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The value of official statistics for society

Topic 5 – Who uses statistics, what do they need and how should we engage with them?

Keywords: official statistics, value of statistics, communication

Introduction

Official statistics have been a success story over decades. Currently, tight budget constraints are imposed on many national statistical offices, despite the growing demand for statistics globally and challenges arising from the increasingly competitive information industry. How can we continue the success story? In March 2015, the Conference of European Statisticians established a UNECE Task Force on Value of Official Statistics to define what users, stakeholders and society value in official statistics, and develop ways to measure this value to better understand it and communicate it more effectively to society. The Task Force includes experts from the United Kingdom (chair), Australia, Canada, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Switzerland, Turkey, Eurostat, OECD, Paris 21, UNECE and the World Bank.

Methods / Problem statement

Stakeholders sometimes fail to see the value of official statistics when deciding on investment in the future and when agreeing on new policies that create many new data needs. Recent developments underline the need to act to ensure the relevance of official statistics and demonstrate their value:

- (a) Statistical offices are by no means the sole supplier of information. Indeed, the world is arguably awash with information. Correct analysis of data and its reliability is the key factor in being able to make better decisions
- (b) Tightening budgets and public accountability increase the pressure to demonstrate how effectively statistical offices use public funds to meet the needs for statistical information
- (c) Technological advances have powered the Digital and Data Revolutions. These raise legitimate questions about how effectively statisticians are using new possibilities to expand the benefits to societies
- (d) Big Data - its uncertainty, complexity, velocity and size - challenges the expertise of statistical offices in design, analysis and technology to exploit the opportunities
- (e) Information needs are rapidly increasing and becoming more complex, for example the reporting on Sustainable Development Goals. People demand easy answers to specific questions
- (f) These developments are available not just to statistical offices but to all and often serve to increase the competition within the information industry.

Results / Proposed solution

Under these conditions, statistical offices need to define what is the value of official statistics and its impact on decision making to enable:

- Communicating, in the midst of Data Revolution, what is the business and value of official statistics.
- Conveying the reasons why investment in official statistics should be made.

- Pooling good practices of statistical offices to support mutual learning and ability to exploit the new opportunities.
- Taking new measures to increase the value of official statistics for our societies.
- Developing better ways to measure and explain the value of official statistics.

Conclusions

The presentation brings eight recommendations by the UNECE Task Force for discussion at the Conference to support statistical offices in increasing, promoting and measuring the value of official statistics.