SDG ACCELERATION ROADMAP

UNLEASHING THE POWER OF PRIVATE-SECTOR DATA IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Microsoft's Support to the Public Sector in Asia

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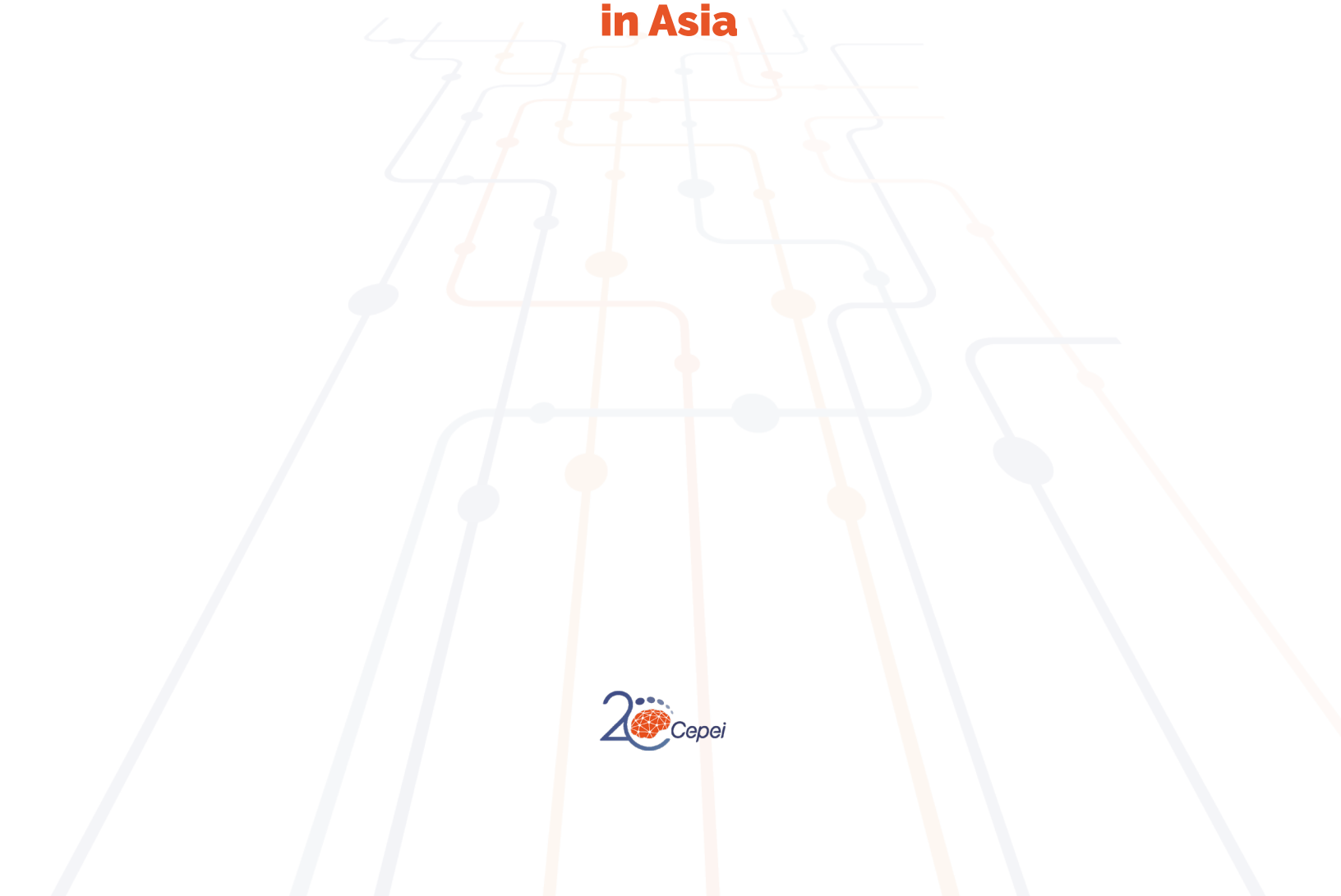

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May 2023
The full case study can be found at www.cepei.org

Executive Summary

In 2021, Cepei and LIRNEAsia launched the SDG Acceleration Roadmap project,[1] supported by the International Development Research [2]Centre (IDRC), and in partnership with the Local Development Research Initiative (LDRI) in [3]Kenya, the Caribbean Open Institute (COI) in [4]Jamaica, and the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) in [5]Palestine. With the midway point of the Sustainable Development [6]Goals (SDGs) fast approaching, the project aims to understand how far the private sector's data-related contributions to public policy in the Global South extend. Our primary research question is: ***what is the private sector doing to make more and better data available to achieve and monitor the SDGs in the Global South?*** *To answer this question, over the course of 2022 and 2023, we are undertaking and publishing research and fostering global dialogues about the value of public-private initiatives in the data and digital policy spaces.*

This Executive Summary provides insights into the Microsoft's support to the public sector in Asia. It was prepared by LIRNEasia.

[1] Visit the SDG Acceleration Roadmap homepage at: https://cepei.org/en/products/sdg-acceleration-road-map/
[2] Visit the International Development Reasearch Centre (IDRC) homepage at: https://idrc.ca/en
[3] Visit the Local Development Research Institute homepage at: https://www.developlocal.org
[4] Visit the Caribbean Open Institute homepage at: https://caribbeanopeninstitute.org
[5] Visit the Center for Continuing Education homepage at: https://www.birzeit.edu/en/community-affairs/institutes-centers/center-continuing-education
[6] Visit the Sustainable Development Goals at: https://sdgs.un.org

About the SDG Acceleration Roadmap Project

There is a significant shift taking place within the world of business. In recent years, environmental, social, and governance (ESG) has risen in prominence among an increasingly socially and environmentally conscious consumer base. ESG investing has attracted substantial interest with reporting on environmental and occasionally social metrics, becoming a must-do in many companies' annual reporting and shareholder meetings. Viewed from a public policy perspective, the turn towards more socially and environmentally conscious capitalism creates opportunities for alignment between business and government; for instance, between ESG metrics and political targets such as the SDGs that center on people, planet, and prosperity as the three pillars of sustainable development.

