

0. Data2x

HLPF Session: Monitoring progress towards achieving the SDGs Opening Remarks for Emily Courey Pryor, Executive Director, Data2X

July 9, 2018

10am-1pm

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

When data was collected to better understand the living conditions of the population of one country, an inequality in the division of labour immediately became clear: women were spending far more time than men on child care. The government in that country wanted to rectify this imbalance: they revised their parental leave legislation to promote fathers taking leave and to encourage positive perception around fathers participating more fully in family life. Recent time use survey data has shown that women and men are now dedicating similar amounts of time to child care and participation rates in paternity and maternity leave programs are comparable in that country.

In another country, a law on domestic violence existed but the prevailing feeling was that violence against women was not a problem. You can imagine the shock when the government decided to collect data on domestic violence and found that one in three married women in the country had experienced physical or sexual violence from their partner at some point in their lives. This data served as a wake-up call prompting wide-scale legislative, advocacy, and financial action from the government, international agencies, and civil society. A follow-up survey is underway to determine whether this approach, spurred by the data, has led to a reduction in domestic violence against women.

These aren't just hypothetical stories. The first comes from Finland; the second, from Vietnam. Finland and Vietnam made the decision to prioritize the collection of data, to fill a data gap—indeed, to fill an information gap—about a segment of their population. The collection and use of this sex-disaggregated data led to change for people who had previously been “left-behind.”

As the Executive Director of Data2X, the gender data alliance housed at the UN Foundation, I'm committed to increasing the collection and use of quality gender data to improve women's and girls' lives, so my examples should come as no surprise. I am hopeful that similar stories of disaggregated data leading to change exist for rural populations, youth and the elderly, people with disabilities, and more.

Which brings us to the significant opportunity we have at this High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, and our session today on “Monitoring progress towards achieving the SDGs,” where we will have two panels of experts examine progress to date on the SDGs, and the role of data in sustainable development.

My invitation – and challenge -to our audience is: while our speakers are sharing their SDG experiences, think about the stories from Finland and Vietnam. These countries embraced data to identify populations who were being left behind - how can we accelerate our own efforts on disaggregated data, particularly when they show us we can draw a connection from data collection, to data analysis and use, to improved policies. And how can we do a better job of collecting and sharing these types of examples,

to help accelerate a commitment to disaggregated data which, by its nature, can better serve more people? Lastly, how can we use these examples to prove the point of the critical value of data in the SDG picture and the need to make better, smarter, greater investments in data to ensure we can flex the muscle of data and statistics equally, across all regions, in service to this ambitious agenda.

As we all know from the Secretary-General's SDG Report, we are not on track to reach the 2030 targets. But I don't do this work to be a pessimist, so I'll choose optimism: Yes, we are three years in, but we have 12 years left! So let's use these years well and wisely – let's use these types of conversations to learn from each other – but, more importantly, let's commit to taking these ideas back to our teams and working even harder. Data is a tool which can help us move from diagnosis to treatment of injustice in our world; and it's all of us, statisticians, policy makers, program designers, civil society, private sector who can and must wield that tool to meet the needs of our people and our planet and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Let's get to work!