

The data revolution in Africa is characterised by increasing amounts of data now being produced at faster speeds, by more actors (beyond the State) deploying various technologies and innovations than ever before. This revolution, is also characterised by greater dissemination and analytical capabilities through new technologies and social media.

Last week, data enthusiasts, government representatives, civil society representatives and corporate honchos gathered in Nairobi for the ‘High-Level Meeting on Data for Development in Africa’. Convened by the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD), the meeting, sought to “amplify the voices of African governments, regional bodies, private sector, and civil society partners across the region and the world, to ensure that data becomes part of the infrastructure for sustainable development, while showcasing the new partnerships, projects, and institutions that are leading the way”.

Several key themes and messages emerged from the meeting. Various governments made commitments (albeit vague and too broad) that seek to address the barriers that get in the way of getting data through reducing inequality, improving access to technology, investing in required expertise and technical competence, introducing legislative and policy frameworks to address privacy concerns, and scaling up successful innovations. The commitments covered the fields of business, agriculture, civil registration, health, migration, and data capacity.

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In addition, twenty-three innovative projects from civil society organizations, academia and the private sector also showcased partnerships and initiatives that contribute to achieving and monitoring progress of the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. These innovations, projects and partnerships covered the various ends of the data and technology spectrum. Kenya's leading telco, Safaricom, also highlighted the role private sector actors can play in integrating the SDGs within their businesses.

Emphatically, to ensure that data works for the people of Africa, catalytic action to strengthen data as a critical component of the infrastructure of sustainable development is needed. Governments, academia, private sector players and civil society organizations must therefore forge unique partnerships that are backed by strong political will to ensure that effective coordination and collaboration translates into concrete actions. These collaborations and partnerships should be forged across boundaries and disciplines; include both small and large-scale interventions; and capitalise on Africa's digital renaissance.

As a demonstration of this political will, several governments in Africa are blazing the trail in numerous ways. For instance, the Government of Senegal now considers investment in data as important as it would treat investment in physical infrastructure such as roads. In Ghana and Sierra Leone, more policy-makers and legislators are now using data to inform their work and make planning is continuously evidence-based.

Despite the progressive developments, several cautionary statements are worth noting. Firstly, data is not a silver-bullet to addressing present development challenges and/or problems. To be transformative, use of data and evidence must include political agency and citizen mobilization. Thus, while data may highlight important development cleavages, it may not guarantee change if not used appropriately within the various political contexts. 'Everyone Counts', a new global initiative by CARE, KWANTU and World Vision (that was also showcased in the meeting) seeks to contribute to this agenda.

Secondly, there is need for data 'experts' to move beyond the chronic obsession with big numbers to ensure greater inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable segments of the population. Achieving this will require a 'business unusual' approach that devises better data collection methodologies and technologies that must collect more and better than ever before. This 'new' data should then be used together with administrative and open data to ensure that 'no one is left behind'.

Thirdly, the utility of citizen-generated data is still contentious - especially within state institutions. Increasing the value of this data must therefore involve standardization of data collection tools and methodologies across the board (to the extent possible), making consideration for ethical approvals, subjecting this data to quality audits and triangulation, as well as adhering to quality assurance standards.

Fourthly, the emergence of various data communities within African countries has made the roles of National Statistical Offices in the data ecosystem even more crucial. However, significant

capacity and technical disparities exist between the various National Statistical Offices (NSOs) in Africa. To realise the potential of data and statistics in achieving sustainable development outcomes, financial and human capacities of these institutions must be enhanced. This would ensure that NSOs are capable of producing quality statistics for purposes of both planning for and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals, include local level or rural areas, and improve the gender disaggregation of data and statistics. Moreover, with the appropriate human, technical and financial capacities, National Statistical Offices can provide much needed leadership in promoting collaboration, harmonization and coordination of the various in-country, regional and global data communities and actors.

Source: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/donald-mogeni/how-africas-data-revoluti_b_17374274.html

Ministers, donors, civil society groups and private sector partners are set to pledge at least \$2.5 billion in new funding to improve and expand the reach of reproductive health services to women and girls in developing countries at the [Family Planning Summit](#) being held in the United Kingdom's capital on 11th July, 2017..

Commitments are still coming in at the summit — taking place on World Population Day — with the total expected to exceed the \$2.5 billion estimate by the end of the day.

More than half of the commitments counted so far will come from country governments in Asia and Africa, with India committing to spend an additional \$1 billion by 2020, while Bangladesh said it will increase its family planning funding by nearly 70 percent to \$615 million until 2021.

Advocates say the funding is crucial at a time when progress on family planning seems to have stalled, and the world's largest bilateral donor — the United States — is pulling back.

High-level speakers at the summit — including Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the [World Health Organization](#); and Kristalina Georgieva, chief executive officer of the [World Bank](#) — have been stressing the importance of investment in family planning and addressing some of the challenges.

New funding

The summit's co-host, the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), is by far the biggest non-governmental donor so far, committing \$375 million over the next four years, a 60 percent increase on its previous family planning budget. The investment will focus on reforming supply chains and increasing the range of contraceptives available, with a special focus on reaching adolescent girls and tackling [the particular challenges they face](#).

The U.K.'s [Department for International Development](#) has said it will allocate an additional 45 million British pounds (\$58 million) a year to its family planning funding until 2022; while Norway will increase its investment by up to \$50 million in new funding until 2020; and Belgium

has said it will donate 36 million euros (\$41 million) in multiannual core funding to the [United Nations Population Fund](#), another co-host of the summit. Denmark will give an additional \$15 million to UNFPA, while the European Commission is expected to announce 20 million euros (\$23 million) in new funding to [UNFPA Supplies](#) for the 2017/18 period. The Netherlands said it will contribute \$11.5 million to girls in refugee camps.

