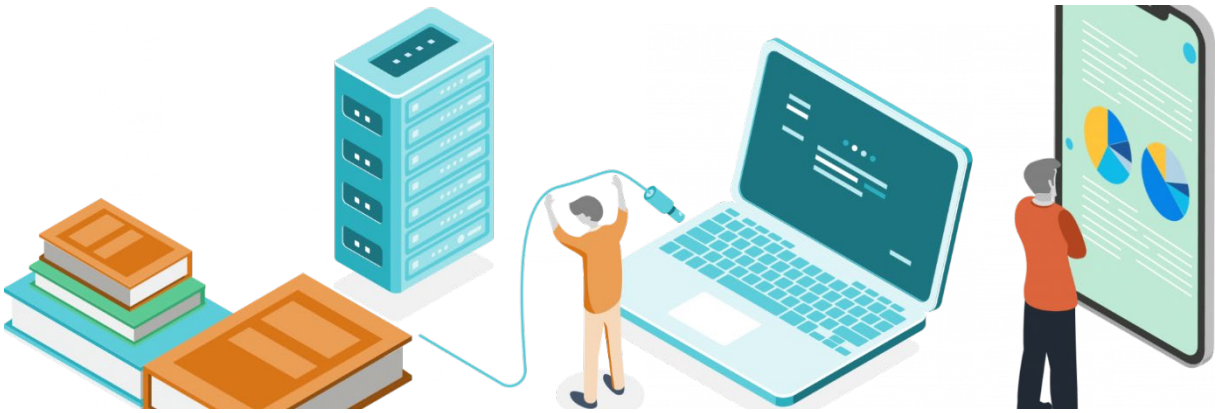
Administrative data for disaggregated Sustainable Development Goals indicators in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America

Development Account Project #13

Evaluation and learning
Final report

2021-2024



Report completed on December 2024
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The consultant would like to thank Vibeke Nielsen and Martina de Saverio for the valuable support they kindly provided throughout the course of this assignment. Their availability, professionalism, and the quality of their feedback deserve special recognition.

Above all, the consultant wishes to express sincere gratitude to the interviewees for the importance they placed on this exercise, generously agreeing to dedicate one to two hours of their time to answer the questions.

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List of acronyms

CRVS	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
DQAF	Data Quality Assurance Framework
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NSO	National Statistical Office
NSS	National Statistical System
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
ToC	Theory of Change
UNDESA	United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNRCO	United Nations Resident Coordinator Office
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
VNR	Voluntary National Review

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Executive summary

In January 2021, the UNSD started to implement the DA13 project to support the use of administrative data for statistical purposes and improve SDG reporting. The present report draws on data collected through quantitative and qualitative tools to explore the contributions that can be attributed to the project in that regard and makes recommendations to enhance impact.

The mission appraised both project implementation modalities (internal performance) and project achievements.

It was found that DA13 relied on a qualified management team that made good use of UN resources, and that has designed mechanisms to foster ownership and sustainability from the onset. By adopting a holistic, demand-driven approach, the project sought to address technical and legal challenges that hamper the use of administrative data while taking context specificities into consideration. Interventions are highly relevant, and there is evidence that the project has contributed to enhancing awareness, making data more accessible, and bringing closer actors from the national statistical systems. The project has contributed to building capacities on a wide range of areas, in particular data quality assessments. Some IT upgrades were also observed, albeit heterogeneously. Beyond all, DA13 has had a strong enabling effect, building trust among stakeholders and addressing salient issues that traditional technical assistance could not have solved. However, there is limited evidence that SDG reporting has improved.

Findings question the alignment between DA13 strategic vision and implementation modalities. The project endeavoured to “test” methods that use administrative data for statistical purposes in many contexts, but the geographic scope seemed too large given limited project resources. Implementation did not rest on a robust results and learning framework; the latter, based on well documented indicators and regularly collected data at country-level would have helped better monitor output delivery, draw regular lessons and make strategic adjustments to ensure transformative change.

Eventually, as is the case for most technical assistance projects, impact is affected by a set of external factors that are beyond the project’s control. The mission had found evidence that country-level change is commensurate with beneficiaries’ capacity and willingness to take advantage of project resources.

1. Description of the project

1.1. Background

When good-quality administrative systems are in place and their information is regularly updated, they can reliably provide a full picture of key aspects of a country's population or economy on a continuous basis. Data collected for administrative purposes can be a rich and cost-efficient source for the production of timely and high-quality official statistics, especially to address the urgent need for disaggregated data on SDG indicators to ensure no one is left behind in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. However, many countries still lack the infrastructure and technical and institutional arrangements needed for the efficient exchange and processing of administrative data and metadata for the production of official statistics. Moving in a direction of increased use of administrative data for statistics production will also make the statistical system more agile and resilient in times of crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.2. Project objectives and outcomes/results

It is against this background that the UNSD has embarked on a project to support the use of administrative data of the production of official statistics and SDG reporting in eight countries (nine initially). The purpose is to identify one to two thematic areas per country and provide assistance to address legal and technical challenges to administrative data sharing and processing. The results of the work shall provide practical level experiences that others can benefit from, and lead to a number of examples along the overall process of using administrative data for statistical purposes; from accessing data to processing them and publishing statistics based on them.

1.3. Project strategies and key activities

The project started with a country-by-country mapping of key dimensions:

- Situation in the focus area: overall understanding of the situation
- Baseline: data availability and dynamics at play in the sector
- Support provided by partners: an attempt to identify potential overlaps/synergies
- Assets/advantages: cooperation opportunities in the focus area
- Gaps: major issues identified at this stage
- VNR: comments on the Voluntary National Review

Once that background information was collected, the initial approach catered for a four-step support:

- First, capacity development needs assessments for each of the countries to develop better understanding of the baseline situation (national circumstances, level of development of the statistical system, skills among staff etc.) and the priorities and needs that need to be addressed within the framework of the project
- Second, a high-level event followed by a multi-day workshop to raise awareness and create ownership among stakeholders, particularly the administrative data owners, and support the work to initiate or expand collaboration
- Third, bilateral support in the form of workshops, trainings, technical assistance, study, etc. conducted to go more in depth on the content of the chosen thematic area and the specific needs identified
- Fourth, the project envisioned a final international workshop where countries share the results of their work.

That strategy was used as the backbone of the overall implementation, with national adjustments: high level events were not organised in all countries; or these were sometimes organised for a restricted number of people, focusing on the focus area. These were usually country-led to ground the project in the national context from the onset and encourage full ownership.

1.4. Beneficiaries and target countries

Key stakeholders of this work include the National Statistical Offices and the owners of the administrative data, along with the wider statistical system. Policy and decision makers are expected to benefit from the results of the work.

The project initially selected nine countries from three continents:

- Africa: Cameroon, Namibia and Tanzania
- Asia and the Pacific: Bhutan, Myanmar and Sri Lanka
- Latin America: Costa Rica, Dominican Republic and Ecuador

These countries were identified based on four criteria mentioned in the initial technical proposal:

- Demonstrated interest and ongoing work on inter-governmental collaboration and sharing of administrative data to help increase availability, timeliness and quality of SDG indicators.
- An interest to work on an area that is also useful in a wider context linked to the use of administrative data for statistical purpose so that they can function as practical case studies that can also be used as examples for other countries.
- Regional representation; As countries tend to compare themselves with countries in their own region, three regions have been included; Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America.
- An overall assessment of potential options with an aim to cover different thematic areas (i.e. health, population, business, environment etc.) and cross-cutting challenges (i.e. legal frameworks and trust, harmonization of standards, technical interoperability etc.)

Even though the nine initially selected countries met the above criteria, the list changed over the course of the first year, with Myanmar and Ecuador being removed, and the Maldives joining the group. These changes were justified as follows:

- Myanmar: Myanmar was originally one of the nine countries, but due to the political circumstances, engagement on capacity development was deemed challenging. At the same time, Namibia and Cameroon both proposed to expand the scope of areas covered. It was decided to take Myanmar out of the list and stick to eight countries
- Ecuador: in 2021, priorities of work had changed from using electronic invoicing as a data source for economic statistics to rather focus work on stunting which is a strong policy priority of the government in Ecuador. However, in 2022, following further changes of priorities, the country did not follow up on background information. It was decided to not continue the work with Ecuador.
- Maldives: the country stepped in in the wake of Ecuador's removal. UNSD engaged with the country, who demonstrated strong interest and commitment.

The final list of countries along with their focus areas is presented in the list below.

Table 1: DA13 countries, associated focus areas and related SDG indicators (source: various project documents)

Country	Focus area	SDG indicator
Bhutan	Education, health and CRVS	No specific indicator
Cameroon	Justice and crime indicators	SDG indicator 16.1.1. Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age
Chile	Population register	Large number of SDG indicators
Dominican Republic	Environment and disaster risk reduction	SDG indicator 13.1.1: Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population
Maldives	Employment and migration	Large number of SDG indicators
Namibia	Agriculture	SDG goals 2, 5 and 15
Sri Lanka	Business	SDG indicator 17.18.2: Number of countries that have national statistical legislation that complies with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics
Tanzania	Civil registration and vital statistics	SDG indicator 16.9.1: Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age.

1.5. Key partners and other stakeholders

The project relies on a wide range of stakeholders for the implementation of activities:

- UN entities: UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) as the leading entity, UN Economic Commissions for Africa (ECA), for Asia and the pacific (ESCAP) and Latin America (ECLAC), UN Resident Coordinator Office (UN RCOs), UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN International Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- Other international organisations: the World Bank
- A pool of consultants contracted for specific support

1.6. Resources

Project implementation rests on a project lead and a project support person, who are both based at UN headquarters in New York.

The total budget of the project was $624 000.

1.7. Link to the SDGs

The project seeks to help countries use administrative data to produce new statistical indicators, or to improve the production of already existing ones. Indicators reflect country priorities, which often align with the SDG agenda. As such, it can be said that the project contributes to improved SDG reporting.

1.8. Innovative elements

Implementation modalities did not imply innovative elements; however the focus on using administrative data for statistical production is in itself an innovation. In partner countries, the

use of admin records for that purpose is limited, and work to streamline it can be viewed as an innovation.

2. Evaluation objectives, scope and questions

2.1. Purpose and objectives

Both the ToRs and talks with the project team highlight two mission objectives:

- Accountability: the UNSD expects the mission to generate evidence regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of DESA's statistical capacity building work
- Learning: even though the project is not expected to be continued, the UNSD will continue to engage with countries on projects seeking to improve the use of admin data. Drawing lessons from DA13 will hence prove useful.

2.2. Evaluation scope, criteria and questions

The evaluation shall be all-encompassing: no country or activities is expected to be left aside.

While the ToRs catered for some evaluation questions, the evaluation mission refined that list and included new ones. They are all listed below.

Evaluation questions from the ToRs:

- Did the project strengthen national capacities in the project countries in establishing and implementing effective collaboration between agencies holding administrative data and the national statistical office, potentially leading to increased evidence-based policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation at national level?
- Did the project identify and make recommendations about the key entry points, during the duration of the project, to impact relevant social policy and programme development and implementation?
- Did the project strengthen national capacity of National Statistical Offices and other agencies of the National Statistical Systems to increase the use of data collected for administrative purposes in official statistics production and dissemination, particularly for SDG indicators and assessment of impact of Covid-19 on the society?
- Did the project effectively ensure the participation of country representatives in project activities?
- Did the project promote South-South cooperation to share knowledge and experiences?
- Did the project strengthen intra-Governmental collaboration with a focus on data sharing to increase availability, quality and timeliness of disaggregated data for SDG indicators?
- Did the project increase availability of disaggregated SDG indicators?

Effectiveness:

- What are the achievements of the overall project objectives/outcomes?
- Is the monitoring and evaluation system results-based and facilitates a project adaptive management?
- Assess how contextual and institutional risks, and positive external to the project factors, have been managed by the project management?

Efficiency of resource use and coherence:

- Have resources (financial, human, technical support, etc.) been allocated strategically to achieve the project outputs and outcomes?

- How well coordinated were implementing entities in implementing joint activities and/or among the implementing entities at project level?

Impact orientation and sustainability:

To what extent have targeted countries been able to make use of knowledge products/tools to improve their work and enhance results

- Which project-supported tools have been institutionalized, or have the potential to, by partners and/or replicated or external organizations?
- Is the project contributing to expand the knowledge base and build evidence regarding the project outcomes and impacts?
- How can aspects of the project that proved successful be scaled up and replicated after the project ends?

Complementary evaluation questions:

- *Relevance/alignment*
- Were the causal relationships documents?
- Was the project built following a complementarity/overlap assessment of initiatives implemented by other partners (regional/continental bodies, UN agencies, bilateral cooperation agencies)?
- What is the rationale behind the extended geographic scope?
- Was country-selection done on a genuine demand-basis?
- Did selection criteria take into consideration local constraints (compatibility with statistical production activities, infrastructure and facilities)?
- What was the project contribution in the identification of thematic areas?
- Were activities aligned to a national plan/strategy? Were they tailored to national constraints/maturity levels?

Effectiveness

- Are there areas/causal relationships that were not targeted by the project, but whose consideration could have led to better outcome?

Efficiency

- Did the project perform an absorption capacity assessment to match proposed inputs to the local constraints?
- To what extent did the project rely on assessments and tools produced by other structures/partners: peer reviews, statistical capacity index, evaluations, DQAF, etc.?
- Was the e-learning course design followed by an assessment of the existing and available offer?
- Were implementation modalities efficient to achieve the project objectives?

Impact

-
- What changes were generated by the project, whether intended or unintended? What are the most significant ones?
- Have the topic-specific use cases developed by the countries with the support of the project been shared with the national statistical system?

Sustainability

- Did the project frame an exit strategy to foster long-term impact?
- Was a sustainability risk assessment performed (low retention rate within NSOs, HR policies, governance schemes, etc.), and was mitigation strategy put together?
- Where project-supported tools co-constructed, to ensure full ownership by beneficiary countries?
- Beyond the project, has the use of admin data for statistical purpose been introduced in country priorities (national plans and strategies, requests for support, recruitment of relevant profiles)?

Gender and human rights perspective

- To what extent were gender and human rights perspectives integrated into design and implementation of the project?
- How can gender and human rights perspectives be better included in future projects design and implementation?
- To what extent did the project promote gender equality and non-discrimination?

