

Strengthening country data dissemination systems

Good practices in using DevInfo

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1. Country-led monitoring and evaluation systems are vital to national and decentralized development

Since their adoption by all United Nations Member States in 2000, the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals have become a universal framework for development and a means for developing and transition countries, and their development partners, to work together in pursuit of a shared future for all. At the midpoint of 2007, between the adoption of the MDGs and the 2015 target date, the collective results suggested that there have been gains, but that much remains to be done for millions of people to realize the basic promises of the Millennium Declaration. To achieve sustainable results, country-led development strategies must be backed with adequate financing within the global partnership for development. However, this is possible only if policy-relevant and technically-reliable country-led monitoring and evaluation systems – owned by developing and transition countries – provide timely evidence to inform necessary policies and strategies to ensure progress.

DevInfo: A database system designed to facilitate ownership by national authorities

DevInfo is a database system which harnesses the power of advanced information technology to compile and disseminate data on human development. In particular, the system has been endorsed by the UN Development Group to assist countries in monitoring achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). DevInfo provides methods to organize, store and display data in a uniform way to facilitate data sharing at the country level across government departments, UN agencies and development

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partners. DevInfo has simple and user-friendly features which produce tables, graphs and maps for inclusion in reports, presentations and advocacy materials. The software supports both standard indicators (the MDG indicators) and user-defined indicators. DevInfo is compliant with international statistical standards to support open access and widespread data exchange. DevInfo is distributed royalty-free to all Member States and UN agencies for deployment on both desktops and the web. The user interface of the system and the contents of the databases supported by the system include country-specific branding and packaging options which have been designed for broad ownership by national authorities.

The vision that DevInfo supports is a day when Member States use common database standards for tracking national human development indicators, containing high-quality data with adequate coverage and depth to sustain good governance around the agenda of achieving the MDGs and national development goals.

DevInfo is being used as an advocacy platform to engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders in policy choices for human development. Member States and UN agencies around the world are using DevInfo to help support the reform of development planning policies. The system is enabling the UN to work together as “One UN” and to effectively deliver as one UN system based on a common database that leads to a common understanding of how to move forward together with less duplication of efforts and wasteful delays in progress.

DevInfo is being used as a tool to restructure programming processes based on human rights. The system helps planners address disparities and target the most vulnerable sections of society. An important aspect of the DevInfo database structure is that it provides for monitoring multiple levels of sub-national data. The database structure also provides methods for monitoring subgroups by sex, location (urban/rural), age-groups, ethnicity, education level, wealth index and other important factors related to groups at risk and in need.

DevInfo can help design cost effective interventions based on facts over perceptions. The system helps planners evaluate their options to plan for optimum results with limited resources. DevInfo presents the facts from multiple data sources with extensive metadata. This assists planners to assess all of the available data related to the current situation, weigh alternatives and plan ahead as effectively as possible.

2. DevInfo is being used to support country-led monitoring and evaluation systems

National ownership and demand-driven monitoring and evaluation systems

Progress in human development is being made even in countries where the challenges are the greatest. This progress testifies to the unprecedented degree of commitment by these countries to achieve results through national ownership of the development process. National ownership of data dissemination processes helps to ensure that all stakeholders can make informed decisions about the future course of development policies that affect them as individuals, communities and the nation as a whole.

A survey conducted by UNICEF CEE/CIS Regional Office in 2008 showed that 68% of the countries in the region are in various stages of DevInfo implementation. In most of these countries, the National Statistics Office (NSO) is the owner of the database, while in 32% of them the ownership is shared with other agencies or ministries. For example, in Kosovo, the Ministry of Science and Technology is supporting the DevInfo initiative. In Tajikistan, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade is a national partner, along with the NSO.

