

# DATA FOR CHILDREN

Policy Brief | 2019



Data Landscape Diagnostic and  
Strategic Action Plan



## OVERVIEW

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is a large, diverse country in East Africa with a population of approximately **100 million people – over forty-five percent of which are children.**<sup>1</sup>



The overriding vision of the Federal Government of Ethiopia is to become a middle-income country by 2025, and to make measurable progress against the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet despite significant social and economic achievements,<sup>2</sup> **disparities in development outcomes for children persist** based on gender, geographic location, and wealth.<sup>3</sup>

Within the SDG context of “leave no one behind,” there exists an opportunity, and a pressing obligation, to support better outcomes for children. Fostering a thriving data ecosystem – in which the **right data are in the right hands at the right time to impact decisions** – can drive better results for the children of Ethiopia.<sup>4</sup>

This process identified data quality as the most significant challenge facing the Ethiopia data for children ecosystem. In what follows, we highlight key factors that contribute to poor data quality, as well as opportunities for addressing quality concerns.

In pursuit of this goal, UNICEF Ethiopia commissioned a data landscape diagnostic and strategic action plan from August-December 2018. This work examined the Ethiopia data for children ecosystem through the lens of data demand, supply, and use. Research included desk research and key informant interviews with thirty-four UNICEF, government, and civil society representatives in Addis Ababa and Amhara Region.

1. (UNDESA, 2017).

2. (World Bank, 30 May 2016).

3. (UNICEF, 2017).

4. (UNICEF, April 2017).

# KEY FINDINGS

Trust in data quality – its accuracy, availability, and completeness – is a determining factor in whether data is useful and used to make policy decisions. Poor data quality constrains the ability of development actors to reach the most vulnerable, limits the usefulness of data for measuring achievements against national and global goals, and ultimately erodes confidence in evidence-based policy.

**Increasing the quality of government data should be the top ecosystem priority** for the Federal Government of Ethiopia and development partners, with a particular focus on administrative data. In what follows, key challenges impeding quality data are elaborated.

## DATA DEMAND: AWARENESS OF DATA FOR CHILDREN

The Federal Government of Ethiopia and other development actors have made significant investments in child-relevant priorities, including the establishment of a Ministry for Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA). However, interviews and recent programming suggest that demand for gender- or age-disaggregated data remains limited. **Limited demand may contribute to the paucity of data disaggregated by age, gender, wealth, and location** within national surveys and sectoral information systems. Disaggregated data are critical for efficient, targeted policies and programmes to reach Ethiopia's most vulnerable children. But if policymakers – ministers and elected officials – do not request such data, there may be little incentive to invest in producing such data.

There was also a concern that **government budget allocations for data and information systems are inadequate to support quality data**. This funding gap may indicate a lack of understanding of human and technological resource needs for data collection, management, and analysis. It may also signal a dependency on development partner assistance, or limited value placed on data for decision-making. Providing additional funding for technological and human resource capacities may address data availability in the short-term. However, additional **efforts to strengthen government awareness of and demand for child-relevant data** are needed ensure the long-term sustainability of technical and human capital investments.



... political leaders give less attention to data and statistics. **Because of this lack of attention and commitment, less government resources [are] allocated...** though producing and generating quality and sustainable data and statistics requires a tremendous amount of resource[s].

– Interviewee

## DATA SUPPLY: IMPLEMENTATION OF DATA POLICIES

Ethiopia's federated government structure, combined with fragmented roles and responsibilities between national level agencies, has contributed to **disconnected data systems and resources**. Infrastructure limitations at subnational levels, and uneven policies for sharing data across ministries and administrative levels, also **impede data access**. This poses a significant challenge for cross-sectoral workstreams such as child protection, and non-custodial agencies such as MoWCA.

Further, the **Central Statistical Authority does not have a mandate for data production and quality standard enforcement mechanisms within the National Statistical System**.<sup>5</sup> Some ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) are guided by separate legislation regarding statistical data production. As a result, discrepancies in methodologies and measurement formats persist, as do concerns about data accuracy.

5. CSA Proclamation of 2005 No. 442/2005.



According to the Ministry of Education, school enrollment at primary level is 97 percent. But [Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs] has reported 23 percent child labor participation. How can that be?

