DATA ACTION PLAN 2030

The Role of the Private Sector in Voluntary National Reviews Towards the 2030 Agenda

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Introduction

Implementing the 2030 Agenda is the most ambitious global project to achieve a sustainable world. It is made up of abundant goals for countries, as a whole, to achieve levels of sustainable development in the remainder of the decade. These goals are difficult to achieve without the participation of the private sector and civil society. Companies are key actors in implementing and measuring their progress due to their ability to create wealth and generate employment, their activities' impact on the environment, and the gigantic amount of data and technologies they produce. In this Policy Brief, we analyze the role of the private sector in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and preparing Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

The growing production of data and technologies for use by the private sector and other relevant actors has been called "the data revolution." This revolution is happening rapidly. It has been identified as having large-scale potential to accelerate the sustainable development agenda. Adding such data and technologies to official statistics would make it possible to monitor the progress of the SDGs in more detail and timeliness, as well as diagnose and resolve bottlenecks in fulfilling these. The private sector has contributed data to the measurement of the SDGs in the preparation of progress and impact reports and has also carried out its follow-up exercises to the 2030 Agenda. Observing these experiences contributes to identifying good practices and formulating public policies that accelerate the use of private data actions in sustainable development.

The first section will provide basic notions of the 2030 Agenda, the VNRs, the SDGs and their monitoring, and the data revolution. Then, we will show examples of the participation of the private sector in the monitoring of SDGs and the contribution of data for the construction of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Finally, we will offer some recommendations for the advancement of public-private articulation in this process on issues such as:

- Public-private partnerships
- Data-driven policy adoption
- Standardization and data quality
- Characterization of private sector data actions
- Innovation and capacity building
- Implementation of monitoring technologies
- Data protection and security
- Skills transfer between the public and private sectors
- Articulation of National Statistical Offices (NSOs)
- Strengthening subnational statistical systems

1. 2030 Agenda, VNR and the Data Revolution

2030 Agenda

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations was equipped with a document that comprehensively addressed development, set a political vision of the desirable world, adopted priorities and principles for action, established means to achieve them, and a scheme for monitoring progress. The proposal was of such ambition that it could only be successful if development actors (governments at all levels, civil society, the private sector, among others) worked together.

SDG Monitoring: Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)

The SDGs are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. Within each objective, different goals are set, and each has its indicators that determine whether or not t the objective is met.

The follow-up and review mechanism established by countries in the 2030 Agenda establishes that Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) will be the cornerstone of the monitoring system.

The VNRs are reports that each State voluntarily submits to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and in which they report on their progress in fulfilling the 2030 Agenda, the actions they have taken to implement it, the obstacles and opportunities identified, good

practices, lessons learned, and future steps they plan to take, among other things.

The private sector's participation in the construction of the Voluntary National Reviews is important to ensure their accuracy, completeness,, and effectiveness. The private sector's data collection capacity, innovation, and practical solutions complement government efforts, fostering transparency, multi-sectoral collaboration, and sustained progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Monitoring the SDGs and the private sector

Monitoring the SDGs is an essential process for assessing and advancing the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. This involves collecting, analyzing, and reporting relevant data that allows measuring progress toward established goals. The data used for this monitoring come from various sources, including national censuses, surveys, administrative records, and input from the private sector and civil society. These data can be demographic, economic, social, spatial, and environmental.

A key component of SDG monitoring is analyzing the data collected. This analysis allows us to identify trends, areas for improvement, and gaps in the implementation of the objectives. By interpreting this data, informed decisions can be made to adjust and improve SDG implementation strategies, ensuring that efforts are effectively directed towards meeting the set targets.

Effective monitoring requires the collaboration of various actors. Governments, the private sector, international organizations,, and civil society must collaborate to provide a comprehensive and accurate view of SDG progress. This multi-sectoral participation not only enriches the analysis but also facilitates the implementation of innovative and sustainable solutions.

The private sector is playing an essential role in monitoring the SDGs through several actions:

Data Collection and Provision: The data-driven economy is widespread. Companies collect consumer data such as gender, age, location, consumption patterns, interests, travel, and even moods. They also collect data from their production systems: the amount of inputs used (many of them from nature), costs, products and services, waste generated, or jobs of men and women. They also

collect context data such as climate variables, satellite imagery, and education levels. These data are not usually part of official statistics but offer significant potential to increase them in volume, representativeness, geographical disaggregation, and opportunity.