3. Methodology

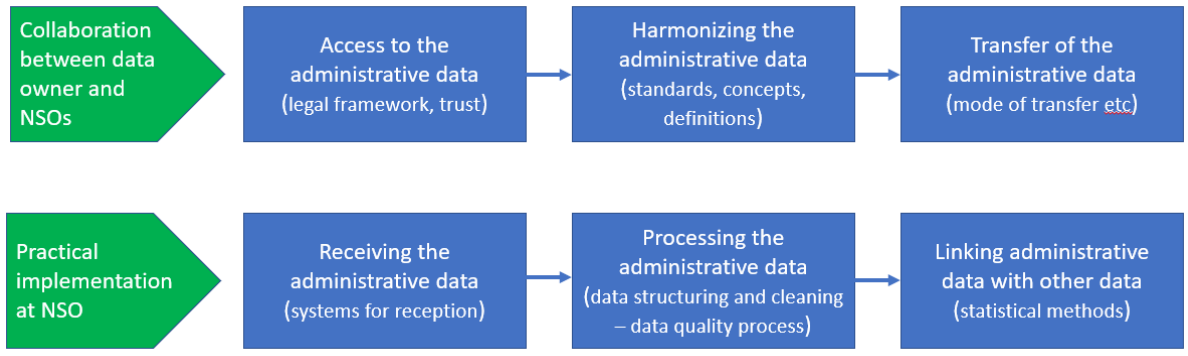
3.1. Inception phase

The inception phase started early September with a kick off call with the project team. It was an opportunity to discuss UN priorities, get a better understanding of the project implementation modalities and start delving into project-related materials. It was followed by a formal introduction to beneficiary countries, where the latter had a chance to ask questions about the overall assignments and make suggestions so as to the methodology to be used.

The consultant then reviewed documents communicated by the project management team: technical proposal, progress reports, field missions reports and materials produced at country-level. The consultant also had a chance to attend an online meeting on GIS data with the Maldives, to be exposed to the way technical assistance was provided.

Documentation review allowed for the intervention logic reconstruction. The project was not based on a formal theory of change, although some pathways had been identified in the technical proposal, that display some elements that are needed when working towards using administrative data for statistical purposes.

Figure 1: elements needed to use administrative data for statistical purposes (source: DA13 technical proposal)

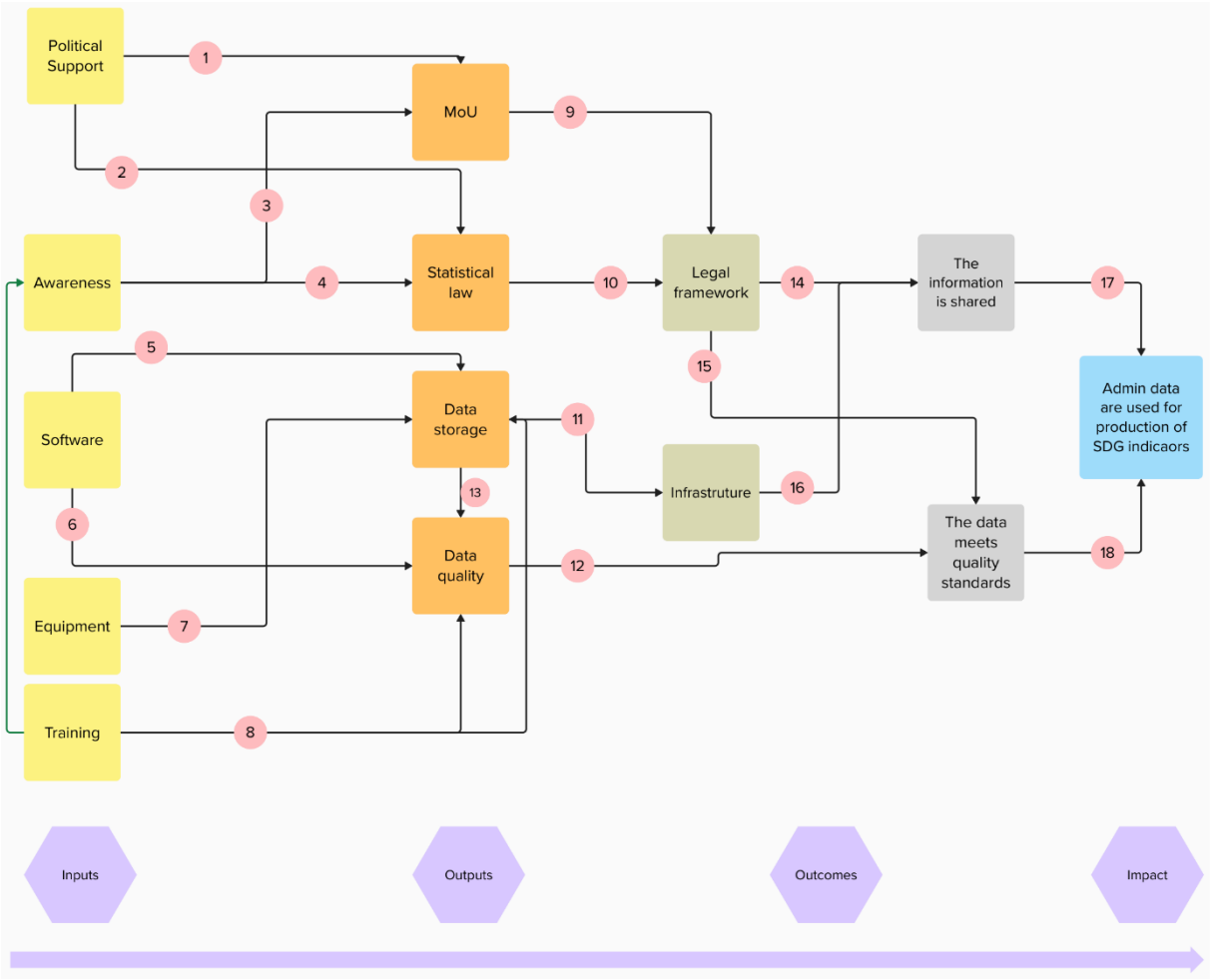


The consultant used these to reconstruct an extensive theory of change that serves two purposes:

- Project wise, it identifies the channels through which inputs turn into output, outcomes and impact.
- The ToC goes beyond the project though, as it comprises channels that were not necessarily considered by the project (in particular the purchase of equipment). They are featured in the theory of change for the sake of understanding all the mechanisms that shall be taken into consideration when discussing the use of admin data for official statistics

It is featured and explained below.

Figure 2: reconstructed project's theory of change (source: evaluation mission)



The mission has identified at least 18 relationships[1] that were supported by the project, that are all expected to contribute to improving the use of admin data to produce official statistics. These relationships can be described as follows.

Political support and leadership, obtained through high level initial events at the beginning of the projects, are needed to embark the national statistical system stakeholders. Other activities initiated at an early stage, such as three-to-four-day workshops, help raise awareness about the potential of admin data, as well as enabling mechanisms to put in place. These include the adoption of MoU signed between various administrations and statistical law upgrades to improve legal frameworks (1, 2, 3, 4, 9 and 10).

At the same time, support on IT equipment and software (software here also include "registers" and "management information systems") is needed to improve the way the data is stored and treated), and in the end, data quality (5, 6 and 7). However, it is important that these are "best case scenarios": the project never offered to provide equipment. This causal relationship, although important from a technical point of view, does not apply to the project. Upgrades in software and

[1] The relationships that are identified here are the most "visible", those that were explicitly targeted by the project. It should be kept in mind that these blocs are part of a system where relationships are more complex and not exclusively linear.

IT equipment all lead to improved infrastructure (12) which, combined with a conducive legal environment, allow for the information/data to be shared and exploited (15 and 16).

A third stream of work relates to capacity building and training that is provided by the project, including on the design and use of data quality assessment tools to identify sound data sources and work on data quality (8). Quality includes applies not only to the content of the data, but also to the way it is produced and stored. As a matter of facts, admin data does exist but often fails to contribute to the production of official statistics because it doesn't match with the requirement of statisticians. The quality of data also benefits from better data storage and overall investments in software and IT equipment (13). This all lead to setting and reaching higher quality standards (14).

Eventually, the regular sharing of quality admin data offers the possibility to produce official statistics, including on SDGs (17 and 18).

This theory of change and its underlying assumptions paved the way for the design of evaluation questions. They are annexed to this report.

3.2. Data collection phase

The data collection phase started in October and lasted six weeks. It relied on three tools:

- A quantitative form sent out to project beneficiaries
- A set of 10 bilateral interviews
- Attendance to several sessions during the UN World Data Forum where participants presented project achievements and impact in their respective countries

Quantitative questionnaires

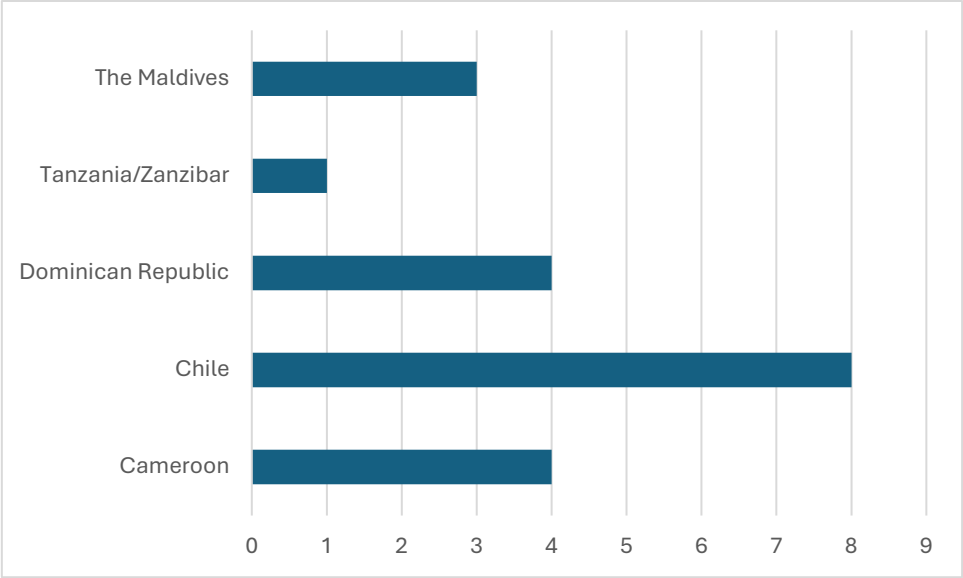
A quantitative questionnaire was designed to collect "raw" participant feedback on project activities. Information collected is useful to perform basic descriptive analysis and help detect trends to explore through qualitative interviews: overall project and activities relevance, progress made, observed changed, impeding factors, etc. The questionnaire was administered online using Framaforms[2] and responses were anonymous. It was translated into French and Spanish.

The DA13 project has targeted quite a number of participants throughout the eight beneficiary countries, be it NSOs or data holding agencies. Yet the degree of participation from one organisation to another is highly uneven: while some have attended one online workshop, others have been involved at all stages of implementation. This has raised concerns on the best way to fully capture quantitative information. As a mitigation measure, the consultant focused on participants who were associated to the project in the long run, *ie.* those who have been involved in activities that spanned across a relatively long period of time.

The consultant requested a list of people to the focal points in the NSO. However, their feedback was heterogeneous. While some countries quickly shared the list (Chile, Dominican Republic, Cameroon), other ones failed to do so. Consequently, responses are not representative: Chile is overrepresented while three countries did not provide feedback (Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Namibia). One should be careful when drawing conclusions from the information collected through that form.

[2] Framaforms is a free and open source solution created by a French non-profit called Framasoft, that advocates for a more open, less GAFA-dependent internet.

Figure 3: number of respondents to the quantitative evaluation form, by country (n = 20; source: evaluation mission)



Answers to the form are annexed to this document.

Qualitative data

Qualitative information complements the quantitative data. While the mission envisioned 15 to 16 interviews with different type of project participants (NSO and other data holding agencies, UN staffs, external consultants), only 10 formal interviews were conducted (see the list of interviewees in the annexes). Some countries failed to address requests for interviews, in particular Sri Lanka and Namibia.

Interviews were done both remotely and physically, at the UN world data forum.

3.3. Analysis matrix

The information collected feeds into two streams of analysis:

- Project implementation: observations that relate to project design, organisation, management, governance, resources
- Project performance: observations derived from the data collection phase, that shed light on the evaluation criteria

3.4. Learning

While the evaluation exercise seeks to gather evidence on the change generated by the project (or the lack thereof), learning sessions are an attempt to document “how things were done” in a bid to draw lessons, identify enabling factors or risks that ought to be mitigated.

Given time constraints and availability challenges, such sessions could not be organised before December 2024, as initially intended. The consultant proposes to schedule them in January 2025. Topics and target audiences shall be discussed with the team management. Below are some suggestions, that echo some discussions held with the project participants:

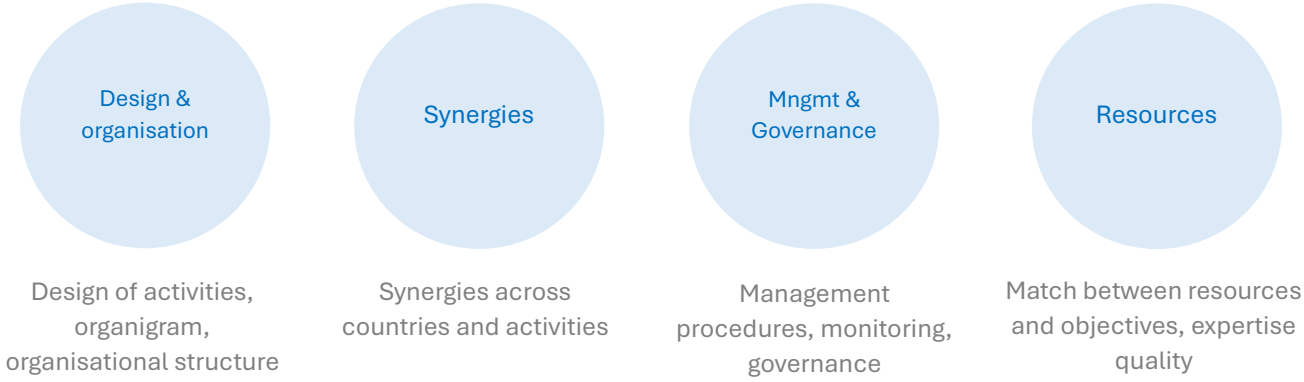
- Enhancing data sharing across administrations: good practices, challenges and opportunities
- Sustainable capacity building: a discussion on the availability of training materials and documentation produced by the project

- IT infrastructure: showcasing country experiences to share experience
- SDG reporting: discussing bottlenecks to SDG reporting and how to address them

4. Findings

5.1. Project implementation

Project implementation is assessed against the framework below.

