



UN World Data Forum for Sustainable Development

The ISI was a significant presence at the first UN World Data Forum, which was held from 15th-18th January 2017, at the Cape Town International Convention Centre. The Forum was hosted by Statistics South Africa with support from the Statistics Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, under the guidance of the United Nations Statistical Commission and the High-Level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



At the Opening Ceremony of the
UN World Data Forum

The Forum brought together approximately 1500 participants from more than 100 countries and a wide range of groups representing policy makers, public and private sectors, educational, research and civil society organisations. The aim was to assist in the huge challenge of putting systems in place to gather and analyse the data needed to inform the 169 targets and 230 indicators that support the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at an historic UN Summit. The new Goals are unique in that they call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection. The SDGs need data that are more accurate, nuanced, innovative and collaborative.

The “We did it!” of the post-forum blog of Stefan Schweinfest, UN Statistics Division Director, (<http://undataforum.org/WorldDataForum/looking-back-and-looking-forward/>) reflects the exceptional commitment of everyone who helped bring the concept to such successful fruition in such a short time. ISI Vice-President Irena Krizman served as a member of the Programme Committee, which had its first meeting in late August 2016, and can attest to the hard work, and often confusion under time and stakeholder pressures, in creating and organising 6 plenary panels and almost 100 sessions of invited speakers, discussants, panels, workshops and even data labs. The ISI was asked to co-lead Area 4 “Understanding

the world through data”. In addition, the ISI took an active role in organizing, co-organizing and proposing sessions as listed below. We give our gratitude and appreciation to Irena for her outstanding dedication to this demanding task.

Sessions organised or co-organised by the ISI:

- [TA4.05 Data literacy: what, why and how?](#) (organiser, speaker and chair: Helen MacGillivray)
- [TA4.08 Data journalism](#) (organiser and chair: John Bailer) Virtual session via WebEx.
- [TA2.20 Academy-centered partnerships for data production and sharing](#) (organiser and chair: Pedro Silva)
- [TA6.04 A modernisation of collaborative frameworks among data communities](#) (organiser and chair: Irena Krizman)
- [TA6.05 Involving different stakeholders in the official statistical production – experiences and challenges](#) (organiser, chair and speaker: Irena Krizman)
- [TA4.01 Capturing the 21st Century through data and algorithms](#) (organisers: Emmanuel Letouzé, Data Pop Alliance, and Irena Krizman)

ISI also initiated two sessions:

- TA4.04 Data advocacy: What works and what has impact? (organiser: Open Data Watch; organiser and chair: Misha Belkindas)
- [TA3.11 Data needs at the local level: “Leaving no one behind” – the geographical dimension and the new urban agenda.](#) (organiser: Jagdev Singh Virdee, SCORUS; chair: Pieter Everaers)



**Dr Blandina Kilama, Tanzania,
speaking about her work in
communicating results from data
and research on poverty in session
TA4.05**

Pedro Silva, Irena Krizman and Helen MacGillivray were official ISI representative delegates to the Forum, with other ISI members also participating, including Council members Misha Belkindas, Ola Awad, Oliver Chinganya, Haishan Fu and Delia North. In addition to UN WDF, Irena Krizman participated at the GPSDD ([Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data](#)) meeting where representatives of champions and anchor partners discussed the future plans and governance structure of the GPSDD.

Organisers were asked in October 2016 for short videos of themselves for the UNWDF website stating “I am going to Cape Town because...”. Twelve of these featured in the

Opening Ceremony on 15th January, including all three from Pedro, Irena and Helen. ISI sessions also had a considerable presence in the official UNWDF Newsletters (<http://undataforum.org/WorldDataForum/media/>), the summaries with photos (<http://www.iisd.ca/undata/forum1/>) and the more informal prolific Statistics SA photos (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/124502081@N02/>). *Data literacy: what, why and how?* featured in Newsletter 2 and the IISD Reporting Services Highlights of 16th January; *A modernisation of collaborative frameworks among data communities* appeared in the IISD Highlights of 17th January; and *Data journalism* in the IISD Highlights of 18th January. [Photos in this report were taken by Helen MacGillivray.]