- Interviewee

## DATA SUPPLY AND DATA USE: ACCOUNTABILITIES AND INCENTIVES

Developing a culture of data use requires the existence of expectations and processes that facilitate or necessitate data. The Federal Government of Ethiopia has such policies in place, in the form of medium-term development plans. These plans are linked with national economic and human development goals and monitored by the Planning and Development Commission.

While this provides an avenue for government-to-government accountability, the contents of progress reviews are not publicly available. Information that is

shared typically relates to high-level macroeconomic targets – which may limit MDA incentives for achieving progress against human development goals.<sup>6</sup> Further, government focus on achieving economic and development milestones may come at the expense of reporting facts.<sup>7</sup> There is a strong link between political legitimacy, economic growth, and poverty alleviation. The government is also the sole legal source of data and statistics.<sup>8</sup> Taken together, these factors may incentivise inaccurate reporting, if data run counter to narratives or progress.



I submit my assessment results... But then the federal government says, 'This is not a good look for Ethiopia; it's too high. We might say this is your result, but we're going to cut it in half.'

- Interviewee

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Across the Ethiopia data for children ecosystem, new and emerging opportunities for increasing data quality also exist. These include the rollout of a national civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) system, as well as policy and advocacy initiatives.

Challenges and Opportunities in the  
Ethiopia Data Ecosystem



6. See <https://allafrica.com/stories/201808170670.html>.

7. See <https://www.devex.com/news/why-governments-tiptoe-around-the-word-cholera-92348>.

8. (World Bank, 30 May 2016).

## DATA SUPPLY AND DATA USE: CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS

A potential lever for increasing data quality is **leveraging the Government of Ethiopia's rollout of CRVS data to validate information from administrative data systems**. Interoperability – the sharing of data across systems, through the use of a unique identifier – could be an inexpensive, sustainable means to increase administrative data quality. Such interoperability can facilitate one-to-one matching of individual profiles across systems, reducing data duplication and inconsistencies.

As the EDHS and national censuses are costly and infrequent – and given the high levels of internal migration spurred by climate change, conflict, and urbanisation – having accurate data from administrative systems can allow for more accurate and timely targeting. CRVS may also serve as a “neutral” source for accountability in data reporting, standardising population denominators used across the SDGs and other development indicators.



Regarding administrative data, in comparison with official statistics... its wide availability and relatively cheap cost of data collection can be taken as a strength. Regarding official statistics... its reliability, quality, specificity, and application can be taken as a strength.

– Interviewee

**Achieving this would require near-complete CRVS coverage, and the ability to interface between government systems.** However, CRVS registration and coverage are not yet universal due to procedural and technological barriers. At time of writing, there were efforts underway to connect health and CRVS systems, and preliminary efforts to connect CRVS with EMIS and the social protection system.

**Moving forward, the Government of Ethiopia, UNICEF, and other development actors should seek to accelerate CRVS coverage and interfaces between government data systems.** Such efforts should include a stocktaking of progress and lessons learned, evaluated against the guidance provided by the African Programme for the Accelerated Improvement of CRVS.

## DATA DEMAND, DATA SUPPLY, AND DATA USE: ADVOCACY FOR DATA FOR CHILDREN

Ongoing awareness-raising and policy advocacy can also support an increased demand for – and supply of – data for children. Advocacy should include legislative branches at federal and regional levels to **underscore the link between data for children, child-centred policies, and economic growth**. In particular, data related to child protection was identified as a key gap in the national ecosystem.

**Advocacy should also include making the case to political officials for adequate data system budgets** – investments in technological, infrastructure, and human capabilities at all administrative levels. Different legislative and MDA staff roles will have different capacity needs, based on decision space.<sup>9</sup> However, all should have a basic awareness of data uses, system functionalities, and programmatic needs.



A big barrier to data use is political culture. **Data are not used, and [so] there is no infrastructure to support use.**

– Interviewee

9. (Stout et. al., 2018).

## DATA DEMAND AND DATA SUPPLY: HARMONIZING POLICIES FOR DATA SHARING

Finally, there is a need – and an opportunity – for the Government of Ethiopia to **harmonise data production, quality, and sharing policies** within the National Statistical System, and between relevant agencies. The Central Statistical Agency does not have a legal mandate to access or oversee data produced by MDAs. Similarly, the MoWCA does not have the mandate to “demand” child-relevant data from custodial agencies, and data sharing between administrative levels can also pose a challenge.