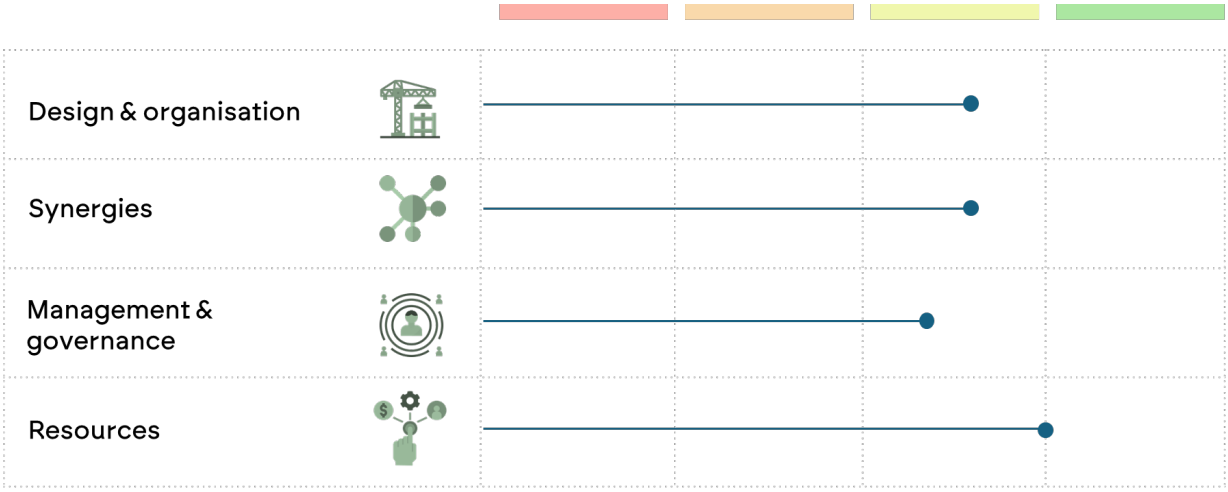


	Stage 1: deficient	Stage 2: elementary	Stage 3: secured	Stage 4: optimised
Design & organisation	Unidentified activities upstream. Confused definition of roles and responsibilities. Organisational structure not suited to needs.	Upstream identification of activities. Organizational chart established, roles and responsibilities defined but not necessarily understood. Organisational structure partially suited to needs.	Activities identified upstream and evolving. Detailed organizational chart, roles and responsibilities defined. Organisational structure meets needs satisfactorily.	Activities identified upstream, evolving, and aligned with objectives. Detailed organizational chart with roles and responsibilities defined, documented, shared, and understood. Organisational structure suited to needs.
Linkage	No synergy between activities and components, siloed operation. No sharing of project information within the team. Partners unaware of project actions.	Opportunistic search for synergies between activities. Low level of sharing and utilization of information from project outputs. Partners slightly informed about the overall project.	Constant search for synergies within a single component. Regular sharing of information about outputs and activity results. Partners relatively informed about the overall project.	Constant search for synergies between actions within a component and across components. Systematic valorisation of outputs and results across activities and components. Partners informed about project actions.
Mngmt & Gov.	No formal M&E system. Confusing management and reporting procedures. Governance and committees are informal and unsatisfactory.	M&E system built but rarely updated or used for reporting purposes. Management and reporting procedures defined but weakly implemented. Governance and committees are inconsistent.	Operational M&E system regularly updated and feeding into periodic reporting. Management and reporting procedures defined, documented, and shared. Governance and committees are satisfactory.	Operational M&E system, automated, and integrated into dashboards. Management and reporting procedures defined, documented, shared, and understood. Governance and committees are effective.
Resources	Needs not covered by resources. Profiles lacking required skills. High staff turnover affecting activity implementation.	Needs partially covered, with slightly under-dimensioned staff. Gaps in mobilised profiles. Significant changes in staffing during the project.	Needs satisfactorily covered, with reasonably well-dimensioned staff. Mobilised profiles relatively relevant to objectives. Some changes in staffing during the project.	Needs satisfactorily covered, with well-dimensioned staff. Mobilised profiles relevant to objectives. Stable staffing throughout the project.

Based on the information collected by the consultant, the overall project organisation reaches the stage "secured" and, to some extent, is close to the "optimised" level. It relies on a flexible yet robust organisational structure that takes advantage of the wide expertise that can be found in the UN agencies network. Strong country ownership combined with a "blue print" allows for a smart, gradual approach whereby countries progressively get familiar with the topic and can make the best of the project resources. The latter prove relevant, savvy and were praised by all beneficiaries.

Room for improvement include a more detailed monitoring and evaluation framework, the need for more project management resources, and better information sharing mechanisms across countries, although none of the above have altered the quality of project implementation.

Figure 4: DA13 project implementation evaluation matrix (source: evaluation mission)



Design and organisation

Overall, the project design and organisation are satisfactory. The identification of countries was done on a demand-basis and proposed activities were backed by detailed country diagnostics. All proposed actions are well grounded in the programme budget and match the UNSD mandate. The involvement of UN agencies was well-thought from the onset. In particular, the RCO offices were of great importance to initiate talks and foster overall coordination. By seeking to complement the use of "traditional" sources by administrative data to produce official statistics, the project offered an innovative approach, especially in the context of developing/emerging countries that usually rely on surveys. Having countries from various horizons was definitely a powerful feature to raise awareness on the potential of admin data and spread the message to a wide audience.

A key issue relies in the regional scope, which was determined in multiple ways (reliance on UN staffs' personal knowledge, support from UN RCO offices, feedback from regional commissions) and led to the identification of nine countries. Such a number was seen as way to showcase and raise awareness on the power of admin data in diverse contexts. A few years down the road, one can question this decision, especially given the "limited" resources available for the implementation of activities. The project managed to mitigate the lack of country involvement by changing the scope (Ecuador and Myanmar were taken out, while the Maldives joined later on), showing flexibility and narrowing down the number of countries to eight. Yet the heterogenous involvement of some countries confirms that a more restrictive focus could have allowed for more

granular and effective support, even though one should bear in mind that countries need to be given time to identify the activities that they are interested in. A respondent put it that way: "*it's a challenge to run a project with eight countries*".

Synergies

The project performed well in terms of synergies, whether internal or external.

The extensive work with UN agencies beyond UNSD, whether regional commissions, RCOs or other structures, demonstrates the capacity of the project to reconcile agendas and identify synergies with various organisations. The teams also managed to mitigate situations where potential duplication of efforts was identified, in particular with regional commissions (ESCAP and ECLAC). Some respondents mentioned the need for even further collaboration though, especially with country-based agencies in contexts where the partners were slightly less responsive.

Synergies were also identified with other UNSD-led initiatives, namely the Collaborative on admin data[3] initiative and the Data 4 now[4] project. While the geographic scopes of these two programmes don't match that of DA13, documents produced by one or the other were often reused by the project, and experience sharing mechanisms were put in place, the latest being a joint session during the November 2024 UN World Data Forum, where country representatives were given a chance to present their respective work. The involvement of DA13 team members in those two initiatives guarantees that there is no duplication of efforts.

Eventually, the project sought to propose a "blue print" while taking into account local realities: a high level event to get political support and raise awareness about on the topic, bilateral meetings to refine the understanding and the proposed approach, quality assessment actions, support to foster data sharing mechanisms, etc. At each level, the project provides guidance and materials, leveraging on past of similar initiatives.

Two areas for improvement were identified:

- The need for more coordination between the project and the beneficiaries, which sometimes suffered from the limited project resources available (see "resources" section for more information)
- Insufficient cross-country coordination: while experience sharing mechanisms were put in place (see: https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/capacity-development/admin-data/events), some countries expressed their interest in having a more formalised forum to discuss their issues and get support/guidance from more advanced countries

Once again, these are minor comments that did not impact project activities.

Management & governance

In terms of management and governance, the project reached the "secured" stage; however, this is the area where the mission identified the greatest room for improvement – although, as for the previous dimensions, these improvements don't imply any shortcoming that were detrimental to the project implementation.

Management procedures and distribution of labour were clearly stated. Reporting mechanisms, based on UN procedures, were also straightforward, although reporting expectations slightly changed over the course of the project (in particular financial reporting).

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[3] https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/capacity-development/admin-data/
[4] https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/capacity-development/data-for-now/

The greatest room for improvement lies in the Monitoring and Evaluation framework, in particular its formalisation. No theory of change was produced, and the log frame comprises basic indicators that mostly focus on project outputs, failing to fully capture the effects and changes that the project was looking to achieve.

Overall, project management rests on the shoulders of a restricted number of people. The team appeared particularly qualified and their skills, flexibility as well as social capacities were praised by beneficiary countries; yet **these resources were too limited from a quantitative standpoint**. "*We are over burdening ourselves*" is a sentence that summarises this observation. This, combined with the lack of a robust results framework and the vast number of countries, affects the capacity to provide tight country-level management and oversight (clear annual work plans backed by milestones and regularly monitored KPIs).

Resources

This section comprises technical, financial and human resources. **It is considered particularly satisfactory, based on the enthusiasm expressed by all the respondents**: the people recruited by the project, whether from the project management unit or the technical experts, all matched the beneficiaries' expectations, and beyond. This is a very consistent statement that is worth mentioning. Discussions held between the evaluator and some of the people who worked on DA13 confirmed that profiles displayed strong skills, whether technical or human. The extensive mobilisation of staffs from various UNSD branches (Development Data and Outreach, Demographic and Social Statistics, Economic Statistics Data Innovation and Capacity, Environment Statistics and Geospatial Information) has been a key point that is worth mentioning. Private contractors and local consultants were overall praised for their capacities and availability, although some concerns were expressed regarding the language barriers.

In terms of financial resources, the evaluation is slightly more contrasted. **The limited budget restricted the capacity of the project to provide more regular and in-country support**. The hybrid approach (remote and in-country activities) and the use of local consultants sought to mitigate this situation but most beneficiary countries claimed that more in-country presence would have made a greater contribution. Limited financial resources also, in a way, affected the capacity of the project to closely monitor local developments and further tailor its support.

Eventually, some countries consider that strong achievements in that area can only be achieved through significant IT upgrade. **The impossibility to purchase equipment is viewed by many as a strong deterrent to making sustainable progress**. The evaluator has a balanced opinion on the matter: pressing needs relate to political wills and data governance rather than equipment; and a lot can be achieved through then open source, free tools that were installed by the project.

5.2. Project performance

The project performance was assessed against five of the OECD evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. As per the ToRs, the mission has also appraised the extent to which the project may have contributed to advancing the gender equality agenda, as well as the promotion of human rights and vulnerable people. All the observations framed below are based either on secondary data (literature review, project documents, the consultant knowledge) or primary data (qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaire). Whenever a sentence appears "*in italics and quotation marks*", it means that it is directly quoting a statement issued by an interviewee.

Criteria #1: relevance

> Enhancing the use of administrative data, a concrete solution to mitigate the shortcomings of SDG reporting

Reporting on SDGs puts national statistical systems under stress. In emerging and developing countries, official statistics mostly come from surveys and census that are often handled by the National Statistical Offices. Not only are these resources-draining and time-consuming, but they are not implemented every year. Besides, they sometimes fail to capture disaggregated dynamics to fully account for granular phenomenon, in particular the situation of the poor and the vulnerable.

In more mature statistical systems, survey and census data are complemented by administrative records, from which statistical analysis can be derived when well kept. This significantly alleviates the financial burden of the NSOs and helps increase the quality, timeliness and granularity of statistical information.

The project was designed in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis, where data and statistics infrastructure had been disrupted, further highlighting the need to include new data sources to better monitor the impact of the pandemic.

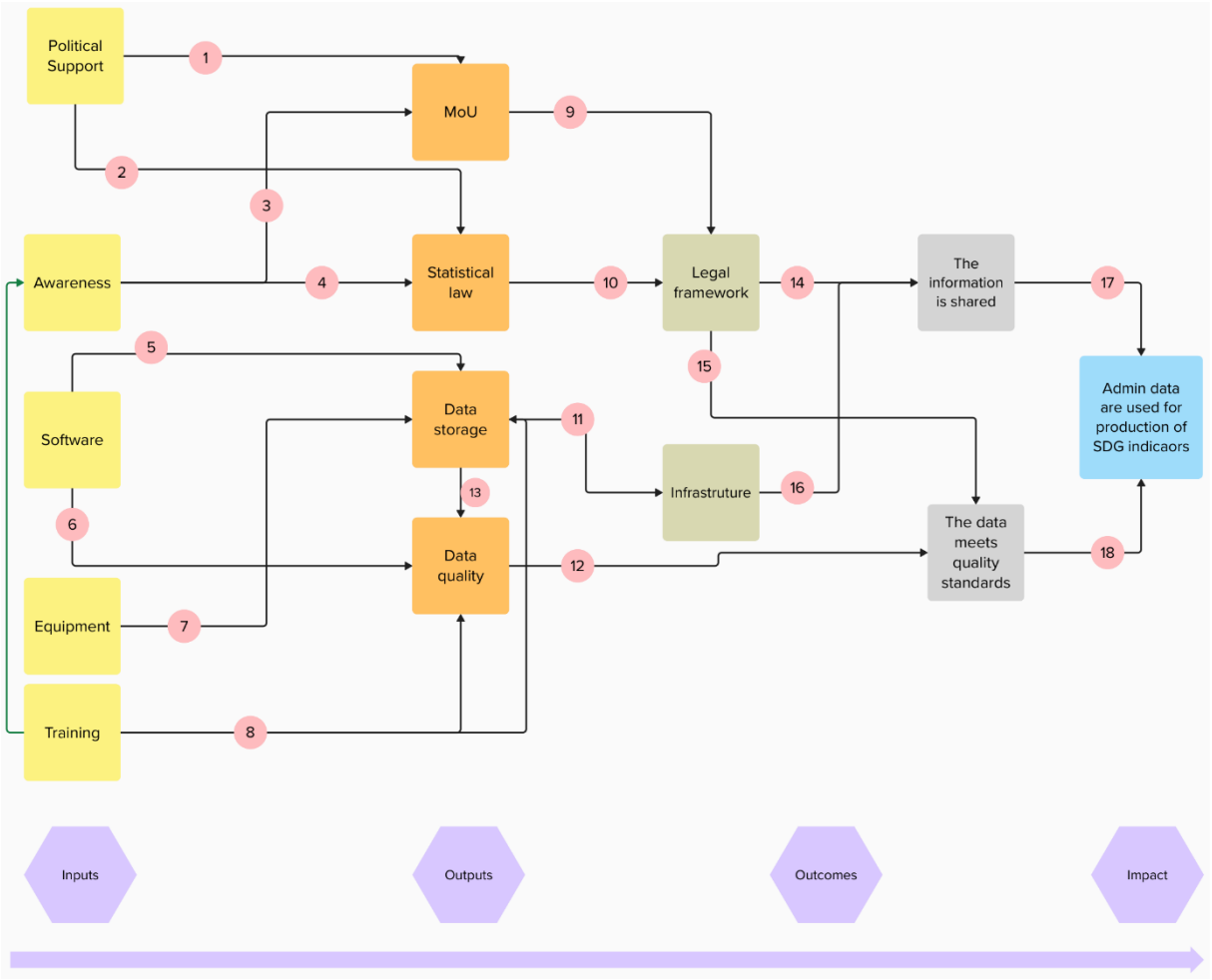
In that sense, **the very objective of the project proves totally relevant**. The use of administrative data for the production of official statistics is a trend that has been promoted by international agencies for several years[5] and the project attempts to advance this agenda is welcome.