The UNWDF Newsletters and the two photo collections include a number of entertaining pictures of (official) statisticians “at play” at the Gala Dinner in response to the singing of Yvonne Chaka Chaka and her band. The crowd of statisticians were entertained by the vocal stylings of the Statistician-General, Dr Pali Lehohla, and the Director of the United Nations Statistics Division, Mr Stefan Schweinfest (who was resplendent in one of the SG’s yellow suits), and responded with statistically diverse dancing styles, including outliers such as Ola Rosling who was universally acclaimed as most outstanding dancer.

At Sunday’s Opening Ceremony, Pali Lehohla, Statistics South Africa Statistician-General and host extraordinaire, and Jeff Radebe, Minister in the Presidency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, and Chairperson of the National Planning Commission of South Africa, presented lifetime achievement in statistics awards to: Katherine Wallman, former Chief US Statistician; Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General; Hans Rosling, Co-Founder and Chair, Gapminder Foundation; and Enrico Giovannini, Co-Chair of the Secretary-General’s Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development.

The opening plenary panel of 9 speakers addressed the topic of *Harnessing the Power of Data for Sustainable Development*. Plenary panels and parallel sessions were organised under six main themes, with colour coding in the program to assist delegate choices: *New approaches to capacity development for better data*; *Innovations and synergies across different data ecosystems*; *Leaving no one behind*; *Understanding the world through data*; *Data principles and governance*; and *The way forward: a Global Action Plan for data*.

The large delegate attendances sustained across the whole Forum, the streams of visitors to the approximately 25 exhibitors, and the buzz throughout the venue during session breaks, demonstrated the engagement and commitment of the diversity of participants to the aims and objectives of the Forum and to better data and statistics for sustainable development. The words “data” and “statistics” were almost inseparable throughout, and the word “statistician” easily dominated all others, with only occasional reference to the term “data scientist”. The emphasis throughout was on the overwhelming importance of data and statistics in striving to achieve the SDG’s; data quality and synthesis, particularly in new data sources; open data and open government; increasing the pace of collecting and analysing data; empowering communities through open and disaggregated data; importance of geospatial data for evidence and decisions; collaboration in every aspect of harnessing data, particularly between public and private sector institutions; building a more fact-based society and improving trust of data and statistics; and improving systems, frameworks, legislative underpinning and communication.

Terminology that permeated the Forum was representative of the overall mood of new goals and ways forward, of collaborative building of better data and analysis, and enabling communities and individuals through understanding and using data. Examples of terminology heard include: open data; disaggregation and granulation; false statistics; digital enablement; data privacy; reliable providers and producers; data architecture; data narratives; data interrogation; algorithms; standards; digital citizens; ecosystems; digital platforms; data portals; and (my favourite) knowledge gardens.

Speakers and presentations in TA4.05 *Data literacy: what, why and how?* :

- Delia North, Dean & Head of School of Mathematics, Statistics and Computer Science, Kwa-Zulu Natal University, Durban, spoke on *Empowering (future) users through data literacy*.
- Arulsivanathan (Satthi) Naidoo, Executive Manager, Stakeholder relations for Statistics SA, South Africa, spoke on *Empowering users in situ in government and municipalities*.
- Blandina Kilama, Poverty Research Department, Tanzania, discussed *Data literacy and communication for capacity building*.
- Helen MacGillivray discussed *Data and Statistics: the sciences, the literacies and collaborations*.

Key points from this session included:

- Recent descriptions of data literacy are essentially the same as the many and long-standing descriptions of statistical literacy, and in some cases, even the same as descriptions of the statistical investigation process. Hence to develop data literacy, there are lessons from the long and many experiences of efforts to further statistical literacy.
- Empowering future users must be across all ages and all disciplines, requires great knowledge, skills and dedication, and tremendous collaboration and support across teacher education, tertiary teaching and government.
- GIS is available for everyone to explore and enrich their statistical and data literacy, and NSOs need to completely incorporate GIS within their work.
- Communication strategies, including choice of exposition, must be adapted to the user/recipient and can be devised only from listening to the recipient.