The selection of indicators contained in a DevInfo database is demand-driven. This ensures that a national database will sustain its relevance and importance as a useful tool for monitoring national frameworks. The relevance of the data contained in the database for tracking these frameworks is critical to the success of the implementation of the database system. Successful DevInfo implementations have identified stakeholders and ensured their participation in governance of the system. The stakeholders have thoroughly examined the legal framework for gathering and use of statistics in the country and its ramifications for DevInfo. They have leveraged relevant institutional structures and processes of government and partners to strengthen national data dissemination. Considering these issues helps position DevInfo strategically, creating links to relevant activities, such as in the areas of national strategic planning and support to the statistical system in the country. In this way DevInfo is conceived as a component of a more strategic approach to achieve national development goals.

DevInfo is being used by Member States to monitor comprehensive plans for sustainable development, including poverty reduction strategies, health and nutrition plans, environmental plans and

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education plans. DevInfo is being implemented by complementing existing databases and bridging data dissemination gaps.

Most of the countries in the CEE/CIS region that are implementing DevInfo have not limited the content of the national databases to the monitoring of the MDGs. Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova and Serbia expanded its scope to monitor national development strategies, including poverty reduction strategies (PRSPs). Albania and Turkey are using DevInfo to monitor EU-related strategies, including social exclusion. In some cases DevInfo is being used for monitoring sectoral strategies, such as health care reform in Kyrgyzstan and the education strategy in Kosovo.

Picture 1: *ArmeniaInfo*, national adaption in Armenia, is used to monitor MDGs as well as national development strategies



There are more than 16 national adaptations of DevInfo database technology in the CEE/CIS region. Some of these adaptations have been deployed online: for example, Tajikistan launched *TajikInfo* at www.tajikinfo.tj and Moldova launched *MoldovaInfo* at www.devinfo.md. Four national databases (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Macedonia and Serbia) are hosted at the global DevInfo website www.devinfo.info. In addition, the websites of the national statistical offices of Serbia (<http://webrzs.statserb.sr.gov.yu/axd/devinfo/indexe.htm>) and Montenegro (www.monstat.cg.yu/EngProjekti.htm) allow users to download their databases to function with the desktop version of DevInfo.

Picture 2: *TojikInfo*, local adaptation in Tajikistan, is available on line.Picture 3: *Kyrgyzstan HealthInfo*, local adaptation in Kyrgyzstan, is used for health reform.

National ownership processes entail several elements. It starts from the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding among stakeholders to build a common database to monitor national development priorities. It then moves on to outline roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, commit financial and human resources, establish a steering committee to govern the content of the database, assign working groups to update the database, decide on the location of the common database, and finally, to end up with the integration of DevInfo database technology into the internal infrastructure of the government. This results in full institutionalization of the system.

An example of full ownership of the DevInfo system by a government is in the case of the Republic of Serbia. The government declared DevInfo as a database tool of particular interest for the Republic of Serbia in 2006 and thereby the technology became part of the regular programme of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS). As a result, a committee on social indicators and analysis was formed. The unit consists of four people, supported by the government, who have undertaken the task of further development and maintenance of the DevInfo database at the national level. As result, the national DevInfo database contains a rich set of 395 indicators at national level, which are classified in 12 sectors with 5 multilateral strategies: Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS); National Plan of Action for Children (NPA); World Fit for Children; and World Summit for Children. The database also contains data on 91 indicators at local level (for each of 167 municipalities). A specially designed census database has 62 indicators at the settlement level (for each of 4,715 settlements). These databases are strong tools for monitoring and planning at central and local level.