As **approximately 70% of Ethiopia’s SDG data will be sourced from administrative data systems** – across child-relevant sectors – ensuring that appropriate legal and policy frameworks for data sharing are critical for supporting data quality and use.



Multi-sectoral [priorities are] really hard...There are **many roles in many ministries and really mixed capacities, competing mandates, and varying levels of prioritization.** All of these factors lead to gaps.

– Interviewee

## CONCLUSION

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has achieved significant progress toward realising national and global development goals. Yet achieving inclusive, sustainable progress for children remains a challenge. The coming decade – leading up to the completion of the SDGs in 2030 – will be crucial for improving outcomes for the children of Ethiopia.

Fostering a strong and sustainable data ecosystem can lead to better outcomes, by providing a more robust evidence-base for policy and programmes. In particular, a focus on addressing data quality challenges by leveraging CRVS implementation and continued advocacy can increase trust in, and use of, data and evidence.

Effective use of data is needed to help track results for children, and shape those results with better insights about what is working, and where children are being left behind.<sup>10</sup> For UNICEF to support better child outcomes, an ambitious partnership is needed with the Federal Government of Ethiopia in taking a proactive ecosystem-wide approach to improving data quality, fostering demand, and supporting use.

10. UNICEF (April 2017)

## ETHIOPIA DATA FOR CHILDREN ECOSYSTEM CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PROBLEM	RECOMMENDATION
<p><b>INCREASE</b> work to accelerate CRVS coverage, and interfaces between government data systems</p>	<p>Leverage Ethiopia's rollout of CRVS to validate information from administrative data systems.</p> <p>Evaluate progress and lessons learned against African Programme for the Accelerated Improvement of CRVS.</p>
<p><b>INCREASE</b> awareness-raising and advocacy for data for children</p>	<p>Underscore the link between data for children, child-centred policies, and economic growth.</p> <p>Advocate for adequate data system budgets.</p> <p>Engage with both federal and local actors to ensure all have basic awareness of data uses, system functionalities, and programmatic needs.</p>
<p><b>INCREASE</b> work to harmonize data production, quality, and sharing policies</p>	<p>Develop legal and policy frameworks that support harmonized data production, quality assurance, and sharing.</p>



## REFERENCES

Stout, S., Bhatia-Murdach, V., Kirby, P. and Powell, J. (August 2018). Understanding Data Use: Building M&E Systems that Empower Data Users. Retrieved from [https://www.developmentgateway.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/DataUse\\_Report\\_Sept2018.pdf](https://www.developmentgateway.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/DataUse_Report_Sept2018.pdf)

UNICEF (2017). UNICEF Annual Report 2017 – Ethiopia. Retrieved from [https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Ethiopia\\_2017\\_COAR.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Ethiopia_2017_COAR.pdf).

UNICEF (April 2017). Data for Children Strategic Framework. Retrieved from <https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Data-for-Children-Strategic-Framework-UNICEF.pdf>.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). World Population Prospects 2017: Data Query – Population by age and sex (thousands). Retrieved 22 January 2019.

World Bank (30 May 2016). Priorities for Ending Extreme Poverty and Promoting Shared Prosperity: Systematic Country Diagnostic – Ethiopia. Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/24590>.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Development Gateway would like to thank the UNICEF Ethiopia Country Office and Amhara Field Office that coordinated and facilitated the key informational interviews and provided inputs to the UNICEF Ethiopia Data for Children Policy Brief, Landscape Diagnostic, and Action Plan. Development Gateway would also like to express gratitude to governmental institutions, UN and international agencies, and civil society organisations that took the time to meet with our team and provided invaluable information to inform these findings; and thank the UNICEF East and Southern Africa Regional Office and Headquarters for the opportunity and guidance in this work.

This brief was prepared by Ms. Paige Kirby, with support from Ms. Vinisha Bhatia-Murdach and Ms. Annie Kilroy of Development Gateway; and reviewed by Mr. Vincenzo Vinci, PhD., Ms. Martha Kibur, and Ms. Mekiya Feki of UNICEF Ethiopia. All images are © UNICEF Ethiopia.