> From a technical point of view, the proposed activities are relevant…

Even though the project does not rely on a formal theory of change, the team carried out country-level baseline assessments to better appraise national contexts, identify gaps and design relevant actions. Based on the documentation provided by the project, the evaluation mission has endeavoured to reconstruct a theory of change, in the form of a simplified contribution analysis, to identify the relationships between inputs, outputs and outcomes, and assess whether these were relevant to the beneficiary countries. This ToC is featured below.

[5] See in particular the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data which highlights the need to "[improve] the quality of national statistical registers and expand the use of administrative records integrating them with data from surveys and other new data sources, for the compilation of integrated social, economic and environmental statistics and in relation to follow up on the 2030 Agenda."

Figure 5: DA13 reconstructed theory of change (source: evaluation mission)



When presented to the people that were interviewed, not only was this ToC considered "accurate", in the sense that it did reflect the overall project approach, but it was also described as "encompassing" or "exhaustive", with very little actions missing that could better encourage the use of admin data. In other words, **DA13 strategy to achieve better use of admin data is relevant**.

In details, most respondents confirmed that the first challenges lie in the relationships 1 to 4, in particular the political support ("*If you convince the high level person, it is more likely that you can get the data from their staffs*") and the overall awareness, whether by the NSO ("*when an NSO works on a survey, everything is under their control, which is not the case when using admin data; NSOs need to be reassured*") or the data holder ("*in many countries, the legal framework is there, but not enforced because the data holders don't understand why their data is important*"). In most countries, the project held "high level events" with quite a number of senior staffs and representatives from a wide range of organisations from the NSS, to discuss the use of admin data, **in a bid to foster political sponsorship and raise awareness** on the matter.

Software and equipment are another key dimension to consider when seeking to enhance the use of admin data: "*It's always easier to make progress when you work on IT*", even though it is sometimes underestimated ("*the infrastructure part often gets lost, it's not very much emphasised when we talk about admin data*"). **The project supported IT upgrades** by providing support either through an in-house expert or by hiring local consultants.

Eventually, **building the capacity of staffs on a wide range of areas is paramount**, as using admin data comes with many challenges: training on data quality assessments, on the harmonisation of concepts, on data processing and analysis, etc. Besides, training has a strong spillover effect as it also increases awareness and knowledge, which in turns positively affects the capacity of the NSS to better understand and address interoperability challenges.

> …and foster demand-driven actions to factor in national, context-specific requirements

The project kicked off in January 2021, but engagement with countries started long before that, through various channels: country-level annual planning exercises with UN agencies, UNSD staff country knowledge, discussions with regional commissions, etc. Four country selection criteria are mentioned in the technical proposal:

- Demonstrated interest and ongoing work on inter-governmental collaboration and sharing of administrative data
- An interest to work on an area that is also useful in a wider context linked to the use of administrative data for statistical purpose
- Balanced regional representation to allow for cross-continent experience sharing
- An overall assessment of potential options with an aim to cover different thematic areas (i.e. health, population, business, environment etc.) and cross-cutting challenges (i.e. legal frameworks and trust, harmonisation of standards, technical interoperability etc.)

As a result, nine countries were initially selected and underwent baseline assessments. This initial mapping revealed common legal and technical challenges across countries, which are reflected in the content of the ToC. Yet, instead of applying a one-size-fits-all solution, **countries were asked to prioritise thematic areas and identify their most pressing needs, from a policy perspective**. The baseline assessments that were performed at a very early stage documented the state of play in each country and helped understand where the project had a chance to make a difference.

Beyond the design phase, **the evaluation mission has collected significant evidence that the actions that were undertaken are demand-led and factor in national priorities**:

- The “high level events” that were organised at the beginning of the project were managed by the national stakeholders, who decided on the agendas and the keynote speakers.
- The tools that were used, in particular the ones dedicated to assessing data sources quality, were tailored to the context.
- Eventually, while the project often targeted improving SDG reporting, it allowed for the consideration of country-level priorities beyond the mere SDG framework, further enhancing its alignment to national considerations.

Some beneficiaries mentioned their full involvement in the management of project resources (“*we were involved in the selection of the consultant and were able to put on priorities on the table*”), while others observed that “*the project always found a way to cater for our needs*”.

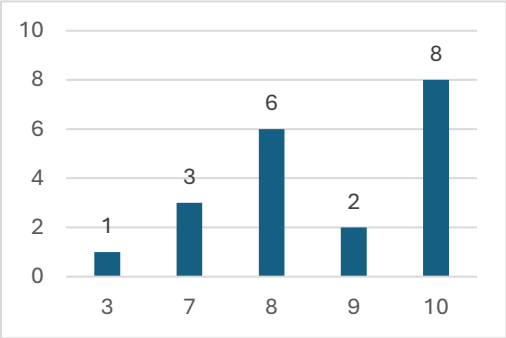


Figure 6: level of agreement with the statement "the project was tailored to our needs" (n = 20); author: evaluation mission)

To the question "on a scale from 1 to 10, did the project address our needs", the distribution of responses shows that **beneficiaries vastly see the project as tailored to their needs**, at the notable exception of Tanzania, whose satisfaction was rated "3". Tanzania's involvement has proven challenging, as repeatedly mentioned in progress reports. The mission has not been able to interview them and discuss that perception.

An overly ambitious geographic scope

Nine countries were initially selected, based on the criteria above mentioned and following talks to test their interests in joining the project. However, that list was eventually narrowed down to eight countries, with Ecuador and Myanmar being taken out while the Maldives joined in.

In the case of Ecuador, the 2021 progress report mentions changing priorities from using electronic invoicing as a data source for economic statistics to rather focus work on stunting. In 2022, as the country failed to follow up on background information, a decision was made to replace it by the Maldives. As for Myanmar, the 2021 report recalls that the project could not engage in capacity development activities due to political circumstances.

While changing the geographic scope showcases the project's capacity to adapt to a changing environment, one can question the relevance of such an enlarged geographic scope given the limited project resources. The evaluation understands that the UN mandate implies collaboration with as many countries as possible, regardless of their capacities; yet this approach shall be reconciled with limited project resources.

Besides, other limitations were mentioned: limited engagement with Tanzania, availability challenges in other countries because of the organisation of population census (Namibia), changing political situations (Sri Lanka), etc.

Working on a multi-country project implies resource-consuming coordination efforts. In a context where resources allocated to project management, be it financial or human, are relatively scarce, **having too many countries jeopardises the capacity of the project to closely monitor activities and respond to changing environments**. This observation echoes comments that were framed by several respondents: "*we didn't have time to accommodate for all requests*".

Conclusion on the relevance

Overall, the project was relevant, in many fashions. First, the activities that were proposed all converge towards increasing the quality of statistical information, a common goal shared by national and international organisations. The project has put in place consultation mechanisms whereby countries were given a chance to identify their priorities, even beyond the SDGs reporting framework. Beneficiaries praise the project flexibility and overall acknowledge that the proposed activities were tailored to their needs.

In spite of those positive findings, the evaluation mission is sceptical of the extended geographic scope, especially in a resource-constrained context. A more restricted focus could have proven more relevant.

Criteria #2: effectiveness

Challenges in assessing the project effectiveness

Effectiveness is the degree to which an intervention is successful in delivering planned outputs. In the context of DA13, there is a matrix of outputs that is assessed in yearly progress reports. However, **outputs are neither country-specific nor tied to indicators, which makes results-based monitoring quite challenging**:

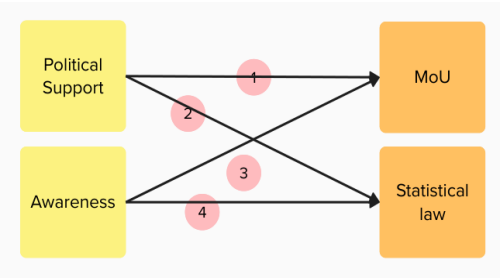
- No country-specific outputs: all outputs apply to the eight countries. The project management team is of course well aware of the country-level details and dynamics; yet the lack of information at national level does not allow for a granular analysis that would highlight success and failures in distinctive, context-specific way. As an example, output OP 1.4 "Practical level work, including advisory services and on-the-job training, for key stakeholders to help ensure that new mechanisms are established" remains vague and does not properly inform on the course of the project at country level (what purpose, positioning in the theory of change, etc.).
- No indicators: outputs are assessed against a status matrix comprising five values: completed, in progress, delayed, not yet started, cancelled. While the latter sheds light on the overall progress, it can't be measured in a quantitative way. It is not possible to appraise whether the project has been successful in delivering concrete outputs. For example, OP 2.3 is "Cross-country webinars and workshops to exchange experiences and learnings", and is not tied to a precise, delimited indicator such as "number of organisations who were sponsored to attend this specific forum". Besides, given that there is no target that can monitored over time, such an indicator can never reach the status "completed".

Therefore, for the sake of this evaluation, the mission sought to appraise project effectiveness against the theory of change, to try and quantify where DA13 contributions were the greatest.

Overall appreciation of DA13 effects against the reconstructed theory of change

Data collected by the mission allows for an assessment of each dimension of the ToC.

Political support and awareness



The first part of the theory of change identifies four relationships that all deal with the need to get political support and raise awareness for data to be shared through MoUs between data holders and the NSOs. Both may also lead to upgraded statistical frameworks and laws, that give a clear mandate to the NSOs and oblige data holders to share the data.

The mission found that the project made a huge contribution both in terms of political support and awareness. Several patterns were identified.

Political support was sought from the onset. The project emphasised the need to hold a high-level event that would gather in the same room the top management of relevant administrations (not only NSOs, but also line ministries). In some cases, Ministers attended, throwing their weight in the process and encouraging data holders to cooperate. In many emerging contexts, decisions often come from the top and not much can be done without green lights from the managers. As mentioned by an interviewee: "*Once the Director General is on board, everything falls into place*".

Such events also helped to raise awareness on the potential of admin data, which is often unknown, even within the NSOs: "*in many agencies, data is far from a priority, and people don't understand why it can be useful. Having these workshops, in the presence of Ministers, was highly beneficial to get people on the same page*".

The project, through the presence of a UN agency, had a strong "enabling effect". In some cases, NSOs had engaged with data holders long before DA13 started. Yet oftentimes discussions failed to translate into data exchanges due to limited political commitment. The presence of the UN was mentioned by almost all interviewees, from both beneficiary organisations and from within the project, as an enabling factor to have people formally agree on working together:

- "*Our role is to be in the room to make the other people come, as statistics office are not the strongest players. When the UN is in the room, it makes a difference*"
- "*If we are backed by the UN, it's easier to venture into the work*"
- "*Once you have a third party, they are more opened to listen. That's the added value of the UN*"
- "*Sometimes, NSOs need the help from international organisations to convince other government agencies in the country: 'Based on UN recommendations, we should do…'*".

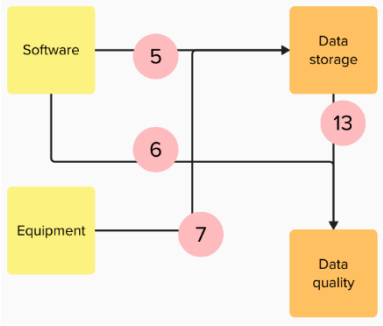
The positive effect of the UN presence applies to several dimensions: increased confidence among partners, pressure to get things done, a guarantee of quality, an opportunity to test tools and methods that the NSOs did not have sound command of, etc. **Overall, this enabling factor was mentioned at least fifteen times in the interviews.**

Increased political support and awareness turned into the signing of many MoUs between NSOs and data holders, a key project indicator. Overall, the mission has identified that such MoUs had been ratified in four countries, with Chile having signed up to six.

The signature of such MoUs have a positive structuring effect on the statistical system as a whole. Not only do they bring data holders closer to NSOs, but they can also be marketed to convince further data holders that sharing the data comes with benefits. Chile has mentioned that first MoU was highly beneficial in that regard: "*having on MoU with civil registration helped convince other structures. It was the most difficult to get, but it opened new perspectives*".

The project has been slightly less involved in statistical framework updates, which were expected to be an output of political support and increased awareness. This seems to have taken place only in Sri Lanka. The mission has sought to identify reasons why such reforms did not spark more interest from the beneficiary countries. The answers lean towards scepticism on the benefits of renovating the legal framework. An interviewee mentioned that "*you may have the best legal framework, but it all boils down to the political will to enforce it*". Another respondent stated that in his country the legal framework was conducive, but few datasets were exchanged between administrations. In both cases, respondents put forward the benefits of working on bilateral MoUs rather than an overarching, less actionable framework.

IT software and infrastructure



The project has endeavoured to support countries in the upgrading of IT infrastructure and the use of more advanced IT solutions, but not in the purchase of equipment. Both were expected to make a significant contribution in the way the data can be shared and stored, which in turns positively affect data quality and availability.

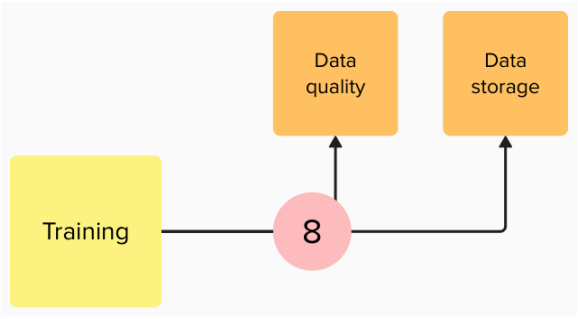
As mentioned by a respondent, "*it's easier to make progress when you work on IT*". Some countries received support from the project, in particular Chile, the Maldives and Namibia. In the case of Bhutan, collaboration was discussed, but another partner already provided support. In Sri Lanka, political circumstances affected the provision of support in that area.

The added value of the project, praised by interviewees who were associated to IT-related activities, is to propose a modular approach that is based on the country development stage: a data lake-like solution (MinIO), creation of pipelines to pull data and store it in the data lake, etc. All proposed solutions are free and open source to avoid vendor lock-in and foster sustainability. When activities were implemented, beneficiary countries expressed their satisfaction with the project: "*We have achieved really well against what we have planned*". Setting up these systems has modernised some practices that were based on inappropriate solutions (emails, google drive, etc.) that were significantly affecting data quality (versioning, duplicates, etc.). In some cases, though, the lack of MoU has impeded data sharing and the systems are not used at their fullest potential; but the project has at least prepared and trained the teams.