Implementation of Monitoring Technology: Within the framework of the data revolution, it is becoming increasingly common to use advanced technologies such as sensors, the Internet of Things (IoT), and geographic information systems (GIS) to monitor and report in real time on different aspects of sustainability, such as air and water quality, energy efficiency, and natural resource management.

Transparency and Accountability: Some companies collect data from their philanthropy or social responsibility projects. These data measure management progress and impact on the SDGs and their indicators. They have also published sustainability and SDG progress reports using recognized frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). This allows companies to be held accountable for their impacts and contributions to the SDGs.

Collaboration and partnerships: It is also expected to see companies (and their foundations) forming alliances with governments, NGOs, and other organizations to share data and resources and to work hand in hand on initiatives that promote the SDGs. Collaboration may include joint projects, shared research, and policy development.

Innovation and capacity building: The private sector innovates technologically and strengthens the capacities of others in terms of data, such as for the diagnosis, design, execution, and evaluation of public policies.

The private sector and the data revolution for sustainable development

The data revolution represents a radical transformation in how data is generated, collected, analyzed, and used, facilitated by advances in digital technology. This phenomenon has created unprecedented opportunities to improve decision-making, personalize services, and foster innovation.

When we talk about the data revolution for sustainable development, we refer to the opportunity to take advantage of these new possibilities, adopting policies based on data – considered essential for good decision-making – accountability, and the resolution of challenges involved in adopting commitments towards sustainable development.

The report "A World That Counts", by the UN Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development highlights how data can transform governance, economies, and societies, promoting more inclusive and sustainable development.

One of the highlights of the data revolution is its ability to personalize services in the private sector. Companies can use data to better understand consumer preferences and behaviors, more precisely tailoring their products and services. This personalization can improve the customer experience and increase the company's operational efficiency, business competitiveness, and sales.

Despite its benefits, the data revolution poses significant challenges. Big data management involves substantial risks in terms of privacy and information security. Protecting personal data and ensuring it is used ethically and securely is critical to maintaining public trust. In addition, not all regions or sectors have equal access to the infrastructure and technology needed to take advantage of the data revolution, which can increase gaps in development and access to basic services. Risks and limitations must be mitigated with appropriate institutional designs.

Data quality is another critical challenge. Ensuring that the data collected is accurate, truthful, and relevant is essential. Incorrect or biased data can lead to wrong decisions and undesired outcomes.

To avoid this, organizations must implement robust data verification and cleaning processes to maintain high-quality standards in the information they use. Adopting quality standards specific to statistical production is an essential frame of reference for this. This provides a field for joint work between national statistical offices and the private sector.

In this way, data analysis based on non-traditional data sources allows for better monitoring of social problems that are difficult to monitor with traditional data sources, as they require a high level of disaggregation, real-time response, or data collection through non-traditional means such as social networks.

2. Examples of private sector involvement

Including private sector data in monitoring and fulfilling the 2030 Agenda has provided substantial benefits, allowing multidimensional monitoring of the SDGs in real-time. It has also improved the quality of available data and analysis and facilitated innovation. In addition, collaboration with the private sector can facilitate strategic partnerships and strengthen the credibility and legitimacy of government efforts in sustainable development.

The review of concrete examples of private sector participation in SDG monitoring is helpful for countries interested in this agenda. It offers concrete experiences to learn or connect to exchange knowledge. Here are some prominent examples from the global south. References to further this information are included at the end of the document.

• *Chile*

The "Business Report for the Sustainable Development of Chile 2023", by Global Compact Chile offers a detailed analysis of the private sector's contribution to the SDGs. This document was prepared with the purpose of being incorporated into the Voluntary National Review of Chile to the UN, providing a diagnosis of the state of sustainability in the Chilean business sector and characterizing the initiatives that respond to the 17 SDGs. It highlights the crucial role of Chilean companies in implementing policies and programs aimed at achieving the SDGs.

One of the key aspects of the report is the collaboration between 14 organizations and business associations, including Acción Empresas, the Chilean Chamber of Construction, and the Confederation of Production and Commerce (CPC). These entities provided information and disseminated a questionnaire based on the new Global Compact reporting methodology.