Important initiatives are also taking place in other regions. For example, Costa Rica selected a strategic implementing government partner who is responsible and who has assumed ownership over the system, and thus, is developing it further, promoting it, and most importantly, sharing the information contained therein. In Egypt, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed among government agencies in charge of data collection, processing, analysis and dissemination. Furthermore, a major advantage is the linkage of DevInfo adaptations to existing decision-making mechanisms and processes in the country. For that purpose, it is helpful for a government body that is directly linked to the decision-making process to manage the system. Tanzania's *TSED*, for example, is owned by the National Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with more than 20 ministries, departments and agencies in the country, and is embedded in the monitoring system for the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty. In order to ensure the relevance of Tanzania's *TSED*, the database includes data for the MDGs, the country's National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty and other relevant frameworks such as Ageing and Aged Population, Labor Market Indicators, Maternal and Child Monitoring Indicators and Education for All. In addition, the National Bureau of Statistics implements a process for ensuring the quality, accuracy and reliability of the data. These conditions encourage the use of the database to produce reports to monitor the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty, and it enables the government and its partners to gauge the progress being made by various interventions. Civil society organizations are using *TSED* in advocacy work related to policy formulation and budgetary processes. Others have also used the database for reporting, proposal writing and presentations. Cambodia provides a clear illustration of strategic linkages. The Statistical Literacy Project has partnered with the *CAMInfo* initiative to conduct joint nation-wide trainings on *CAMInfo* and statistical literacy, targeting government officials and users of statistical data, including high-level decision makers. This partnership is expected to promote better coordination between the data manager, the National Institute of Statistics, and the planning and decision-making agency, the Ministry of Planning. As a result, better access to quality data and improved statistical literacy are hoped to contribute to the improvement of the government's capacity to integrate statistical information into policy making. In St. Lucia, *Helen Info* is designed to be used by the government for Evidence-Based Social Policy. The database has been established in partnership between Government, EU, UNDP and UNICEF, but most important has been government ownership and their commitment to maintain and use it. Following this successful example, DevInfo is now being rolled out throughout the Eastern Caribbean.

National capacity development

Access to timely and reliable development data plays an important role in helping identify national development issues and, through national capacity development in data dissemination, leads to better information for policy development. Progress is being made in sharpening national monitoring and evaluation systems and this is enhancing the impact of development funding. These efforts are being stepped up to increase awareness of potential problems and to find solutions for extreme disparities and vulnerabilities. Since 2004, more than 20,000 professionals have been trained in the use of DevInfo database technology. These training sessions have focused on best practices in establishing a common database on human development and on how to put the data to use for decision making. The training has been targeted to a broad audience of planners, politicians, policy analysts, researchers, teachers, youth and statisticians. The training has been organized at global, regional, national and local levels. The training strategy has been to create teams of master trainers who can assist others to become both trainers and database administrators.

National capacity development is also provided through technical missions and activities to assist national partners and UN agencies in setting up and using DevInfo database technology. In 2007, 298 technical support activities were carried out. This has resulted in more than 120 countries using DevInfo as the database platform to develop their own national socio-economic databases.

Capacity development activities in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) started with a series of DevInfo roll-out training carried out by the UNICEF CEE/CIS Regional Office. The scope of this training varied from orientation and use of the software to advanced database administration and development of local adaptations of the database technology to meet country-specific requirements. There was also a session devoted to Training of Trainers in the user and data administration modules of DevInfo.

Since 2006 regional training was implemented in partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and UNDP Bratislava Regional Center. The training introduced DevInfo v5.0, a new version with the capability of disseminating data online. The DevInfo regional trainings brought together national partners and UN staff members who are already working together on monitoring national development priorities. These regional capacity building activities have been supplemented by the UN Development Group Office (UNDGO, now UNDOCO) which has facilitated

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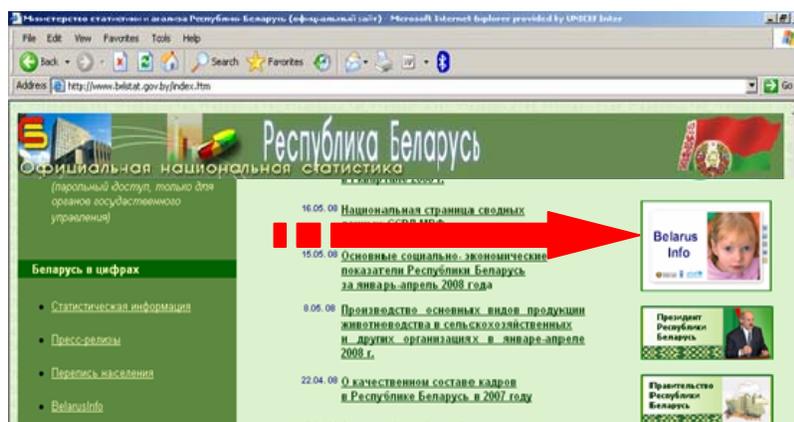
trainings in priority countries covering the roll-out of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). These training activities were organized through the UN Resident Coordinators of these countries.