Causal relationship number 7 describes the need to purchase equipment to improve data storage; however, purchase of equipment was not within the DA13 scope. However, the project managed to make meaningful contributions in countries whose equipment were poor/missing, in particular when server capacities, by setting up FTP servers.

Even though some countries greatly benefitted from the DA13 support, other ones failed to undergo significant IT upgrades, for a wide range of reasons: limited capacities, poor infrastructure, lack of conducive environment for data sharing, etc. In that sense, the capacity of the project to generate positive outputs in terms of IT upgrades is commensurate to country IT maturity and readiness. A respondent mentioned that his country was not ready to receive support on IT upgrades and that data sharing shall continue the way it used be done (emails and Excel sheets). Given the diversity of beneficiary countries, achievement in terms of IT upgrades are not as significant as the ones related to MoUs and awareness.

Capacity building



DA13 sought to build the capacities of its partners in various fashions. The project trained IT teams so that they could autonomously use and maintain the IT solutions. Training was also provided on the quality assessment so that NSOs could engage with data holders and explore the extent to which new admin data sources could be used to produce statistics.

Capacities were built through an 'hands-on' approach rather than through formal classroom courses. Training components were embedded in activities, whether they were implement online on in-country. Various areas were targeted, and there is evidence that they generated at least five effects.

Most countries have improved their capacities to assess data quality. Assessing the quality of the data is paramount to decide whether or note a data source can be used for the production of statistics. The many activities implemented by DA13 on data quality assessments have, in that regard, made a significant contribution. There is evidence that some countries have continued to undertake such assessments after the initial project support (Chile, The Dominican Republic, Cameroon, the Maldives, and to some extent Bhutan).Tanzania also received guidance on quality improvement.

Countries are in a better position to maintain their IT infrastructure. Even in the absence of data sharing agreements, countries have benefitted from capacity building sessions and are less dependent on external consultants to perform IT upgrades and setup data sharing mechanisms.

Training contributes to awareness. This is rather a "retro effect" of training: beyond building the capacities to assess quality and to process data, training contributes to raising awareness and to making people more mindful of the impact of their daily job on the production of statistics. In the case of Namibia, the project the IT team who was trained was then able to launch a platform on their own. In the Maldives, the team was initially quite weak, and is now able to use MinIO autonomously.

The capacities to make decisions has increased. Eventually, especially in the case of more "advanced" countries (Chile), some participants reported that the project helped improve their capacities to make decisions. Their technical skills did not necessarily improve, yet the project has exposed them to situations where strategic decisions needed to be made, that would have an impact on the way admin data are used. The project helped these people understand what was at stake and what would be the implications of each option to be picked.

Structural factors have impeded the project's effectiveness

The mission has documented many effects that can be directly attributed to the project. However, some impeding factors negatively affected the project capacity to generate more effects. Some are beyond the project's control, while other ones relate to the project structure itself.

The Covid pandemic

Activities started in 2021, while the world had not fully recovered from the Codiv 19 pandemic. A hybrid approach, combining online and in-country actions helped mitigate that challenging context, t**he impossibility to visit countries at an earlier stage affected the capacity to quickly start activities** and engage with all stakeholders from the onset.

Organisational issues and limited availability of countries

Beyond the Covid crisis, **almost all countries experienced situations that affected their capacity to take advantage of the resources provided by the project**.

Some had their resources assigned to key data collection exercises (household census in Tanzania, Namibia, Sri Lanka). In the case of Sri Lanka, the changing political context led to the NSO being unable to respond to the project's request – as a matter of facts, the mission failed to interact with representatives from Sri Lanka, in spite of many attempts to do so. In some contexts, such as Tanzania, remote engagement proved challenging, for physical (connectivity issues) and cultural reasons (staffs require the physical presence of a manager to make formal decisions). Cameroon on their end have reported that institutional instability and staff turnover have affected its capacity to mobilise the national statistical system, as critical people were reassigned to new positions.

Project resources and procedures

Overall, beneficiary countries have expressed their satisfaction with the quality of the expertise provided by the project. They have also praised the beneficiary-centred approach whereby countries are in the driving seat and are invited to share their preoccupations.

However, the mission has collected feedback that are worth paying attention to.

First, in few cases, **some beneficiary organisations have expressed concerns about the quality of consultants**. They have challenged their technical skills or their negative impact on the timing (in the case of the Dominican Republic: "*we were too dependent on consultants, who were not reacting quick enough*") and have identified the languages barriers as an issue.

Second, **several countries would have liked to work on longer activities**. In-country missions were often preceded or followed by remote sessions, yet in many occasions participants consider that the timing was sub-optimal. This particularly applies to challenging contexts, where capacities are limited (Cameroon).

Eventually, **a concern that is shared by both the participants and the project team relates to time constraints**. Given the wide geographic scope and the relatively limited resources, DA13 has often seemed to be "in a rush", or at least gave the impression that the available resources were not enough to finalise the work that was planned. This was mentioned by many respondents, whether from the project implementation team or beneficiary countries, and it can be explained by the limited resources available for follow up. The lack of regular, in-country presence, makes monitoring more delicate, and is more prone to delaying activities.

Conclusion on the effectiveness

After a careful investigation of the causal relationships laid in the theory of change, **the mission has collected evidence that the project has positively affected quite a number of areas**.

Countries have confirmed that national statistical systems are now more aware of the potential of administrative data to produce official statistics, and that more data was made available due to the signature of MoUs between the NSOs and data holders. The mission has also found evidence of improved capacities to process the data, appraise the quality of data sources, and, to some extent, maintain the new IT setups.

IT systems were upgraded, albeit unevenly, which is an outcome of countries requests for support.

DA13 being a multi-country initiative, it is worth noting that effects that are attributed to the project are highly heterogeneous, and mostly depend on the beneficiaries' capacities and willingness to make the best of the proposed resources. Having a beneficiary-centred approach seems highly relevant in that regard. Yet some countries suffer from external factors that affect their availability, a dimension that is key in a setup where a significant part of activities are implemented remotely.

Criteria #3: efficiency

Value for money analysis

The overall budget of DA13 is 624 000 USD. To proceed with the value for money analysis, the mission has estimated how much of that budget was dedicated to human resources.

Table 2: project budget description (source: technical proposal and progress report updates)

Description	Amount USD	Description
Other staff costs	0	Project management staffs
Consultants and experts	280 000	Expertise, including 15k for consultant travel
Travel of staff	142 000	Travel costs for UN staffs
Contractual services	60 000	Translation, printing, etc.
General operating expenses	52 000	venue costs for workshops, including lunch and coffee breaks
Workshops / Study tours (Grants and contributions)	90 000	Concluding workshop on exchanging experiences and sharing results, and study tours
Total	**624 000**	

In other words, our of 624 000 USD, 265 000 goes to HR, that is 42% of the overall budget. In other words, 58% of the budget funds "incidental expenditures" (travel, DSA, logistics, etc.). By international standards, such a ratio looks quite inefficient at first glance, as most of the budget covers costs that are not particularly "productive". A more granular look at the figures and the project context calls for a more balanced judgement.

First of all, DA13 is a multi-country project, which implies a lot of travelling and events-related costs, as quite a number of activities are implemented as workshops and gatherings, that are much needed to gain political support and generate awareness. That said, having about 25% of the overall budget dedicated to covering travel costs of UN stats seems very high.

Second, DA projects don't factor in UN staff salaries. In other words, the costs related to project management do not appear in this budget. Factoring these resources in, as is usually the case in cooperation projects, would lead to a totally different picture. This also applies to other UN resources beyond project management (staffs from other UNSD branches, UN ODC, UN regional commissions, UN RCOs, etc.). As a matter of fact, the reliance of a vast network of UN agencies, which is not accounted for in this budget, allows for the relatively limited resources of DA13 to be strategically allocated and to address the needs of beneficiary countries in a relevant fashion. DA13 displays strong financial leveraging performances, that shall be praised.

Considering also that experience sharing mechanisms and study tours highly contribute to raising awareness and to getting exposed to new ideas, allocating a significant budget share to this activity seems strategic.

As a conclusion, **the overall budget distribution seems well-thought, preserving value for money.** It does not call for comments, as mentioned by several respondents:

- "*With very little money, a lot has happened*"
- "*Considering all of that, I think we've done good things*"

No concerns on absorption capacity concerns and duplication of efforts

The mission has sought to explore the extent to which countries were facing absorption capacities that would jeopardise impact generation. **No significant concerns were raised** on the matter. The needs-based approach avoided absorption capacity issues.

Risks of effort duplication are mentioned in some progress reports, but mitigation measures were quickly taken by engaging with the concerned organisations and agreeing on clear scopes of intervention.

Questions on the implementation modalities

To accommodate for the wide geographic scope, activities were implemented in a hybrid fashion. In some cases, this seems to have been efficient, such as Namibia where all the IT upgrades were done remotely. In other cases, remote engagement has proven challenging and less efficient than in-country presence. This was highlighted by many respondents. The in-country/remote distribution of activities seems to have been pretty much the same for all the DA13 countries. **The project could have allocated more resources to in-country actions in contexts that were less reactive to distance engagement**.

Beyond the in-country/remote distribution, **the mission has identified room for improvement in the timing of the activities**, a concern that echoes the wide geographic scope. In spite of relatively few resources being dedicated to project management, all actions were launched at the same time. Inception phases are time consuming and require a lot of attention, and the mission has identified long period of time between project kick off and the first activities (whether remote or in-country), questioning the readiness/willingness of countries to engage on the topic. The first mission in Cameroon took place in December 2022; the project did not visit Tanzania before 2023; quality assessments in Bhutan started in May 2022. In a context where time and resources are limited, a time-bound approach, combined with short sprints, could have been considered.

One of the project objectives is mentioned in the technical proposal as follows: “The idea of this is to showcase the span of areas where administrative data can be utilised for statistical purposes and through the work share good practices and experiences”. The mission is of the view that for such an objective to be fulfilled, **a more focused approach would have been more beneficial**, as it would have allowed for more in-country presence and more structural support to further advance fewer situations.

Conclusion on efficiency

The project has heavily relied on UN in kind resources to strategically allocate available funding. Absorption capacities were not an issue as activities were needs-based.

However, limited time and financial resources were not necessarily compatible with the extended geographic scope. In some cases, activities started at a late stage and were not likely to contribute to reaching the objective.

The mission believes that the available resources don’t match the strategic vision of the project. Focusing on less countries and having a time-bound approach could have been more efficient.

Criteria #4: impact

Warnings on measuring the impact of technical assistance projects

Measuring impact is always a challenging exercise especially in the case of technical assistance projects. The causality relationship between the observed impact and the project must be robust and rest on strong, extensive data. Technical assistance projects are implemented in complex environments where many factors shall be taken into account (political stability, brain drain, internet connectivity, etc.) Besides, when the nature of the topic addressed by the project is fairly technical, significant changes take time to materialise. Impact is therefore better appraised a while after project completion. In the present case, **there is a chance that changes that were observed by the evaluation mission are only partial and don't reflect the whole spectrum of impacts that were generated.**

The envisioned impact of DA13 is framed in a results framework that comprises four outcome indicators. Reporting on these indicators was done on an annual basis in a progress report. The four outcome indicators, as well as their level of achievements, are presented below.

Table 3: results framework (source: progress report 2023 and evaluation mission)

Code	Description	Indicator value by 2024
Objective	To strengthen the capacities of national statistical systems of selected countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America to better utilise sources of administrative data for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for monitoring of the SDGs and the impact of COVID-19	Not applicable (no indicator)
OC1	Strengthened intra-Governmental collaboration with a focus on data sharing to increase availability, quality and timeliness of disaggregated data for SDG indicators. *Indicator 1.1: At least 60 % of target countries have conducted an assessment of the administrative sources existing for the thematic area chosen and their feasibility for statistical purposes, with a focus on key quality aspects and involvement of stakeholders.*	Achieved: assessment performed in 100% countries
OC1	Strengthened intra-Governmental collaboration with a focus on data sharing to increase availability, quality and timeliness of disaggregated data for SDG indicators. *Indicator 1.2: At least 40 % of project countries include a new mechanism to facilitate efficient sharing and quality control of administrative sources for statistical purposes.*	Achieved in five countries (62,5%): - MoUs in Bhutan, Chile (several MoUs), Namibia, and the Dominican Republic - Sri Lanka has a new draft legal framework The Maldives are working on an MoU with the immigration services.
OC2	Strengthened national capacity of National Statistical Offices and other agencies of the National Statistical Systems to increase the use of data collected for administrative purposes in official statistics production and dissemination, particularly for SDG indicators and assessment of impact of Covid-19 on the society. *Indicator 2.1: At least 50 % of target countries have added at least one new indicator or a dimension to data disaggregation for the SDG indicators or other national*	Not achieved – although three countries (Dominican Republic, Namibia, Zanzibar) produced publications

	policy priority needs which the register of choice is covering, and made them available to the public	
OC2	Strengthened national capacity of National Statistical Offices and other agencies of the National Statistical Systems to increase the use of data collected for administrative purposes in official statistics production and dissemination, particularly for SDG indicators and assessment of impact of Covid-19 on the society. *Indicator 2.1: At least 50 % of target countries have developed concrete, practical guidance material of a data quality assurance for the use of administrative data in statistics production, including for COVID-19 indicators*	Achieved in six countries (75%): Bhutan, Cameroon, Chile, Dominican Republic, Maldives and Namibia

When compared against the envisioned outcomes, DA13 has achieved 75% of its objectives. This figure suggests that the project is likely to have generated change within beneficiary countries. **Such statement shall be interpreted with caution**, for a wide range of reasons.

First of all, the inception report of the evaluation mission performed a flash analysis of the monitoring and evaluation framework. The four outcome indicators measure dimensions that relate to data sharing and quality assessment, which are necessary conditions for the use of admin data, but not sufficient. **It would have been relevant to design indicators measuring further causal relationships to better capture systemic changes**.

Second, **the targets set seem overly reasonable** and tend to reflect the project's prudent expectations - overall, the project aims to achieve goals (conduct of quality assessments, production of data sharing agreements, design of a register-based indicator, drafting of materials to perform quality assurance tasks), in 50% of the countries. In 2023 three out of four outcome indicators were achieved. The reason behind that prudent approach probably lies in the post-Covid context in which the project was designed, with limited visibility on country engagement.

Eventually, indicator 2.1 is not achieved. While some countries have identified the area of work and have embarked on producing the indicators, the mission has found limited evidence that indicator production was completed and made available to the public.

