Data for Now: Frequently Asked Questions

What is Data for Now?

Data for Now is an initiative that was launched by the UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed in September 2019. The aim is to support National Statistical Offices in working with internal and external partners to solidify access to timely data. With timely data, policymakers can make better decisions to improve lives and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Who is involved in the initiative?

The core team – the main governance body of the initiative - consists of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network TReNDS, the United Nations Statistics Division and the World Bank. Many other partners from different sectors are involved: country representatives, data providers, regulators, industry associations, experts, analysts, multilaterals, donors, and more.

How is this different to other data for good initiatives?

In two main ways. Firstly, this is a demand-driven initiative. The priorities of country partners guide workplans, and there is much focus on supporting the coordinating role of National Statistical Offices in working with other branches of government and external partners. Secondly, the initiative scales proven methods. This means understanding the different approaches out there and helping country partners implement those best suiting their needs.

Which countries are part of the initiative?

The first phase includes Bangladesh, Colombia, Ghana, Mongolia, Nepal, Paraguay, Senegal, Togo and Rwanda. Other countries will begin joining end-2020 onwards.

Is Data for Now focusing on big data?

Yes and no. Big data, like earth observations and mobile phone records, form a core part of the methods for the priority areas. However, projects that involve building models (eg, poverty mapping) need traditional data (eg, surveys) for training and optimizing models. There is also some focus on administrative data; the core team is happy to support country partners in achieving their priorities no matter the focus, though administrative data is more closely aligned with other workstreams within the core team.

How were the priority areas chosen?

These reflect the priorities of the initial set of country partners, which were established through extensive consultations and during the Data for Now inception workshop in November 2019. The priority areas are agriculture, water-related issues (eg, flood management), poverty

estimates, and human mobility (disaster management, migration, transport). More themes will be covered in later phases of the initiative.

What about whole system change?

Data for Now programs are a point of intervention in complex systems, where targeted action is designed to lead to whole system change. In other words, specific projects like poverty estimates are designed to strengthen the coordinating role of National Statistical Offices given how many branches of government and external partners need to be involved. Consequent projects can build on this foundation of expertise and political gravitas of the National Statistical Offices, to work on more issues and with a bigger pool of partners.

How will Data for Now scale?

Future projects will build on the foundation of existing work. In country, this means working on issues related to the initial priorities. At a global scale, this means sharing knowledge, resources and expertise with other Data for Now country partners that have already made progress. For example, in Mongolia, climate extremes can cause crops to fail, which triggers migration to urban areas, where newcomers often live in traditional homes that rely on coal for heating, causing pollution and contributing to climate change. While the initial priority in Mongolia is crop yield data, future projects may focus on causes (eg, precipitation) or effects (eg, migration) – priorities other country partners are working on.

When can results be expected?

Programs are underway to show progress around the World Data Forum in October 2020.

How much funding is available?

It depends on the country and the program, though there is no readily available funding within the core team. Once priorities are established, the core team works to align programs with resources of existing projects underway, addressing gaps through fundraising.

How do I become a partner?

Please get in touch with info@data4sdgs.org if you would like to get involved in the initial phase of Data for Now. The core team is particularly grateful to partners who can support in-country engagement and provide data, capacity-building, knowledge-sharing and resources. Please also feel free to stay up to date with the initiative to get involved in later phases with our blogs and content on the Data for Now website.