Promoted by these regional activities, many in-country trainings have been carried out. According to an e-mail survey that was carried out by the UNICEF CEE/CIS Regional Office in February 2008, there are more than 1000 people in CEE/CIS trained in DevInfo. This constitutes a critical mass of technical capacity to convey knowledge about the system and to carry out national and sub-national training.

In-country trainings are vital to the implementation of DevInfo database technology. These trainings, organized on behalf of national authorities, are integrated into a broad framework of monitoring national development priorities. The training focuses on the demand for data to monitor local circumstances.

An example of national capacity building was the step-by-step introduction of DevInfo in the Republic of Belarus. It started with a needs assessment in 2005 followed by participation in the DevInfo 5.0 regional roll-out training in Geneva (2006). The regional roll-out training was followed with a country request to carry out a session on DevInfo database administration in Belarus which covered an orientation for a wider international and national community and hands-on training for the staff members of the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis. In 2006, 22 participants attended database administration training which was facilitated in Russian by the UNICEF Regional Office, in collaboration with the UNDP and UNICEF country offices, and with the technical and logistical support of the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis. As a result of the training, the ministry finalized a national adaptation for Belarus in 2007. The current version of *BelarusInfo* contains 126 indicators, focuses on national MDGs and provides access to socio-economic indicators related to human development in the country.

Picture4: *BelarusInfo* is accessible at the website of the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis of the Republic of Belarus www.belstat.gov.by



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Information on *BelarusInfo* can be obtained at www.belstat.gov.by. At this stage, the database is available in Russian. The Ministry of Statistics and Analysis, in collaboration with UNDP and UNICEF, is planning to update, translate and further disseminate *BelarusInfo* to insure wide access and usage of the database for informed decision making on national and the sub-national levels. Sub-national level training is also being planned.

Monitoring UN contribution to national development strategies and priorities

The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) is the strategic programme framework for the national development strategies supported by the UN Country Team. It describes UN contribution to the priorities in the national development framework. The outcomes of the framework show where the UN Country Team can bring its unique comparative advantages to bear in advocacy, capacity development, policy advice and programming for the achievement of related national priorities. A successful UNDAF is dependent on a strong, relevant national data dissemination system.

In India, the features of *DevInfo India* are being implemented to generate information on the overall situation with respect to sustainable development. The monitoring framework is inclusive of indicators to measure UNDAF outcomes/outputs, information on trends/mechanism for coordination, tracking of national development over time, progress of joint-sector programmes and responses to humanitarian emergencies. In Lesotho, *MalutiInfo* helps make information easily accessible to policy-makers, development practitioners and others, thus allowing them to monitor and evaluate the performance of identified indicators related to the UNDAF, PRS and MDGs. To increase the usefulness of the database, the country has created report templates to generate regular progress reports on thematic development agendas like those related to the UNDAF, UN Common Country Assessment, National Human Development Reports and the Situational Analysis of Women and Children. Similarly, Malawi's *MASEDA* contains indicators for monitoring the country's development strategies, MDGs, and the UNDAF M&E matrix, supplemented by indicators from other relevant areas such as governance. In Cambodia, *CAMInfo* was adapted to include not only the indicators specific to monitoring the UNDAF, but additional indicators in the areas of governance and human rights, in order to capture more qualitative information and results at the output/outcome level.