Table 4: appreciation of progress made in each technical dimension, by country (source: evaluation mission)

Country	Indicator/priority area	State of play
Bhutan	Civil registration and vital statistics	No precise indicator identified. The project has not generated changes on the production of indicators
Cameroon	SDG indicator 16.1.1. Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age	Data on the matter was shared by some holders (police), but others were not committed enough (gendarmerie) for reporting to be done
Chile	Establishment of a statistical population register	No focus on a specific indicator, but a rather all-encompassing approach to allow for better reporting on a wide range of indicators
Dominican Republic	SDG indicator 13.1.1: Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population	The data is exchanged, and the data is available on the ONE portail

Maldives	Labour and migration statistics	The area was identified and an IT infrastructure put in place, but no MoU yet so no production made available to the public
Namibia	Statistics on livestock	Based on newly received data following an MoU signature, a new/expanded publication was published by NSA in the second quarter of 2023
Sri Lanka	Statistical business register (SBR) and SDG indicator 17.18.2: Number of countries that have national statistical legislation that complies with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics	The high-level event generated a positive dynamic, but no substantive progress made was made in terms of making data available to the public. The focus was rather placed on having a new legal framework.
Tanzania	Vital statistics production based on civil registration, including, but not limited to SDG indicator 16.9.1: Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age	Zanzibar has published a "first quarter bulletin of the year 2024 (January - March)", which summarises the Vital events

However, this indicator captures two dimensions:

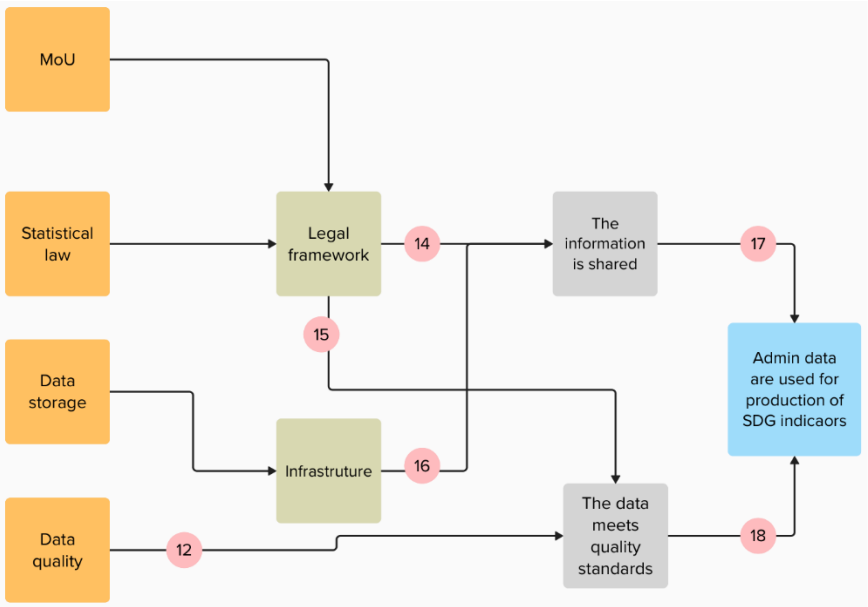
- "Adding at least one new indicator or a dimension to data disaggregation for the SDG indicators or other national policy priority needs"
- "Making it available to the public".

While the table above shows that few countries have reached the objective, it looks like in many cases the first part of the indicator was achieved. **Having a more disaggregated indicator would have allowed for the capture of that achievement.**

Just like for effectiveness, the mission has sought to appraise project impact beyond the mere results framework and has explored the changes that may have been generated along the causal relationships of the theory of change.

Appreciation of the impact against the ToC

The "outcome" part of the ToC is as follows.



The MoU, statistical law, data storage and data quality were explored under the "effectiveness" section.

Improved access to data

A broadly shared view is that data accessibility has increased: "*in my view, access to data is the number one project achievement*". Even in countries where MoUs have not been signed yet, the significant work that was done on IT upgrades has helped prepared the ground: "*most countries are more ready than before to receive and process new data*". Overall, access to new data sources was reported in at least six countries (Bhutan, Cameroon, Chile, Dominican Republic, Namibia and Sri Lanka) and Maldives to some extent (sample data and metadata).

By accessing new data, **countries have embarked on the production of new indicators**, which is one the goals that the project is pursuing: "*we are now able to start processing the data and we have a preliminary version. Without the data, we would not have been able to do it*".

In turns, access to data has given a chance for some countries to **embark on new processing techniques**, in particular record linkages. This is the most "advanced" steps and only few countries have reported work on the matter; yet this shows that in favourable environments the project has the capacity to make a great contribution towards the use of administrative data. Chile can be viewed as a "success story" in that sense. The country requested support to work on probabilistic data linkage and a highly-skilled Chilean consultant was hired. The project helped generate a synthetic dataset that proved useful for training purposes and move things forward. The underlying condition for this success is that the country did not start from scratch: some staffs were technically savvy and mostly just needed to get exposed to good practices.

In short, these observations illustrate the project's positive contribution to causal relationships 14 and 16 of the ToC.

The quality of data has improved

As administrative data is not initially fit for statistical production, **engaging with data producers improved data quality**. Having standardised concepts helped NSOs challenge the information that would be provided by the data holders. When identifying inconsistencies, the NSO could ask clarifications and make recommendations on how to improve data production. This is particularly

true in situations where NSOs had access to micro data. Cameroon has identified significant discrepancies in the number of homicides reported by the police and the gendarmerie, and that harmonisation of concepts was key to help fill this gap (even though there is still of work to be done). In the Dominican Republic, it was reported that a dataset was lost for technical reasons; newly created relationships between ONE and data holders helped the former provide advisory services to the latter so as to start anew and improve what was previously not satisfactory.

Concepts are harmonised across the national statistical system. Working on MoUs and on IT upgrades implied having a shared understanding of domain-specific concepts and clear definitions of given phenomena. The project provided support on the matter: stakeholders were gathered during workshops and had a chance to discuss what to include/exclude from a concept, how to measure it, how to report on it, etc.

In short, the project made a positive contribution on causal relationships 12 and 15 of the ToC.

The impact on the capacity to report on SDGs is uncertain

Both data quality and access to data have improved, but **there is limited evidence that reporting on SDG or on national indicators has improved**, which is the "last mile" in the theory of change (causal relationships 17 and 18).

Responses to that question were at best uncertain: "*we're not sure about our capacity to better report on this indicator*", "*we have started but we need more data*", "*this is perhaps too strong a statement*", "*we need more time to improve reporting*" are among the feedback that were collected by the mission. This observation does not come as a surprise and can be justified in many ways.

First, **the use of administrative data is a new topic that requires some prerequisites to be met**, both legal and technical, but also in terms of trust and country's self-confidence. As mentioned by a respondent, "*NSOs are getting outside of their comfort zone: when undertaking a survey or a census, they control everything from A to Z. Working on admin data implies relying on another actor for part of the work*". Therefore, working on the data is one thing, but releasing an indicator and endorsing it when the data comes for a third-party source is another one.

Second, **it could also be that countries need more time**. A lot has been achieved in some contexts: MoUs, IT upgrades and capacity building have all led to more data being available for analysis. But the use of admin data is still new for many countries and processes take time to fall into place. Some data might be missing, NSOs may not be fully autonomous, etc. Not to mention external factors that may delay the analysis and reporting process. This observation boils down to this section's initial remarks: impacts are usually assessed a while after project completion, and it could be that improved SDG reporting will materialise a few years down the road.

Reporting and disseminating indicators are often challenging, in particular in developing and emerging contexts where **governments are always careful about the information they release**. Reporting is often associated to disclosing information to the public, as framed by indicator 2.1 (at least 50% of target countries have added at least one new indicator or a dimension to data disaggregation for the SDG indicators or other national policy priority needs which the register of choice is covering and made them available to the public), and is sometimes considered as an information that can be used to question the legitimacy of the power in place. This particularly holds true in "young" democracies as well as contexts that are prone to political unrest. However, this hypothesis is a mere assumption and was not verified by the evaluation mission.

Eventually, **limited improved reporting, in the sense of publicly disclosed information, shall not rule out the eventuality that progress was indeed made in terms of production of indicators** and that the use of administrative data for evidence-based policy making has increased. This would be a slightly different achievement than the one initially foreseen, but that would equally generate positive change in the country. This assumption could not be verified by the evaluation mission.

Other changes generated beyond the theory of change

The mission has identified other impacts that are not fully captured by the ToC but that positively affect national statistical systems.

Spillover effect

The restricted focus on a few SDG indicators or thematic areas can be seen as an attempt to gain hands-on experience in a test and learn way. Countries were selected on their willingness to experiment, but some had very limited knowledge on the use of admin data. DA13 was a leaning accelerator: it has enhanced awareness on the matter, but has also **sparked genuine interest in extending the use of admin data to other areas**:

- "*If it has worked here, why not do it in another sector*?"
- "*We were initially shy, we were not pushing to get the data, and we were not encouraged to do so. It might have been uncomfortable in the beginning but the experience was overall positive and we shall aim to replicate it in new areas*".

One respondent also claimed that working on data that are not produced by the NSO has been a game changer in the way other data sources are considered. They are currently designing a project on the use of non-traditional data beyond administrative data.

Changes perception across the national statistical system

Many respondents report that their **national statistical system is now more integrated**. Even though the SDGs have brought the use of data in the spotlights, NSOs are often under-considered and are sometimes sidelined from discussions related to policy-making (this statement is based on the mission's experience but was not explored in DA13 evaluation). The use of admin data has reportedly changed the way countries are working. "*Chile now works differently. We established a collaboration group across data holders, together with the NSO. This is a direct outcome of the project*".

Engaging with data holders, agreeing on common concepts and frameworks, building trust among stakeholders are pieces of evidence that the project has contributed to bringing stakeholders closer.

Impeding factors to impact generation

Impeding factors are, overall, similar to those identified in the "effectiveness" section: limited resources, country availability, etc. Other ones, more specific, were identified through the interviews, that are worth mentioning.

Interestingly enough, some of these comments relate to country ownerships. By placing a strong emphasis on the demand-driven approach, the project has put countries in the driving seat. While this approach should be praised for fostering sustainability, it relies on countries' capacities to perform self-assessments and identify relevant areas of focus. Yet, the use of administrative data to produce official statistics is a new topic for many and **participants may not have all the skills and knowledge to reconciliate country needs, country capacities and technical feasibility**. This phenomenon was reported in at least two countries and was summarised in that sentence: "*I'm not sure about how the data sources were mapped. We could have focused on data that were more ready to be used, perhaps through MoUs with more relevant institutions*". The mission has collected evidence that country-interventions were framed on a needs-basis, but that key priorities were identified based on a policy perspective. Baseline assessments were undertaken but they came in after the priority areas had been identified and overall remain quite vague so as to the challenges to be addressed.

Other participants have noticed issues that relate to **the use of UIDs**, that they were made aware of when holding talks with Uruguay. UIDs allow for easy record linkage across datasets. Yet establishing such UIDs is particularly challenging and requires strong political sponsorship at the highest level. UIDs are not "mandatory" to use admin data and resorting to probabilistic linkage, which was supported by DA13, allows two datasets to be matched; yet more structural work would be of great use. As such a move towards the establishments of UIDs bears non-statistical considerations, DA13 has not worked on it.

In many countries, **the fate of administrative data is also determined by the extent to which power is decentralised**. In a decentralised context, data collected often stays at lower administrative levels; on the contrary, centralised contexts tend to exclude remote areas. At least two countries share that they would have appreciated further support to lower administrative units to extend country coverage and better capture phenomena at decentralised level: "*some of the data that we are expected to analyse is collected by administrations that are very close to the filed, sometimes in the villages themselves. If we only work with central organisations, I'm wondering how we can enforce that the harmonised concepts are fully applied*".

Eventually, **developing and emerging statistical systems are exposed to brain drain**, a well-documented phenomenon that threatens the capacity of an organisation to retain their staffs.

Conclusion on the impact

The lack of a robust results framework that relies on detailed outcome indicators combined to the timing of the impact measurement makes it challenging to quantify overall project impact. However, investigating the ToC causal relationships allows for the documentation of the following changes that DA13 can claims responsibility for: improved data accessibility and quality, willingness to expand the use of administrative data and better NSS integration. These observed changes are unevenly distributed across countries and reflect the latter's willingness and capacity to invest time and resources in the project.

On another hand, the mission has collected limited evidence that SDG reporting, which is the overall goal of the project, has improved. However, this shall not be seen as a failure to generate change, as improved reporting relies on many factors that such a project can't leverage.

Criteria #5: sustainability

Sustainability explores the extent to which project-generated changes can last over time. To inform this section, the mission has investigated mechanisms put in place by DA13 from the onset to ensure in-depth knowledge transfer and foster structural transformation, and efforts to address impeding factors.

Country ownership as a strategy to secure effects and impact sustainability

An underlying condition to sustainability is country buy-in. Many findings have already been presented in the "relevance" section, which documents how country needs were factored into DA13, and highlights that **activities were highly demand driven**. Besides, the project strove to accommodate for local realities, thus paving the way for sustainable change.

Long term capacity building

Brain drain significantly affects sustainable knowledge transfer. Contexts that combine low salaries and untrained labour display strong premium on skilled staffs. Public administrations, whether NSOs or line ministries, do not offer wages that compete with the private sector. Trained staffs are often chased by companies who offer better salaries and professional perspectives. Training critical masses can help reduce that threat. **DA13 has therefore worked on producing an e-learning course on the use of administrative data to produce official statistics**. Out of the six envisioned modules, five are at final stage and the last one on quality shall be completed shortly. The mission has browsed some modules and found that both the content and the interface had bore high potential.

To fulfil its promises, the e-learning course shall be widely disseminated. The project envisions partnerships with other UN agencies (UN SIAP, UN Women, regional commissions) and will reach out to NSOs to inform them about the launch of the course. Webinars will be proposed to interested staffs.

Documentation and dissemination as sustainability enhancers

DA13 has contributed to the production of critical materials, in particular quality assessment tools. The latter were based on documents produced under the Collaborative for admin data, and project consultants confirmed that they were asked to tailor the tools to country needs for future reuse: "*we identified parts where the questionnaire was not necessarily relevant and also made recommendations to reuse it*". Surveyed countries have confirmed that the quality assessment tools were appropriate, and some expressed their willingness to use them and assess further data sources.

In Cameroon, the project supported the design of a template to centralise data before processing it. **Sustainability lies in country stakeholders' decision to use such documents**: "*people were trained, and it is now up to them to use it*". This highlights, once again, that a project's capacity to

make a difference is often commensurate to the country's willingness to make good use of the proposes resources.

