovernmental negotiations to agree the outcome document of the Post-2015 Summit in September this year are reaching their final phase. This document and the framework of goals, targets and indicators it contains will shape global efforts on sustainable development for at least the next decade.

In May this year, negotiations focused on the topic of follow-up and review of the new framework. Since these discussions, a 'zero draft' of the outcome document has been published. The zero draft contains a number of introductory references to follow-up and review, along with a specific section (III) on this topic. At the global level, follow up and review will be facilitated through the new High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).

While the zero draft contains some positive language about creating an inclusive post-2015 agenda, there is insufficient appreciation of the vital role civil society

can play in monitoring the SDGs and almost no commitment to the creation of specific mechanisms that would enable civil society to actively contribute to this process.<sup>2</sup> As we have outlined in our [analysis of the zero draft](#), there is also no recognition of the importance of data generated by citizens and civil society which can provide timely, detailed and unique insights into progress on the SDGs.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the negotiations of the post-2015 outcome document, an [Inter-agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators](#) (IAEG-SDGs) has been created to develop an indicator framework for the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda at the global level, and to support its implementation. The Group has committed finalising the global indicator framework by the end of November 2015, for submission to the 47th session of the UN Statistical Commission for approval by Member States in March 2016. Civil society stakeholders are able to participate in the IAEG-SDGs process, however this is primarily as observers given that this is a Member State-led process. Furthermore, while civil society efforts to influence the choice of indicators are important, its involvement in official SDG monitoring is more closely linked to the follow-up and

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<sup>2</sup> [http://tapnetwork2015.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/TAP-Network-Zero\\_Draft\\_Response.pdf](http://tapnetwork2015.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/TAP-Network-Zero_Draft_Response.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://civicus.org/images/DataShift%20Response%20to%20Zero%20Draft%20-%2023%20June%20web.pdf>

review discussions in the post-2015 outcome document.

## THE DATA REVOLUTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The important role that civil society and citizens can play in producing and using data has also featured prominently in discussions on the data revolution for sustainable development.<sup>4</sup>

Civil society has emphasized that it has much to offer when it comes to generating and using data, but also has many capacity development needs. Civil society has also noted that there is a risk that the data revolution serves to further increase, rather than decrease, the divide between people and countries that do and don't have the means to produce, access and use data.

Work is being done on developing a multi-stakeholder global partnership on sustainable development data, and civil society is actively engaging in these discussions to ensure the partnership is established in a way that is inclusive, transparent and responds to the needs but also leverages the assets of civil society, particularly in the Global South.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.undatarevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/A-World-That-Counts2.pdf>

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Civil society has an opportunity to ensure that with the set of goals that are agreed in September, civil society and citizen-generated data can inform assessments of sustainable development progress, as well as policy and programming decisions on how to best accelerate transformative change. This will be best achieved if civil society works together.

The questions below can help guide discussions on how best to collaborate.

### **Value and interest in collaborating:**

- What is the current thinking amongst civil society on the value of drawing on civil society and citizen-generated data to monitor the SDGs?
- What initiatives are organisations already investing in?
- Do organisations see the value in collaborating and coordinating efforts?

### **Outcome:**

- What outcomes are we seeking to achieve at the global, regional and national levels?
- What are some of the likely challenges in achieving these outcomes?

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## Important steps:

- What needs to be prioritized to lead us towards these outcomes?
- What are the immediate next steps?
- What are the key moments for engagement and face-to-face collaboration?

## Outreach:

- Who do we need to engage with, how, and when?
- What do we need to support this engagement?
- How do we link these efforts to broader civil society engagement on the post-2015 agenda?

## WHAT IS THE DATASHIFT?

The DataShift is a multi-stakeholder, bottom-up initiative that builds the capacity and confidence of civil society organisations to produce and use citizen-generated data to monitor development progress, demand accountability and campaign for transformative change. Ultimately, our vision is a world where people-powered accountability drives progress on sustainable development. This includes Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a data revolution with civil society at the core. The DataShift wants to see the advocacy of civil society and the actions of decision makers informed by more and better citizen-generated data. This means increasing the coverage, building the credibility, enhancing the comparability and complementarity and bolstering the use of citizen-generated data in campaigning. To learn more, visit [www.thedatashift.org](http://www.thedatashift.org) and contact Kate Higgins, Manager, DataShift at [Kate.Higgins@civicus.org](mailto:Kate.Higgins@civicus.org).

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