Local monitoring and evaluation systems to strengthen decentralization

Successful national development strategies are built on sound economic and technical information which are used to design programmes to overcome key development challenges. These strategies are aimed to reduce child and maternal mortality, extreme poverty, lack of basic sanitation, unemployment and increasing inequalities. To be effective, national development strategies must be universal while targeting the most vulnerable and marginalized to reduce disparities. Policymakers must know where disparities exist within their own countries to develop relevant solutions which benefit the poor – often those living in rural areas or urban slums, children of mothers with no formal education and living in the poorest households. National monitoring and evaluation systems focusing on disaggregated data, as well as decentralized systems, are fundamental to provide the needed information for policy makers to design and implement such developing strategies.

In Albania, UNDP - in partnership with UNICEF and UNFPA - supported local authorities in all 12 regions of Albania in developing Regional Development Plans. The decentralized monitoring and evaluation system is being supported by DevInfo. In Serbia, in compliance with the National Plan of Action for Children, 16 municipalities initiated Local Plans of Action for Children (LPA). These are strategic documents to define and guide optimal child development in local settings. The municipalities have been introduced to DevInfo to monitor progress, assess the local situation and inform decision making. Similarly, municipal databases are being developed in Montenegro. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, ten municipalities are working on the adaptation of DevInfo to strengthen child rights monitoring. In some municipalities, DevInfo is also used for monitoring the child protection systems reform. Data from municipalities is being sent to the Department of the Economic Development at central level where a consolidated dataset is used for national level planning and fund allocation. In the Russian Federation, the municipality of Moscow is exploring the opportunity of using DevInfo to monitor the Child Friendly Cities Initiative.

3. DevInfo is being used to monitor regional development challenges

DevInfo is being used at transnational level to highlight and monitor specific development challenges common to group of countries or regions. For example, the UNICEF CEE/CIS Regional Office developed three adaptations: *MONEEInfo*, *MICS Info* and *Regional MGDInfo*.

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Picture 5: *MONEE Info*, a regional adaptation developed by UNICEF RO, is based on TransMONEE data



MONEEInfo - available in online at www.moneeinfo.org - consists of 128 indicators related to the MDGs and beyond. *MONEEInfo*, based on the UNICEF IRC TranMonee database, allows monitoring the situation of women and children in 27 countries of the region with time series from 1989 to the most recent year for which data are available. It is available in Russian and English. *MONEEInfo* provides a rich resource to access and analyze child protection indicators related to the institutionalization of children, living arrangements and juvenile justice, among other related issues.

Picture 6: *MICSInfo*, a regional adaptation developed by UNICEF RO, presents MICS3 data



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MICSInfo - accessible at www.micsinfo.org - presents the findings for the third round of Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys carried out in 12 countries of the CEE/CIS region. This DevInfo adaptation consists of a DevInfo gallery which provides access to the charts with the key findings, the downloadable tables, the report “*Emerging challenges for children in Eastern Europe and Central Asia - Focus on disparities*” and provides full access to data on 59 indicators, including new indicators on child protection and early childhood development. Data are disaggregated by age, gender, family size, children living arrangement, residence, mother’s education, wealth index and ethnicity/language/religion.

Picture 7: Regional MDGInfo was developed by UNICEF, UNECE and UNDP



The *Regional MDGInfo* database - accessible at www.regionalmginfo.org - has been developed through partnership of UNICEF, UNDP and UNECE in an effort to strengthen national capacities in MDG literacy and monitoring. The database is used to advocate for improvements in data quality and comparability. There are 78 indicators stratified by different background variables in the database. The gallery provides easy access to presentations of the key findings related to progress towards the MDGs. *Regional MDGInfo* contains indicators from both national and international sources, as well as regionally-specific indicators, to maximize the relevance of MDG monitoring to the national context and to promote evidence-based advocacy for policy making.

4. Data disseminated through DevInfo contributed to achieving results for children

Most of the countries in the CEE/CIS region that are using DevInfo report that the system is being used for preparing progress reports on MDGs and national development strategies. Serbia and Moldova reported that DevInfo was able to trigger important policy changes, including in public budgets, both at national and decentralized level.

