development
initiatives

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citizen-generated data and sustainable development

evidence from case studies
in Kenya and Uganda

executive summary

Acknowledgements

Executive summary

The call for a data revolution, expressed in the report of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons in the lead up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,[1] has generated significant attention on the role of data in driving and monitoring sustainable development. Among a wide range of stakeholders, there has been growing discussion of the roles of official statistics and new data sources in order to seek drastic improvements in the production and use of data at national, regional and global levels.

In both Kenya and Uganda, the development data and information landscape has changed significantly over recent years. Officials, civil society and the private sector are stepping up efforts to harness existing and new data sources to support decision-making and accountability for sustainable development.[2] Technological advances have supported increased access to data and information in digital formats, as well as the emergence of technology-focused or enabled data initiatives such as multiple open data platforms, and SMS-based citizen reporting systems.[3]

Some proponents of citizen-generated data see it as a key element in the emerging data revolution. CIVICUS define it as 'data that people or their organisations produce to directly monitor, demand or drive change on issues that affect them',[4] and such issues include resource allocation and service delivery. It is described as having significant potential to contribute to monitoring implementation and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is seen to ensure citizen engagement, government responsiveness and impact at the local level, while helping fill important gaps in official data.[5]

There is, however, a need for stronger evidence on how citizen-generated data initiatives contribute to change in the development context. This is what we aim to contribute to with this report, based on two case studies from Kenya and Uganda.

The Uganda case study focuses on the work of 'community resource trackers', a group of volunteers supported by Development Research and Training (DRT) in five post-conflict districts of Eastern and Northern Uganda (Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, Katakwi and Kotido). Resource trackers work to identify and track resources intended for the community, and provide feedback information on these resources to service providers and other duty bearers. Resources include all financial and in-kind resources, such as grants and services, which are allocated to communities through the central and local government, non-governmental organisations and donors.

The Kenya case study looks at the School Report Card initiative: an effort to increase parent participation in schooling of their children. Developed and implemented by National Taxpayers Association (NTA) and the Ministry of Education, it is a simple scorecard tool for parents to assess the performance of their school each year in 10 key areas that relate to education quality.

Main findings

- The findings from our case studies demonstrate that citizens – individuals and communities – are important agents in the data revolution as active users, producers and intermediaries of development data and information.
- In both cases, citizen-generated data initiatives have contributed to improvements in the delivery of development-related projects, accessibility and/or quality of public services.
- Both initiatives contributed to empowerment and participation of local actors in accountability efforts, albeit with more limited engagement from more marginalised groups.
- There is some indication that the Kenyan initiative saw policy-level uptake.
- Due to significant differences in context and purpose of the initiatives, the data and information produced differ significantly in degree of standardisation and documentation, pointing to a need for a differentiated approach when considering and harnessing the wider potential of citizen-generated data.

A further issue we explore in this report is the wider potential for increased production and use of citizen-generated data in development contexts. In this area, our findings indicate that there is potential of citizen-generated data – in particular at local level – to contribute to accountability, planning, SDG monitoring and to provide important complementary perspectives to official data and statistics. However, to realise this potential, important concerns need to be addressed, including on data quality and standards, capacity and sustainability of citizen-generated data efforts, and official recognition of citizen-generated data. This could be achieved through collaboration between official and non-official data producers and users.

Main recommendations

Going forward, there is a rich agenda for research and practical demonstration on how this potential can be realised in specific contexts and application scenarios. This could involve:

- Conducting further research to develop typologies and case studies of citizen-generated data initiatives and the data they produce.
- Exploring in more detail how datasets generated through citizen-generated data initiatives complement available official data.
- Strengthening existing citizen-generated data efforts as appropriate to context and objectives, in particular to include marginalised people and communities and to assure data quality.
- Building collaboration and partnerships with official actors, especially around the development of community-level data collection infrastructures.
- More broadly, engaging in ongoing dialogue with official and other non-official data stakeholders to contribute to the development of an inclusive national statistics system that maximises the contributions of all users and producers of data.

Notes

[1] IEAG, 2014. *A World That Counts: Mobilising the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development.* Available at: http://www.undatarevolution.org/ (accessed 22 February 2017).

[2] In both Kenya and Uganda, multi-stakeholder conversations have emerged over recent years that aim to define priorities in data production and use for sustainable development, and to encourage collaboration among government and non-state actors. Development Initiatives is involved in both countries in relevant discussions. See for example: Adieno, D., 2015. *Data Revolution: testing ideas at the national level in Kenya.* Development Initiatives. Available at: http://devinit.org/post/data-revolution-testing-ideas-at-the-national-level-in-kenya/ (accessed 8 March 2017).

[3] In both Kenya and Uganda there are multiple official and non-official data portals, some of which are more up to date than others. Overall, uptake of these has been limited, and fragmentation of various initiatives has been diagnosed as a challenge. Cf. Mahihu, C., 2013. *Kenya's Low Consumption of Open Data.* Available at: https://ihub.co.ke/blogs/16329/kenyas-low-consumption-of-open-data (accessed 8 March 2017) and DRT, 2015. *Unlocking the Potential of a More Harnessed Partnership Among Open Data Actors in Uganda.* Available at: https://indigotrust.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/drt-indigo-trust-uganda-final-report.pdf (accessed 21 November 2016). Among newer data initiatives, U-report is worth noting as one gathering citizen-feedback based on SMS reporting, see: http://ureport.ug/ (accessed 8 March 2017) and the UN Global Pulse Lab Kampala is investing in a number of big data-focused projects for application in development settings, see: http://www.unglobalpulse.org/kampala (accessed 8 March 2017).

[4] DataShift, 2015. *What is citizen-generated data and what is the DataShift doing to promote it?* Available at: http://civicus.org/images/ER%20cgd_brief.pdf (accessed 29 March 2016).

[5] Cf. DataShift, 2016. *Making use of citizen-generated data.* Available at: http://www.data4sdgs.org/guide-making-use-of-citizen-generated-data (accessed 8 March 2017) and Lee, L., 2015. *How citizen monitoring could make the SDGs really deliver for poor people.* Available at: http://insights.careinternational.org.uk/development-blog/governance/how-citizen-monitoring-could-make-the-sdgs-really-deliver-for-poor-people (accessed 8 March 2017).

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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