• *Colombia*

The SDG Corporate Tracker (SDG CT) is a multi-stakeholder initiative aimed at the entire business community operating in Colombia, regardless of the company's economic activity, size or whether it is local or transnational. The initiative measures and reports the contribution of the business sector to the SDGs and has an online platform that collects data in a standardized method for the analysis of the contribution of the private sector.

The SDG CT points out as its added value the integration of the private sector as a critical actor in development processes. By fostering collaboration between companies, governments, civil society, and academia, this tool helps companies identify opportunities for improvement and optimization in their operations, better aligning with global development goals. In addition, it links business contributions to public policies, ensuring that these are reflected in national reports on the SDGs.

The tool also promotes a cooperative and dynamic approach that involves multiple actors, highlighting the importance of collective action to achieve sustainability. The platform not only facilitates data collection directly from companies, improving the quality and accuracy

of the information, but also highlights the role of the private sector in monitoring and advancing the 2030 Agenda.

- *Kenya*

In Kenya, Safaricom, a leading telecommunications company, has implemented several initiatives to monitor and report on its contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), precisely Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure).

In its 2023 Sustainability Report, the company details its progress towards the SDGs using specific indicators such as the number of M-Pesa users, which has grown to 32 million, and the number of jobs created directly and indirectly, amounting to thousands of new positions.

- *Vietnam*

In Vietnam, Vingroup, one of the country's largest conglomerates, has taken steps to monitor and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goals 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and 13 (Climate Action).

The company also publishes annual sustainability reports detailing its progress towards the SDGs, using specific indicators such as the amount of renewable energy generated and reductions in carbon emissions. These reports highlight investments in green infrastructure and Vingroup's efforts to promote energy efficiency and sustainability in its daily operations.

Vingroup's measures are in line with Vietnam's National Green Growth Strategy and National Action Plan for Green Growth. Its initiatives have attracted significant foreign investment in green sectors, boosting job creation and fostering sustainable economic development.

In conclusion, these cases exemplify different alternatives to taking advantage of the data revolution in SDG monitoring and developing VNRs. There is a concrete opportunity in the private sector's collection, analysis, and dissemination of data. Also, there are ways to articulate these efforts with the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. At the same time, the need to accelerate and deepen these public-private partnerships is perceived.

This requires the design of institutional and regulatory frameworks that take advantage of lessons learned, the acceleration of enabling conditions for the use of private data in the monitoring and implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the strengthening of capacities in data quality management in the private sector, the strengthening of national statistical systems in human resources, technologies, and installed capacity, and cooperation between countries to share lessons and make standardized agreements to take advantage of such opportunities.

3. Recommendations

General

Innovation and Capacity Development: Invest in technological innovations and strengthen the data collection and analysis capacities of governments, the private sector, and NGOs. This will increase the capacity to diagnose, design, execute, and evaluate effective public policies.

Implementation of Monitoring Technology: Use advanced technologies such as sensors, the Internet of Things (IoT), and geographic information systems (GIS) to monitor crucial sustainability aspects such as air and water quality, energy efficiency, and natural resource management in real time.

Data Protection and Security: Implement robust measures to ensure the privacy and security of the data collected. This is essential to maintain public trust and ensure the ethical use of information.

Data Standardization and Quality: Ensuring that data is accurate, truthful, and relevant through robust verification and cleansing processes. Adopting our quality standards for statistical production is essential to maintain the integrity of the information used.

Governments

Characterize the data actions carried out by the private sector to understand the capabilities of the private data ecosystem.

Consolidate public-private partnerships to increase production capacity and data utilization.

Transfer capacities to the private sector regarding official data quality standards.

Articulate the National Statistical Offices to exchange experiences, build enabling mechanisms for using private data, develop strategic projects of common interest, etc.

Strengthen subnational statistical systems with the participation of the private sector to accelerate the creation of capacities and competencies of local governments in the production of official data.

Data-Driven Policy Adoption: Use high-quality data to make informed decisions, foster accountability, and solve challenges related to making commitments toward sustainable development.

Private sector

Transparency and Accountability: Publish sustainability and progress towards the SDGs using recognized frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). This improves transparency and allows companies to be accountable for their impacts and contributions.

The adoption of statistical production standards will allow private data to be easily interoperable with official data systems.

Transfer of technical and technological capacities to national and local governments to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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