COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS

Big Win Philanthropy

Brief: Making Data Systems Work for Counties

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Data For Decision Making

Good quality data are essential for institutions to accurately plan, budget, and evaluate development activities. Without basic development metrics, it is not possible to get an accurate picture of how a population is developing or how to target investments to meet the real-time needs of that population. In the absence of quality data, investments of limited resources are based on educated guesses.

Too often, government at all levels lacks relevant, timely and accurate data for decision-making. Information that is disaggregated to the sub-national level is critical to ensure investments are efficient, targeted and appropriate. When data are available, there may not be skilled staff available to conduct the analysis necessary for their use in decision-making.

For example: immunization campaigns are run at sub-national level. District, or county, health officials know that they need to purchase vaccines and syringes, and to engage health workers to administer them. But without the right data, buying the right quantity of drugs and finding the right number of people to run effective campaigns remains a guessing game that could result in waste or shortages. So, having reliable data on births and population trends informs the purchase of vaccines and their distribution, to give every child a shot at a healthy start.

In 2010, Kenya moved to a devolved system of governance. Now, rather than having a centralized government overseeing implementation and allocating resources to its districts, the 47 counties are responsible in large part for administering – and financing – their own basic functions related to health and social welfare. The evolution of the country's data systems have not, however, kept pace with the devolution of executive function, resulting in a dysfunctional data ecosystem in which data producers, analysts and end-users of data are left under-resourced and out of sync.

Although data problems exist at the national level as well, they affect counties to a greater extent because aggregated data often masks sub-national disparities. Geographical differences across the 47 counties demand county-specific information to drive localized decision-making on appropriate investments at all levels. Without data, counties cannot know for certain if their investments are yielding the desired outcomes to grow prosperity and wellbeing.

Investing For Development

One of the drivers of the decision to devolve governance in Kenya was a need for greater efficiency in the provision of social services, matching policy development and implementation to the needs of populations.

It was anticipated that by bringing decision-making closer to populations to ensure that government is responsive to the needs of its citizens, better targeting of services would follow.

Then, with better access to basic social services such as health and education, and greater opportunities for livelihoods and employment, populations would be able to harness their social capital and contribute to economic growth. This model is at the heart of the Demographic Dividend agenda being pursued by the African Union.

WHAT IS A DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND?

The demographic dividend is the potential economic boom that follows a broad-based and sustained fertility decline in a population that at the same time benefits from strategic investments in health, education, employment and good governance. When a larger population is in employment than the population that depends on it, a demographic dividend can be harnessed for growth.

It is important to note that these targeted investments in the nurturing of human capital throughout the life course are necessary to ensure social wellbeing and development, irrespective of the potential economic incentive that could follow.

Sound policy decisions based on data are only the beginning of the strategy to harness a Demographic Dividend for populations; tracking of commitments, achievements and investments is also a critical element of the equation.

Partnering to Harness a Demographic Dividend In Kenya

Data management and analysis are an integral component to any strategy for Kenya to meet its development goals and position itself to harness a Demographic Dividend. One institution that could provide the necessary leadership for counties in this arena is the Council of Governors, due to its existing strong relationships with the counties and the collaborative nature of its approach to its work as a supportive pillar for county governments to consult, to learn from and to strengthen their capacities for improved performance.

In 2016, Big Win Philanthropy entered into a strategic partnership with the Council of Governors to support counties to systematically track and upgrade the impact of their investments in children and youth. Nine counties – Kakamega, Kisumu, Kitui, Makueni, Meru, Trans Nzoia, Turkana, Vihiga and Wajir – were included in an assessment carried out by technical partner African Population and Health Research Center of their data landscapes. This assessment was the basis for county-specific strategies to improve collection, analysis and use of data to better inform policy- and decision-making going forward.

It also had the benefit of identifying the gaps in existing data collection mechanisms that are preventing a comprehensive tracking of outcomes of investments.

This partnership is one example of how the Council of Governors can optimally deliver on its mission to help counties collectively address issues of policy and governance by laying the foundation for an ideal data management systems to enable counties to maximize results.

A Solution to County Data Challenges

Recommendation 1 : Priority Indicators

A list of actionable indicators measurable with purportedly existing county-level data was

generated by the Council of Governors, and used by APHRC to asses where there were gaps and opportunities in data collection in each of the sample counties. Below is a table of those indicators, categorized according to the four pillars identified by the African Union Roadmap on harnessing the Demographic Dividend through investments in youth: health and wellbeing; education and skills development; employment and entrepreneurship; and rights, governance and youth empowerment.

Category	Illustrative Indicators
Health	
Maternal Health	% of live births assisted by a skilled attendant
Newborn and Child Health	% of births 12 -23 months fully immunized
Nutrition	% of children under five who are stunted
Adolescent Health	% of adolescents who have begun childbearing
Education	
Early Childhood Development (ECD)	% of children 3 to 5 years attending ECD program
Basic (Primary & Secondary)	% of children who transition from ECD to primary school
Vocational and Training	Youth Polytechnics completion rate
Employment	% of young people not in education, employment or training
Governance	Per capita county spending on social protection

**for a complete list of prioritized indicators, see http://aphrc.org/archives/publications/making-data-systems-work-for-counties*

Key Considerations for County Data Systems

Tracking investments in children and youth to measure progress toward achieving targets that position a county to harness a demographic dividend requires a tool that can be easily used by county governments, without requiring additional capacity. Such a tool could:

- **Enable county governments to translate policy decisions** and investment choices into plans, and support implementation for results
- **Collate and process data from multiple sources and sectors using a single platform**
- **Interpret large amounts of data via instant aggregation and visualization**, without the need for advanced skills
- **Easily identify opportunities for peer learning** within and among counties
- **Allow real-time data collation and processing**
- **Be easily configured** to produce different products for different levels of decision-making

Recommendation 2 : County Data Dashboards

APHRC explored options for a tool that not only tracks progress on priority indicators at the county level but is also easy to use. The recommended tool – and associated indicators—offer a multi-sector perspective to decision-makers about where investments can achieve the greatest impact and help drive progress toward economic growth and development. Its functions could also be expanded to support implementation of priority interventions in a multitude of sectors beyond those identified as central to the Demographic Dividend agenda.

This visualisation tool, or dashboard, would not be limited only to presenting data: it could also track support for decision-making and be a tool to ensure accountability and transparency at all levels of governance. The tool could incorporate predictive modelling that would assess the potential impacts of various investments in interventions aimed to develop or sustain human capital, to compare and assess efficiencies in each of the interventions. The results would be used to develop strategies for counties and incorporate tracking of achievement in their implementation.

The recommended data tracking tool to create county data dashboards is a configurable, off-the-shelf data collection and reporting software. It would offer the most functions and technical support, removing the burden of maintenance from the counties. Though it is an expensive option, it is considered the most cost-effective when compared with alternatives because it will maximize the ability of counties to use data for tracking considering their existing capacities.

These recommendations demonstrate synergy with a commitment reiterated by the Council of Governors to establish structures that will support counties to create robust data systems that track investments in human capital and maximize their impact through better-supported decisions. They have been adopted in full by the Council of Governors in May 2017.

Going forward, this decisive action by the Council of Governors could prove a regional model of how to action the shared value of data for decision-making. It is hoped that bold leadership and a commitment to nurturing human capital across countries, supported by sustained and targeted investment in the four pillars identified as critical to harnessing a Demographic Dividend, will yield economic and wellbeing benefits for all.