Other documents include materials on IT infrastructure. The project has supported IT upgrades through advisory services, technical discussions, and IT setups that used new solutions. **The proposed technical approach will be formalised in documents that shall be made available online by January 2025**: "*we give beneficiaries guiding documents: where is the data coming from, at what frequency is it collected, what the MoUs shall comprise, the challenges associated to sharing, the data, etc. It's some sort of toolkit to appreciate the admin data sources that they are pulling. It helps identify people managing data pipelines, what data standards to use (such as SDMX)*". It was said that this documentation benefited from the Data for now project, illustrating the synergies sought across various UN projects. This documentation will provide guidance not only to DA13 beneficiary countries, but also to further ones that have an interest in upgrading their infrastructure.

Eventually, **the project recorded and stored what was done to manage knowledge**. "*We have created a git repository and we've partnered with other partners such as data science campus to help make good use of the solutions we've setup*". In some cases, training sessions were even recorded so that newcomers can get up to speed even after project completion.

The promotion of "free" tools to avoid vendor lock-in and autonomise beneficiary countries

Whenever including an IT component in a technical assistance project, there is a risk that the proposed solutions are not fully adopted as they sometimes come with high entry costs. DA13 has proposed data lake-like infrastructure, which implies the use of ETL and the creation of data storage platforms. In many cases, organisations will tend to procure consultants that will be tasked with setting up the infrastructure, and licenses will be renewed every year. **DA13 approach rests open-source solutions: not only are they free, but they imply a vibrant community that value experience sharing to and makes problem solving easy**.

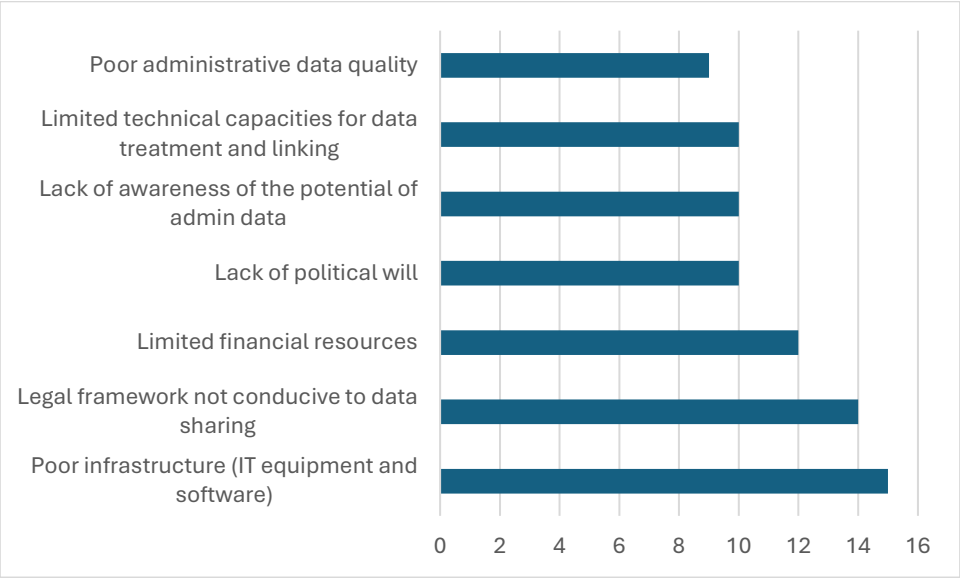
Continued support after the project

As mentioned under the "efficiency" section, the project management staffs salaries were not included in the budget. Their contract is not project-bound, and their salaries are funded by other sources. In other words, **the relationship between the UN team and the countries might not be ending once the project is over.** There might not be resources to send experts on the ground and launch new activities, but the team might be able to address some urgent needs or provide guidance, when possible. Besides, the Development Accounts is a capacity development programme that funds various projects, on a rolling basis. Potential requests for support might be accommodated in further DA projects. This long term engagement beyond the project is critical to foster DA13 impact sustainability. The mission has confirmation that further support will be provided in some cases (UNODC in Cameroon, Maldives through D4N, Statistics Norway in Namibia, DA16 project in Sri Lanka)

Impeding factors to sustainability

The quantitative form sent out to project beneficiaries explored the latter's perceptions on challenges and impeding factors to sustainability. Respondents were asked to pick among a set of impeding factors.

Figure 7: list of impeding factors mentioned by respondents (n = 20; source: evaluation)



Responses tend to show that there are still many challenges to sustainability, the greatest ones lying in IT infrastructure, legal frameworks and financial limitations. Political will and awareness are slightly less mentioned, confirming that the project has made a great contribution in that respect. When given a chance to provide details on these limitations, here are the key dimensions that stand out:

- **Data holders lack basic IT infrastructure**: in some cases, people responsible for data entry don't even have laptops or internet connections
- **Strong reliance on enabling individuals**: the project has been successful in mobilising top management individuals, but it takes time to convince an entire organisation. Therefore, in the wake of management reshuffles, political sponsorship might be diluted, and the use of admin data can be deprioritised
- **Difficulties to scale up**: even though the willingness to scale up was mentioned by many respondents, limitations to do so are many (absence of an overarching scaling up framework, lack of self-confidence to venture into new actions without the UN support, absence of a legal framework that obliges data holders to share data, not enough skilled staffs across the system to address the issues, etc.).

Eventually, **some respondents would appreciate to have a proper "end of project" workshops** at two level:

- Within their countries to be given a chance to showcase what was done and to advocate for further resources to be allocated.
- Among the DA13 countries, to share experiences and discuss how other countries have addressed similar technical or legal issues – although this can be nuanced as experience sharing activities were arranged under of the CAD and beyond

Conclusion on sustainability

On paper, it looks like DA13 approach has factored in sustainability issues from the onset, by fostering country leadership, considering training critical masses and favouring open-source solutions. These are good practices that shall be praised. However, the challenges to sustainability are many folds, as reported by the respondents themselves, and shed light on two key considerations:

- The project had a “restrictive” approach, focusing on a few indicators or areas. This was necessary to spark interest, raise awareness and gain experience, yet it is not sufficient to encourage scale up initiatives and generate systemic changes
- Impact sustainability is commensurate to a country’s willingness to pick up the work where the project has stopped. The project did its best to get things started, now countries shall confirm their commitment to further advancing the matter.

Gender & Human Rights

Not the core focus of the project…

The **gender and human rights agendas where not a specific focus of the project**: no indicators were tied to those dimensions. In the first place, respondents found it difficult to answer the question and even seemed destabilised by the question. In the technical proposal, the words "human rights" do not appear, and the word "gender" is repeated only six times, and almost systematically follows the words "disaggregated by".

… yet some positive changes can be observed

That said, when given a chance to take time and reflect on potential changes on these agendas, respondents came up with a few relevant observations.

Disaggregated information

This is a response that was formulated by almost all respondents. **Having access to micro data makes it possible to produce gender-sensitive indicators**. In one case, it was even mentioned that the NSO wanted to further mainstream gender-responsiveness, and made it a key pillar of its NSDS.

Gender balanced teams

It was mentioned that the project, being strongly led by women on the UN side, was **helpful in empowering women** in beneficiary countries. On the other way around, experts and consultants were pleased to see that teams within beneficiary countries were often gender balanced.

Femicide

This observation is peculiar to the case of Cameroon, which focused on homicide data, but bears strong promises in terms of replication. When discussing concepts related to the topic, **participants were exposed to the concept of femicide**, which had never been envisaged beyond the mere gender-disaggregated way of counting murdered people. When assessing contextualised data (circumstances under which the person was killed, relationship between the murderer and the deceased person, etc.), stakeholders came to realise that women were more exposed than men to specific phenomena leading to death, raising awareness about the needs to put specific protection mechanisms in place. The extent to which these mechanisms will be implemented remains to be investigated; yet the project has at least contributed to raising awareness on that matter.

Minorities

Eventually, Chile has reported that **having the population register in place opened the way to inform the fate of minorities** (indigenous people, migrants, transgender people): "*these are small groups, but now we have space to work on them and better allocate resources*".

Human rights

The work in Cameroon encompasses information on the safety of individuals, which can be linked to human rights. In the Maldives, the focus on employment and migration could capture

disparities in labor markets and migration patterns. The same observations made for Chile can potentially be replicated for Tanzania

Conclusion on Gender and human rights

Even though the gender and human rights agendas were not a core focus of the project, respondents identified some positive dimensions tied to the project, that mostly relate to the possibility to better inform gender or minority-specific situations, and to raise awareness on specific gender-related concepts (such as femicide). The mission was not able to precisely quantify these dimensions.

6. Conclusions

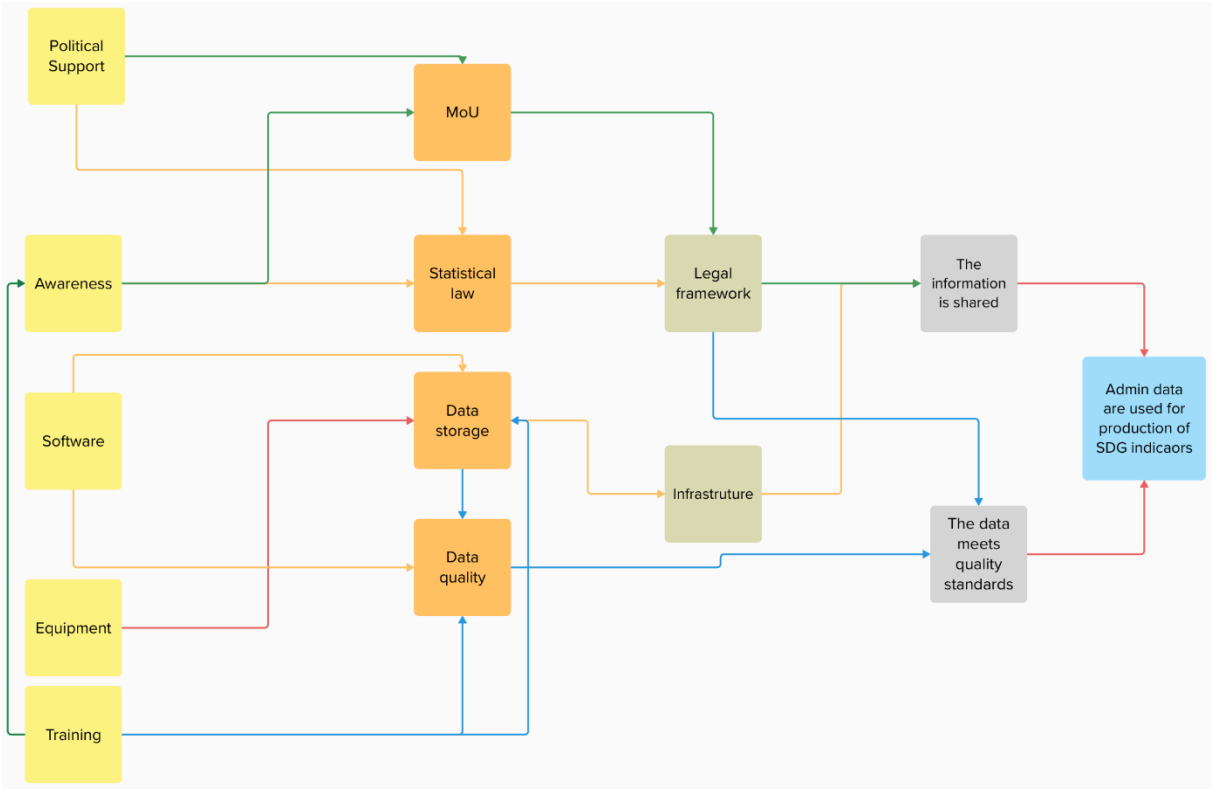
Overview of project contributions

Information collected by the evaluation mission depicts a project that has offered a relevant course of action for countries to enhance the use of administrative records. There is evidence that many good practices were mobilised, from country ownership to flexibility and efficient allocation of resources. Human resources were highly qualified and met the beneficiaries' expectations. Sustainability was thought from the onset in a bid to foster countries' autonomy upon project completion. **In that sense, the mission can confirm that DA13 was relevant, effective, and somehow impactful.**

The previous sections have attempted to identify, in an exhaustive way, all the effects and changes generated by the project, along the lines of a ToC. Some of them were observed in pretty much all the beneficiary countries while others were unevenly distributed. The strength of contributions is visually represented below (see Figure 7: DA13 contribution). Overall, we can rank project contributions in four categories:

- Strong contributions: contributions that were observed in most countries and that can be directly attributed to the project. They are highlighted in green.
- Positive contributions: contributions that have been confirmed in many countries and that may have a positive impact. They are highlighted in blue.
- Heterogeneous contributions: contributions that can be attributed to the project, but they were not observed in all countries. They are highlighted in orange.
- Limited contributions: areas where DA13 made a limited contribution, if any at all. They are highlighted in red.

Figure 8: DA13 contribution analysis (source: evaluation mission)



Strong contributions

The first strong contribution relates to increased awareness on the use of admin data to produce official statistics. In most countries the topic was new although some countries had previous experience on the matter. Awareness was raised in both NSOs and data holders: the former learned about the potential of non-traditional data sources, while the latter understood the impact of their daily work on the national statistical production.

The second strong contribution lies in the signature of multiple Memorandum of Understanding between NSOs and data holders, enhancing statistical system integration. These MoUs are a direct consequence of improved awareness, and to some extent, of improved political support. They have had a positive impact on the overall legal frameworks.

Eventually, DA13 strongly contributed to increasing data sharing. Signing MoUs has been highly beneficial and NSOs were granted access to data that they had never explored before DA13.

Positive contribution

Capacity was built in many areas, from data assessment to IT maintenance and record linkage. Respondents reported that their skills somehow improved in these areas, and the existence of an e-learning course that will be shortly released has a strong probability to make a positive contribution.

Better skills lead to better data quality: stakeholders gain knowledge on the importance to harmonise concepts across the statistical systems and on the use of assessment tools to appreciate data sources quality. Improved legal frameworks through MoUs deepen interactions across the NSO and data holders: the former can advise the latter on how to improve their admin records.

Heterogenous contributions

The project contribution to reforming statistical law was limited to Sri Lanka. However, project intervention was much needed at the statistical framework dated back from 1956. In early 2024, the updated statistical framework was in the last rounds of internal review. The mission can't confirm whether it had been approved by December 2024 as requests to interviews Sri Lanka participants remained unaddressed.

There are confirmed contributions on IT upgrades, although they are restricted to a limited number of countries. Where they were recorded, IT upgrades generated significant impacts in terms of data quality and data sharing.

Limited contributions

No equipment was provided as equipment purchase is not eligible for DA project supports. While this appears as a limited contribution, the mission would like to stress that this is by no means a sign of project under-performance. Indeed, the purchase of equipment was never a purpose of the project. Featuring this relationship in the ToC is a mere way of seeing where and how inputs can make a difference from a theoretical standpoint.