Speakers in TA6.04: *A modernisation of collaborative frameworks among data communities*:

- Linda Peters, Global Manager, Statistics, Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI)
- Oliver Chinganya, UN ECA, African Centre for Statistics
- John Pullinger, Chief Executive, UK Statistics Authority, United Kingdom
- Claire Melamed, Executive Director, Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD)
- Irena Krizman, ISI Vice-President (chair)

The need for a multi-stakeholders dialog was never greater before. To fulfill the SDGs requirement on data and statistics, improved coordination, collaboration and communication are needed among the data communities. This panel session addressed some of the challenges in this regard such as:

- Attaining political agreement on collaborative frameworks and their coordination;
- Highlighting innovative modes and ways of collaboration and communication;

- Exchanging of good practices on multi-stakeholder dialog and other governance issues;
- Building trust among partners.



Panel in TA6.04.

From L to R: Irena Krizman, Linda Peters, Oliver Chinganya, John Pullinger, Claire Melamed

Speakers and presentations in TA6.05: *Involving different stakeholders in the official statistical production – experiences and challenges*

- Albina Chuwa, Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics, *Involving different stakeholders in the official statistical production – Experiences and challenges*;
- Barnabe Okouda, National Institute of Statistics, Cameroon, *Experience and Challenges from Cameroon*;
- Irena Krizman, International Statistical Institute, *Involving different stakeholders in the official statistical production – Slovenian experiences and challenges*.

This mini governance workshop provided an opportunity to discuss and share experiences and challenges in involving different stakeholders in the official statistical production. The experiences of Slovenia, Tanzania and Cameroon were presented as a starting point for a lively and extensive discussion, with great interest expressed by a keenly attentive audience.

Speakers and moderators in TA4.08 *Data Journalism (via WebEx)*

- Trevor Butterworth, Director, Sense About Science USA and editor stats.org
- Rebecca Goldin, Professor (George Mason University) and Director of stats.org
- Brian Tarran, Editor, Significance magazine
- David Spiegelhalter, Winton Professor for the Public Understanding of Risk, Cambridge
- Kenneth Cukier, Data Editor, The Economist
- John Bailer, ISI Vice-President (chair)
- Pedro Silva, ISI President (Cape Town moderator)

Communicating statistical concepts is a key activity for any statistician or statistical organization. It is particularly important to consider how to communicate statistical concepts to the general public. This panel included presentations by journalists, statisticians and others involved in this important work. The data narrative, seeing through the eyes of recipients and communicating chance were key

features in discussion. As expected, communication of risk was a recurring theme, and it was pointed out how lack of confidence with handling percentages can place barriers in understanding risk.



A screen shot during the successful virtual session TA4.08

Speakers in TA2.20 Academy-centred partnerships for data production and sharing:

- Peter W.F. Smith, University of Southampton, *Collaborating with Government Statisticians in the UK*
- Fabio Senne, Studies on the Development of the Information Society (Cetic.br). *Multistakeholder dialogue and ICT statistics the Brazilian experience*
- Pedro Silva, ISI President (chair and moderator)

Many examples of partnerships were given where academia and members of the data community (those who are in the business of producing data) have teamed up successfully to address real needs. The exposition of parallels and comparisons between the UK and Brazil prompted extensive lively discussion highlighting similarities and contrasts amongst countries, but emphasizing how challenges also present opportunities.

All participants were invited to participate in the recently launched "Virtual UN World Data Forum", which is available at <http://bit.ly/2jyL4aP>. This new virtual platform will allow participants of the first UN World Data Forum, as well as other members of the global data and statistics community, to carry forward the conversations around innovative data solutions and initiatives that took place from 15 to 18 January 2017 in Cape Town, South Africa, and to suggest follow-up questions, and dive into practical implementation challenges around the 6 main thematic areas of the Forum.

The Forum concluded with the launch of the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data. This calls for governments, policy leaders and the international community to undertake key actions in six strategic areas, and is expected to be adopted by the UN Statistical Commission in March this year. To close the Forum, Stefan Schweinfest emphasized its

success in bringing people together and generating new thinking, interactions, partnerships, ideas and actions. He said the Global Action Plan is only the beginning, and there is work to do in order to achieve results on the Plan before the second Forum, in two years' time, in Dubai in late 2018 or early 2019.

Helen MacGillivray, February 2017