One area of alignment is in the field of data and digital transformation. Whether framed as ESG, the SDGs, or corporate social responsibility (CSR), companies around the world are providing support to public sector institutions in ways that help to improve their capacity for evidence-based decision-making. Activities - or data actions - being taken range from the transfer of actionable data to the public sector directly, to the provision of tools or services that help improve the public sector's ability to capture and utilize insights from data repositories.[7]

Examples of public-private data actions abound. Our **Mapping Private Sector Contributions to the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development: Insights from the Global South[8] report ("mapping report")** is based on insights from 394 data actions that have been mapped across 94 countries. These data can be analysed and accessed directly through the project [9]website. What our mapping work uncovered is that there is a vibrant ecosystem of public-private activity around data.

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[7] See here the full list of 'data actions' identified within this project: https://cepei.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Terminologia_Data_Actions-ENG.pdf
[8] Read the document Mapping Private Sector Contributions to the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development: Insights from the Global South at: https://cepei.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Mapping-private-sector-contributions-to-the-data-revolution-for-susainable-development.pdf
[9] Visit the homepage of the project at: https://cepei.org/en/initiatives/sdg-acceleration-road-map/

Our Case Studies

To further explore the themes identified in our mapping report and uncover how the mechanics of public-private data initiatives operate – what the incentives for partnership are, how impact is measured, what enabling environment needs to exist, and other factors – we undertook a series of eight case studies in late 2022 and early 2023.

Our case studies showcase examples of public-private data initiatives and document how companies' data actions can help public institutions in the Global South to respond to major public policy challenges such as climate change, the promotion of gender equality, improving employment opportunities and digital literacy, among others.

We selected our case studies in a way that ensured that we covered multiple types of data, types of initiative/initiative facilitation, types of data action, company size, and thematic area. Thereafter, each project partner independently produced their case studies using a common semi-structured interview guide and desk-based research. Case study-specific methodological considerations are explored in more detail within each study. Through our case studies, we have further developed and refined the themes identified in our mapping report and proposed recommendations based on them. Recommendations emanating from our case studies can be found here. In summary, the five overarching themes that have emerged from our case studies are:

- There is real-world value being produced from public-private data initiatives in the data revolution for sustainable development.
- Governments are more likely to engage with companies that can support data actions across multiple policy areas.
- The most successful examples of public-private data initiatives are ones in which partners have invested the time and effort needed to establish proof-of-concept, build trust, and adapt and iterate the value proposition over time.
- Supporting public policy objectives and maintaining profitability do not have to be mutually exclusive for companies seeking to engage in public-private initiatives.
- The most significant challenge to initiating, completing, monitoring and scaling-up public-private data initiatives is the lack of coherence across and under-development of the standard operating procedures needed to develop them.

Microsoft's Support to the Public Sector in Asia: Findings and recommendations

Microsoft, a leading global technology company, is dedicated to achieving four SDGs using technology, resources, and public-private initiatives. With a wide range of products and services, Microsoft has made significant investments in Asia, focusing on developing markets such as India and China.[10]

In Asia, Microsoft has initiated four data initiatives that aim to make data open and available for better use, ultimately helping to achieve SDGs. These initiatives include the Machine Learning for Glacier Monitoring in the Hindu Kush Himalaya,[11] Microsoft Azure FarmBeats,[12] Open Data Campaign,[13] and the World Health Data Hub initiative.[14]

The success of public-private initiatives relies on three key enablers of data actions: trust, well-connected institutions, and politically neutral facilitation for private sector stakeholder engagement. Building trust requires transparency, understanding the nature of stakeholder contributions, and being clear on partnership benefits. Well-connected institutions are critical for effective collaboration, and politically neutral facilitation by external parties is essential for successful public-private initiatives.

Microsoft aims to build partnerships with other organizations to achieve a greater outcome than could be achieved alone. The synergistic approach to partnerships involves identifying needs and gaps of each partner, and Microsoft's Framework for

[10] Visit the Microsoft Stories Asia hompage at: https://news.microsoft.com/apac/
[11] Visit the homepage of the project at: https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/research/project/farmbeats-iot-agriculture
[12] Visit the hompege of the project at: https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/research/project/farmbeats-iot-agriculture/
[13] Visit the homepage of the project at: https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/corporate-responsibility/open-data?activetab=pivot1%3aprimaryr6
[14] Visit the hompage of the project: https://data.who.int/

guiding initiatives aims to improve leadership qualities in partnering organizations. Microsoft can bring technology, data, expertise, and capacity development to the partnership based on the requirements.

To ensure successful data initiatives, clear and aligned objectives, strong internal capacity building, and effective communication with stakeholders are crucial. Potential misalignments in partnership goals and priorities of public and private sectors must be identified and addressed to ensure success. Building internal capacity for effective partnership involves promoting leadership engagement and creating an organizational culture that supports collaboration.

Overall, our case study proposes three recommendations for large technology companies such as Microsoft, facilitators for public-private data initiatives, and governments:

- Build synergetic partnerships with actors in the ecosystem.
- Use evidence-based practices to design and implement strategies for partnerships.
- Identify specific goals and metrics to measure what 'success' in public-private data initiatives looks like.

References

- United Nations [UN]. (2023). *High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*. https://hlpf.un.org/sdg-summit

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