Eventually, there is little evidence that progress was made in terms of SDG reporting.

> DA13: a pilot project that would have benefitted from an more structured knowledge management framework

DA13 strategy rests on testing the use of administrative data to produce statistics in a wide range of thematic areas and in various setups to draw lessons and ultimately replicate them. In that sense, it can be viewed as a “pilot project -although it is not mentioned as such in the project document

Pilot projects are useful when they are implemented in a way that can help draw lessons. The present evaluation mission feeds into that rationale. However, the **project would have benefitted from a more robust knowledge management framework.**.

DA13 project management team has displayed strong technical and non-technical skills, and some interesting actions took place in terms of experience sharing and learning sessions, including country participations to international events. The CAD was also useful in that regard.

But the overall absence of results framework with a robust indicators matrix and , the lack of centralised database with information on participants, activities and associated experts for knowledge management purposes, may have hampered project’s capacity to document the course of actions on a regular basis and draw lessons. An online workspace was setup, that the consultant did not have access to.

7. Recommendations and lessons learnt

Strategic recommendations

Recommendation 1: clarify project overall goal and better match resources to the strategic vision.

The mission found that there was a mismatch between the strategic vision and project resources. If DA13 is a pilot project, then a learning and knowledge management framework, backed by resources dedicated to MEAL, shall be allocated to the project. If the overall goal is to improve SDG reporting, resources shall be geared towards better reporting from the onset. Conversely, focusing on awareness raising implies different project setup and resources.

Recommendation 2: tighten the geographic scope

Eight countries were supported by the project, after an initial attempt to consider nine, for a budget worth 624 000 USD, which is on average 78 000 USD per country. Even though UN human resources are not considered and significantly strengthen the budget, this figure is pretty low, especially when looking at addressing such a complex issue. Besides, country commitment prove highly heterogeneous. In the future, such a project should consider only three to four countries to make the best of available resources. Country selection should be aligned with the strategic vision: if the project is a pilot one, then beneficiaries shall come from diverse horizons to enlarge the learning spectrum; if the project wants to maximise SDG reporting impact, focus shall be placed on countries who are willing and who have the capacity to identify their needs and to allocate resources that can follow up on the proposed activities; eventually, for awareness raising, criteria selections shall lean towards the identification of setups where the needs are the greatest, and basic prerequisites are not met.

Recommendation 3: use the project to kick start or accelerate other initiatives

DA13 extensively sought to identify synergies with other initiatives (Data for Now, the Collaborative on admin data). Such synergies shall be encouraged in a strategic fashion to maximise project impact. As resources are scarce, DA13 could use its "enabling potential" to make contributions where other partners, with stronger resources, are interested in investing. The project is a strong accelerator, in the sense that it can generate trust and political buy-in. Yet, it does not have sufficient resources to have a transformative impact on all causal relationships identified in the ToC. Partnering with organisations with more in-country resources (the World Bank, EU delegations, bilateral cooperation agencies) would multiply project impact. The project already did it with many UN agencies, as well as other partners (Statistics Norway, the UK, etc.). This could be done in a more systematic, coordinated fashion, to encourage a multiplying effect.

Operational recommendations

Operational recommendations were ranked by estimated potential impact.

Recommendation 4: adopt a time-bound, agile approach with more in-country resources

The project started in 2021 but some activities took over a year to materialise, for many reasons: Covid pandemic, delays to get feedback from countries, not enough resources to launch activities in eight countries at the same time, etc. Similarly, long intervals between two activities were both a cause and a consequence of fading political support. This could not be mitigated by stronger in-

country presence because of resource scarcity. Narrowing the geographic scope (see strategic recommendations) should go hand in hand with reviewing implementation modalities. The project could adopt a time-bound, agile approach instead of offering activities throughout the entire project duration. Once an area/indicator or a specific use case is identified, it should be unfolded in specific outputs or milestones that can be achieved through intense, in-country sprints (from two to four weeks, depending on the activities and country availability). This particularly applies to technical interventions, as legal ones need more time. Such a way of working allows for closer monitoring and for the detection of weak signals that underly low country commitments. Depending on their frequency and depth, such signals may lead to stopping activities and to changing countries of interventions.

Figure 9: visual representation of the agile method (source: web)

In-country presence can be fostered by working more closely with relevant UN agencies. In some cases DA13 was supported by UN RCOs to maintain political buy-in, but other "technical" UN agencies could be leveraged for monitoring purposes in between two sprints.

Recommendation 5: design robust results and learning frameworks that feed into strategic decision-making

A robust results framework implies several dimensions that were missing from DA13: country-level output indicators, outcome indicators that capture transformative effects and allow for the measurement of the ToC causal relationships. An overall monitoring and evaluation framework is then needed to put things in motion: identification of key resources, data sources, data collection frequency, analysis frameworks, integration into project reporting. A learning framework comprises regular learning actions: group discussions on a specific topic, comparative analysis exercises and experience sharing mechanisms, etc.). Learning also depends on knowledge management, which can be enhanced through the centralisation of project-produced materials, the creation and dissemination of publications, and the design of a "use cases catalogue" highlighting key topic-specific achievements.

Recommendation 6: rely on e-learning course

The soon-to-be released e-learning course bears strong promises. There is no doubt that it will significantly contribute to building in-country capacities. Not only should it be made available to a wide audience but completing it could also be a prerequisite for activities to be implemented in a country.

Recommendation 7: allow the purchase of equipment

Purchase of equipment are useful from both a technical and buy-in perspective. On the one hand, more modern equipment can significantly contribute to upgrading IT systems and making data

sharing much easier; on the other hand, equipment is a strong incentive for country commitment. DA procedures don't allow for the purchase of equipment.

Recommendation 8: introduce country call for proposal

Such a move would reverse the way countries are selected: the project would work as a "facility" and be seized by the most motivated countries. This requires strong resources on communication and advocacy to make the project known.

Recommendation 9: introduce peer reviews

Countries often mentioned that they needed to be exposed to best practices and concepts to get inspired. To complement study tours, peer reviews can be proposed to countries displaying strong political will. Peer reviews imply that several peers (NSO DG, or line ministries top management) visit a given country to review the statistical framework and provide recommendations to upgrade it and make it prone to the use of administrative data.

Recommendation 10: provide technical assistance from the onset (identification of priorities)

Countries might not be fully aware of technical requirements to successfully use admin data. Areas of interventions shall be demand-driven and aligned to national priorities, but these priorities shall be reconciled with prerequisites to ensure that the project is successful in advancing the use of administrative data.

8. Annexes

8.1. Evaluation ToRs

TOR_Evaluation_Data 4Now_29Oct2024.do

8.2. Project results framework

Code	Description
Objective	To strengthen the capacities of national statistical systems of selected countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America to better utilise sources of administrative data for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for monitoring of the SDGs and the impact of COVID-19
OC1	Strengthened intra-Governmental collaboration with a focus on data sharing to increase availability, quality and timeliness of disaggregated data for SDG indicators. *Indicator 1.1: At least 60 % of target countries have conducted an assessment of the administrative sources existing for the thematic area chosen and their feasibility for statistical purposes, with a focus on key quality aspects and involvement of stakeholders.*
OC1	Strengthened intra-Governmental collaboration with a focus on data sharing to increase availability, quality and timeliness of disaggregated data for SDG indicators. *Indicator 1.2: At least 40 % of project countries include a new mechanism to facilitate efficient sharing and quality control of administrative sources for statistical purposes.*
OC2	Strengthened national capacity of National Statistical Offices and other agencies of the National Statistical Systems to increase the use of data collected for administrative purposes in official statistics production and dissemination, particularly for SDG indicators and assessment of impact of Covid-19 on the society. *Indicator 2.1: At least 50 % of target countries have added at least one new indicator or a dimension to data disaggregation for the SDG indicators or other national policy priority needs which the register of choice is covering, and made them available to the public*
OC2	Strengthened national capacity of National Statistical Offices and other agencies of the National Statistical Systems to increase the use of data collected for administrative purposes in official statistics production and dissemination, particularly for SDG indicators and assessment of impact of Covid-19 on the society. *Indicator 2.1: At least 50 % of target countries have developed concrete, practical guidance material of a data quality assurance for the use of administrative data in statistics production, including for COVID-19 indicators*

8.3. Data collection instruments

Quantitative form

Link to the form: https://framaforms.org/da13-evaluation-questionnaire-1730215554

DA13 - responses to quantitative ques

Interview guide for NSO/other data holder agency

Interview introduction:

- *Presenting the approach*: evaluation & learning
- *Purpose of the interview*: collect information on the activities implemented by the DA13 project, identify challenges and successes, frame recommendations for the future
- *Transparency*: encourage open conversation, sharing of all ideas, avoid self-censorship, remind that the interview will be treated with confidentiality. Ask for approval to record the interview for accuracy purposes, and to treat the answers with a generative AI tool
- *Duration*: 1h30

Personal introduction:

- *The person*: Who are you? Position in the organisation? Background?
- *The organisation*: name, mandate/objective, resources, size, positioning in the national statistical system, supports received from partners, knowledge of and priority given to admin data before the project
- *Association to the project*: what activities, how, number of actions, number of people associated

Relevance/alignment

- *Needs-based approach*: how the project was framed, assessments that were carried out, contribution from the organisation, identification of focus areas, consideration of your constraints (resources, timing, etc.), alignment to national plan/strategy
- *Alignment with other partners*: involvement of other partners, competition/synergies
- *ToC and causal relationships*: comments on the project logic and rationale

Effectiveness

- *Achievements*: comments on the objectives that were set, observed changes (explore those areas: awareness, knowledge of standards and practices, barriers to data sharing; try to identify the most significant one), unintended changes, project contribution to these changes
- *Data sharing*: situation now VS situation before the project
- *Implementation modalities*: most effective/least support, comment on implementation modalities, recommendations for the future, existence of other projects with other implementation modalities that work well
- *Missing actions*: comments on causal relationships that were not targeted by the project, or other actions that could have led to better outcomes
- *Enabling and impeding factors*: explanations on these factors
- *Changing context*: contextual changes that have impacted the project

Efficiency

- *Resource allocation*: perception on the capacity of the resources to help achieve the objectives, comment on a hypothetical alternative and more efficient resource allocation
- *Absorption capacities*: perception of project resources compared to their own capacities
- *Recycling materials:* use of already existing materials, competition between proposed tools and already existing ones
- *Coordination with other agencies*: existence of duplication of efforts

Impact

- *In your organisation*: potential long-lasting impact, enabling/impeding factors to these impacts
- *In the NSS*: impact on policy formulation and monitoring, on SDG reporting
- *Most significant change*

Sustainability

- *Exit strategy*: project exit strategy, sustainability risk assessment, organisation commitments to sustain the project impacts
- *Institutionalisation*: co-construction of materials, reuse of materials produced by the project, impeding/enabling factors
- *National agenda*: promotion of admin data usage in national plans/strategies
- *Replication*: dissemination of experience acquired through the project, generation of further demands, potential for replication and scale up

Gender and human rights perspective

- Integration of gender and human rights considerations in the project
- Recommendations

Interview guide for consultant/team member

Interview introduction:

- *Presenting the approach*: evaluation & learning
- *Purpose of the interview*: collect information on the activities implemented by the DA13 project, identify challenges and successes, frame recommendations for the future
- *Transparency*: encourage open conversation, sharing of all ideas, avoir self-censorship, remind that the interview will be treated with confidentiality. Ask for approval to record the interview for accuracy purposes, and to treat the answers with a generative AI tool
- *Duration*: 1h30

Personal introduction:

- *The person*: Who are you? Position in the organisation? Background?
- *The organisation (if relevant)*: name, mandate/objective, resources, size, positioning in the international landscape, supports provided to beneficiary administrations
- *Association to the project*: activities, purposes, countries, field missions

Relevance/alignment

- *Needs-based approach*: how the project was framed, assessments that were carried out, contribution from the country, identification of focus areas, consideration of local constraints (resources, timing, etc.), alignment to national plan/strategy
- *Alignment with other partners*: involvement of other partners, competition/synergies
- *ToC and causal relationships*: comments on the project logic and rationale

Effectiveness

- *Achievements*: comments on the objectives that were set, perceived/observed changes (explore those areas: awareness, knowledge of standards and practices, barriers to data sharing; try to identify the most significant one), unintended changes, project contribution to these changes
- *Data sharing*: situation now VS situation before the project
- *Implementation modalities*: most/least effective support, comment on implementation modalities, recommendations for the future, participation to other projects with other implementation modalities that work well
- *Missing actions*: comments on causal relationships that were not targeted by the project, or other actions that could have led to better outcomes
- *Enabling and impeding factors*: explanations on these factors
- *Changing context*: contextual changes that have impacted the project
- *Country commitments*: comments on country commitments

Efficiency

- *Resource allocation*: perception on the capacity of the resources to help achieve the objectives, comment on a hypothetical alternative and more efficient resource allocation
- *Absorption capacities*: perception of project resources compared to country capacities
- *Recycling materials:* use of already existing materials, competition between proposed tools and already existing ones
- *Coordination with other agencies*: existence of duplication of efforts

Impact

- *At organisation-level*: potential long-lasting impact, enabling/impeding factors to these impacts
- *At country level*: impact on policy formulation and monitoring, on SDG reporting
- *Most significant change*

Sustainability

- *Exit strategy*: project exit strategy, sustainability risk assessment, organisation commitments to sustain the project impacts
- *Institutionalisation*: co-construction of materials, reuse of materials produced by the project, impeding/enabling factors
- *National agenda*: promotion of admin data usage in national plans/strategies
- *Replication*: dissemination of experience acquired through the project, generation of further demands, potential for replication and scale up

Gender and human rights perspective

- Integration of gender and human rights considerations in the project
- Recommendations

8.4. List of interviewees

Name	Organisation	Interview date
Vincent Essambe	NSO Cameroon	November 5, 2024
Silja Emmel	Consultant	November 6, 2024
Samrat Maskey	UNSD	November 8, 2024
Aylin Flores, Olga Barquero, Ignacio Agloni	NSO Chile	November 14, 2024
Paola Rodriguez Carlos Paulino	NSO Dominical Republic Emergency Operation Centre	November 14, 2024
Shazna Ashiyath	NSO Maldives	November 14, 2024
Ottilie Mwazi	NSO Namibia	November 15, 2024
Karina Cazarez	Consultant	November 21, 2024
Asaneh Yazdani	UNESCAP	November 26, 2024
Maria Isabel Cobos	UNSD	November 29, 2024
Tandin Dorji	NSO Bhutan	December 16, 2024
Vibeke Oestreich Nielsen Martina De Saverio	UNSD	Regular meetings throughout the mission