According to Salah (2008), in Moldova, the DevInfo database of the Ministry of Economy and Trade provides central public authorities with relevant and internationally comparable statistical data on a regular basis. By using the same technology and the same lists of indicators in building two integrated national databases - Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy database (EGPRSP), and MDG database - the team avoided duplication in collecting statistics and increased the reliability of reporting. They also avoided the complexity which traditionally occurs in maintaining statistical data systems. With the objective of improving national capacity in decision-making, the Ministry of Economy and Trade developed two different types of comprehensive, analytical reports which are also DevInfo based. The Annual Evaluation Report on the Implementation of the Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper helped social sector ministries to discuss budgetary questions with the Ministry of Finance. As result, investments in social sectors were raised by 21 per cent in 2006. The 2005 Poverty and Policy Impact Report provided an overview of national development and included detailed analyses on child poverty and on poverty in rural areas. These reports did not replace economic evaluations and public expenditures reviews. They did however provide useful information for decision-making since they contained analyses which indicate those elements which influenced programme results and how the programme elements interacted among themselves. The reports were produced through an inclusive and nationally owned process where staff from MoET interacted with key decision-makers in line ministries. Because they provided objective analyses of local realities, they were also used by external donors. MoET organized an annual event which was a major opportunity for an evidence-based and participatory reflection on Moldova's performance in the economic and social sectors and for a comparison with other countries. The reports were used for strategic planning including by teams developing the National Development Plan (NDP) 2008–2011. DevInfo played a role in facilitating a common understanding among the government, civil society organizations (CSOs) and development partners. Data analyses and maps were used as platforms for the national dialogue on poverty reduction. As information was easily

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accessible, DevInfo was used to produce a bulletin on EGPRSP implementation which was published in Moldovan newspapers and posted on government websites. This bulletin led to increased CSO participation and involvement in EGPRSP implementation. The materials developed by MoET for monitoring the *Poverty Reduction Strategy* helped a coalition of 14 non-government organizations (NGOs) develop the *State of the Nation Report* which presented civil society's view of development in Moldova. The main purpose of the Report was to play a role in decision-making and, in particular, to influence the content of the NDP for 2008–2011.

At the decentralized level, the municipality of Pirot in Serbia (Vasic, Petrovic and Jancovic, 2008) used DevInfo for reviewing the municipal budget allocation in favor of children. As a result, investment for children was increased seven-fold in just two years starting in 2005. In addition, an increasing demand from the local population for better quality of child social services prompted local authorities to provide additional funds. Firstly, additional funds were invested to equip the antenatal service. Secondly, there was increased funding of the Social Welfare Centre, schools and NGOs. Additionally, a new pre-school was built which tripled access to early childhood education, raising it to 90% in the municipality. In the same municipality, DevInfo enabled local government to identify that none of the Roma children were attending pre-school facilities and that most of the children in the specialized institutions for children with disabilities were Roma. As a result, 50 children from Roma settlements were enrolled into pre-school and in one school year the proportion of Roma children in specialized institutions was reduced by 50%.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, data disseminated through DevInfo are producing policy changes in education. Previously municipal authorities thought enrollment to primary school was 100 per cent. Now, thanks to data disseminated through DevInfo, local authorities realized that the situation is different for marginalized children. DevInfo also helped local municipalities to have a better insight in the area of social protection services, including for vulnerable and excluded groups, as well as on municipal budget allocation for children.

5. Conclusions

The DevInfo database initiative is proving that progress in human development can be accelerated through nationally-owned systems to strengthen data dissemination. The progress being made in use of data for decision-making bears witness to the unparalleled degree of advancement that can be achieved through ready access to relevant development data.

DevInfo is being used by the United Nations to strengthen its strategic national programme frameworks to deliver as One UN based on new approaches to create a common database on human development indicators supported by a strong data dissemination system.

National ownership of data dissemination is vital to the future course of human development where all stakeholders are able to be actively involved the processes of making informed decisions about the future course of development.

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