Australia also looks set to increase family planning support within its aid budget, despite initially indicating that there would be no new funding announcements. A new partnership with UNFPA will invest \$30 million over the next four years to expand access to sexual and reproductive health services in the Pacific, following a [campaign from civil society](#) in the lead up to the summit.

Chris Turner, CEO of [Marie Stopes International Australia](#), told Devex: “We are pleased that Australia is stepping up their support ... Huge opportunity exists to address this need, and we look forward to working with UNFPA, with support from the Australian government to address it.”

Speaking at the summit, Melinda Gates, co-chair of the Gates Foundation, said that: “With so much at stake, the years between now and 2020 will be especially important. That’s why our foundation is committing an additional \$375 million ... to help the women and girls who have been left behind,”

Pointing to President Donald Trump’s decision to pull the U.S. back from its role as the world’s leading family planning donor — including implementing [an expanded version of the “global gag rule”](#) and [defunding the UNFPA](#) — Gates acknowledged that “this additional funding can’t begin to close the gap that the U.S. budget cuts could create.” However, she said it represents a new drive to “partner with the private sector to ensure contraceptives are in stock when women need them — and that women have access to a range of options.”

The foundation will “also prioritize the needs of adolescents and gather more data so their voices and their needs are part of this conversation,” she added.

A further \$1.5 billion is expected to be pledged by country governments in Asia and Africa, including a number of fragile countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has said it will allocate \$2.5 million of its own resources per year, starting in 2017, for the purchase of contraceptives.

Chad, South Sudan and Haiti have also joined the family planning partnership [Family Planning 2020](#) for the first time, committing to government reform and increased family planning access benchmarks.

“It is the [programming] countries and communities that ought to drive this agenda,” said Georgieva, speaking at the summit. “If we try to push family planning without ownership it will be like trying to push wet spaghetti ... Local ownership is what will get us there.”

In total, at least 37 country governments, 16 private companies and 11 partner organizations — including civil society and private foundations — are set to make financial and other pledges.

Monitoring progress

The one-day summit is being held to “check in” on progress made since [its predecessor event in 2012](#), which saw donors and countries come together with the goal of reaching an additional 120 million women with family planning services by 2020.

The 2012 conference raised \$2.6 billion in new financial commitments and political support from more than 40 developing countries, leading to the creation of the [FP2020](#) partnership to support work toward the targets.

However, progress has been slower than expected, with only 30 million additional women and girls reached since then, according to a mid-way review — significantly fewer than hoped.

Approximately 214 million women and girls in developing countries who do not want to get pregnant still do not have access to contraception, according to the [latest data from the Guttmacher Institute](#).

Advocates point to the benefits of investing in family planning, including the impact on health, women’s empowerment, and access to education and the labor force.

The Guttmacher Institute estimates that each additional dollar spent on contraceptive services above current levels would save governments \$2.30 in costs associated with unintended pregnancies, making it “one of the best investments for development and women’s empowerment,” according to Dr Natalia Kanem, acting executive director of UNFPA.

However, contraceptives alone are not the solution, Kanem added. “On its own, delivering contraceptives is not enough — education is key, and young people in particular need access to quality family planning information non-judgmentally,” she said.

New partnerships

The summit is also expected to see the launch of a number of new initiatives and partnerships designed to ensure that even the hardest-to-reach women and girls have access to family planning, including adolescents and people experiencing humanitarian crises.

For example, UNFPA and the NGO [Nutrition International](#) will announce a \$1.5 billion partnership, funded by the Canadian government, to integrate nutrition counselling, education and iron and folic acid supplements into family planning and maternal health programs. The partnership aims to reach 500,000 women and girls in Nigeria and Senegal within two years.

UNFPA Supplies — the world’s largest provider of contraceptives — is also set to announce a new “bridge-funding mechanism” to reduce contraceptive stockouts by improving procurement processes and reducing costs, aiming to be fully scaled up within two years. A new global platform — the Visibility Analytics Network — currently in development, will also provide real-time information about contraceptive supply chains using smartphones to help prevent and respond to stock outs.

Ten companies including Twinings, Vodafone, the Tata Trusts and the Chaudhury Foundation will also make new commitments to reach more women and girls with contraceptive products or to improve employees’ access to family planning.

Governments, donors and NGOs are committing to improve the collection and use of age and sex-disaggregated data to better design and evaluate programs, with a special focus on reaching teenagers.

Commitments from priority countries

The summit is also seeing first-time commitments from a number of priority countries. Chad — which has the lowest contraceptive prevalence rate in Africa, and is under pressure to catch up after a country-wide ban on contraceptives was lifted in 2002 — is pledging to increase its modern contraceptive prevalence rate from 5 to 8 percent by 2020. It aims to reach an additional 115,000 users during that time, and says it will begin growing its family planning community through reforms to its supply chain infrastructure and investment in civil society.

South Sudan — also among the lowest in Africa for modern contraceptive prevalence — is committing to increase the rate among married women from 5 to 10 percent and to reduce maternal mortality by 10 percent by 2020. The country has seen a rapid uptick in investment in family planning despite protracted conflict, and although contraceptive prevalence currently [lingers at around 6.8 percent](#), a World Bank forecast suggests it will reach 23.5 percent by 2020.

Haiti — where less than half of all women use contraceptives, also lagging behind its neighbors — will, for the first time, embed a budget line in its ministry of public health to increase contraceptive purchasing by 5 percent by 2020. In addition, it will create an intergovernmental committee to manage family planning spending and has pledged to increase the country’s modern contraceptive prevalence rate by 10 percent by 2020.