

HARNESSING CITIZEN-GENERATED DATA FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE POST-2015 AGENDA

May 2015

CONTEXT

New technologies offer exciting new ways for citizens to generate and use data in democratic and creative ways. Citizen-generated data provides grounded, timely citizen perspectives that other forms of data are often unable to capture. It is also easier than ever before to aggregate this data, so that something produced for local use can have global relevance.

In September 2015 world leaders will agree a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which will guide the world's priorities and actions on sustainable development for at least the next decade. This presents an unprecedented opportunity for citizens and their organisations to leverage technology and harness the power of data to identify their sustainable development priorities, monitor and drive sustainable development progress and hold governments to account for their commitments.

WHAT IS 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. It can be quantitative and qualitative data, structured and unstructured data, and open and closed data. It comes in a number of formats, ranging from traditional numerical information to text, audio or photos.



Typically, citizen-generated data is collected through a specific initiative that aims to have a positive social impact. Initiatives may address, for example, corruption, sexual harassment, service delivery, or environmental degradation (see Box 1).



Box 1: Citizen-Generated Data Initiatives

HarassMap provides 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 is a platform which logs and maps rights violations in the 'villas' of the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, via SMS.

Check My School is 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 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.

WHAT ROLE CAN CITIZEN-GENERATED DATA PLAY IN MONITORING AND DRIVING PROGRESS ON THE SDGs?

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, citizen-generated data has an important role to play in monitoring and driving progress. It can complement official sources of data used to assess SDG progress, fill data gaps that exist in a timely way and verify official sources of data when data quality is questionable. It 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.

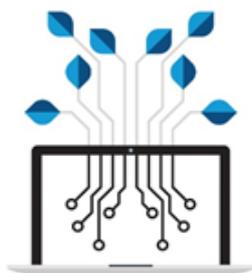
The monitoring component of the SDGs, currently called the 'follow up and review' framework, looks set to operate at three levels: national, regional and global. Box 2 outlines how citizen-generated data can contribute at all levels.

Box 2: Citizen-Generated Data and SDG Follow Up and Review

National level: Citizen-generated data can 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: Citizen-generated data can feed into regional peer review processes to learn from and spur SDG progress.

Global level: Citizen-generated data can inform the dialogue on SDG progress facilitated by the High Level Political Forum, including potential thematic reviews. Citizen-generated data could be included in the Global Sustainable Development Report and/or in a parallel civil society-led shadow reporting process.



WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO HARNESS THE POWER OF CITIZEN-GENERATED DATA?

Much action is needed to fully harness the power of citizen-generated data to monitor and drive progress on the SDGs. This includes:

Protection and institutionalisation of the role of civil society in the post-2015 follow up and review process:

At national, regional and global levels, the follow up and review process needs to be open, inclusive and transparent and give space for the meaningful and constructive participation of civil society.

Recognition of citizen-generated data as a valuable source of evidence for assessing SDG progress:

At national, regional and global levels, citizen-generated data needs to be recognised as a valuable data source that can inform dialogues on, assessments of and decisions to drive SDG progress.

Investment in citizen-generated data as part of the "data revolution for sustainable development":

To increase the coverage, build the credibility and enhance the comparability and complementarity of citizen-generated data, investment in the people and organisations generating this data is needed.

Collaboration between people and organisations working with official and citizen-generated data: Official statistics are absolutely critical to monitoring SDG progress, but citizen-generated data can be a powerful complement. People and

organisations working with official and citizen-generated data need to have space and opportunities to collaborate to identify how to use these different sources in a complementary and coherent way.

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.

The DataShift is a global initiative being rolled out in four pilot countries in 2015-16: Argentina, Nepal, Kenya and Tanzania. It has five work-streams: Global Knowledge Hub, DataShift Ambassadors, Thematic Forums, DataShift Fund and DataShift Dashboard.

To learn more, visit www.thedatashift.org and contact Kate Higgins, Manager, DataShift at Kate.Higgins@civicus.org.

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