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Contribution by UNDP

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“Data Governance for Development: From Asymmetry to Equitable Stewardship”

1. What key challenges do countries face in building and leveraging data capacities, including infrastructure, ownership and stewardship, free and trusted cross-border data flows, interoperability and benefit-sharing?

From UNDP's governance perspective, many of the barriers to effective data sharing are institutional rather than technological. Data often already exist but are fragmented across ministries, revenue authorities, national statistical offices, central banks, registries, and subnational governments. Institutional silos, unclear mandates, different legal requirements and lack of trust between institutions can prevent data from being shared and used, even where the necessary digital infrastructure is in place.

UNDP's work on data sharing for domestic resource mobilization has identified several recurring constraints. These include unclear mandates and fragmented legal frameworks; institutional silos; limited trust between institutions; skills shortages and reporting burdens; poor data quality; incompatible systems and standards; weak common identifiers; and, in some contexts, continued reliance on paper-based or legacy systems. Cross-border incompatibility is an additional challenge - across various use-cases and regions.

These constraints have practical consequences. In public finance, for example, tax, customs, property, business registry, and other relevant data may sit in separate systems, limiting the ability of governments to develop a fuller picture of taxpayers, compliance risks, and the tax base. Important gaps also remain in areas such as beneficial ownership, illicit financial flows and the digital economy, as well as in disaggregation by gender, geography and sector.

Addressing interoperability therefore requires more than digitizing existing processes or connecting IT systems. It also requires clear mandates and legal frameworks, common definitions and identifiers, agreed procedures for sharing and protecting data, institutional coordination and sufficient capacity within the institutions responsible for producing and using the data.

2. How do inequalities affect the way data is generated, collected, governed and used for development?

Inequalities can be reinforced when particular groups or experiences are not adequately captured in the data used for policymaking. National averages can mask significant differences by sex, disability, geography, age, income and other characteristics, while administrative systems do not always collect the level of disaggregation needed to understand who is benefiting from policies and services. This also matters for public finance. For example, where taxpayer data are not sufficiently disaggregated by gender, geography or sector, governments have less information to assess how different groups participate in the formal economy or are affected by tax policy. Similarly, linking revenue data with poverty and inequality data can provide a much better understanding of the distributional effects of fiscal policy.

3. Can you share examples of initiatives that have helped reduce asymmetries and promote more equitable data stewardship?

In **Zambia**, UNDP supported the development of a tax-benefit microsimulation model that required linking household survey data with administrative information held by different government institutions. Securing access to the necessary data required sustained inter-agency dialogue over approximately a year. The resulting analysis informed policy recommendations that were subsequently reflected in adjustments to social protection programmes, including support for girls' tertiary education.

In **South Africa**, UNDP has supported the National Treasury through the design and piloting of MzansiXchange, a national data exchange for secure and coordinated data sharing across government. The support has progressed from assessing and shaping the exchange's governance model to supporting its implementation and pilot - to think through institutional coordination, legal and regulatory arrangements, data-sharing protocols, standards, accountability, and oversight. The pilot is therefore testing both the technical model for data exchange and the governance arrangements needed to make trusted data sharing work across institutions.

In **Timor-Leste**, UNDP supported work to bring together previously fragmented data on enrolment, teachers, infrastructure, and education outcomes. This enabled the Ministry of Education to develop a stronger evidence base for its budget discussions with the Ministry of Finance, contributing to increased education funding and stronger collaboration between the institutions.

4. What major bilateral, regional or international partnerships have helped advance equitable and interoperable data governance?

The Sevilla Platform for Action on the Future of Data, co-led by Colombia, Norway and the United Kingdom, brings together governments, international organisations, academia and civil society around practical approaches to strengthening national data systems. UNDP co-leads the workstream on partner coordination. The Platform emphasises data as a public good, stronger national coordination, governance and interoperability, and investment in national capacity.

One issue emerging from the Future of Data work is that development partners can themselves contribute to fragmentation when support is organised around individual projects, reporting requirements or institutional mandates. This can result in duplication, parallel systems and investments that are difficult to sustain. Greater alignment behind country-owned national data and statistical strategies and investment plans is therefore an important part of strengthening national data systems.

5. How can international cooperation strengthen equitable and interoperable data governance, and what can CSTD contribute?

International cooperation should put greater emphasis on strengthening core national data systems rather than creating parallel systems for individual projects or global reporting requirements. This includes supporting countries to identify their own priority data and investment needs, aligning financing and technical assistance behind national strategies, strengthening institutional and legal arrangements for data sharing, and investing in sustained national capacity.

CSTD could help bring greater attention to the governance and institutional dimensions of interoperability. International discussions can sometimes focus heavily on technology and infrastructure, while practical experience shows that interoperability also depends on clear institutional mandates, appropriate legal frameworks, common standards, incentives for institutions to share data and trust between data holders and users. CSTD could help promote greater exchange of practical experience in these areas and ensure that approaches take account of different levels of national capacity.