

The role of data in promoting inclusive social policies

Lessons from Malaysia, Cambodia, and Timor-Leste pilot projects

■ Why learn from data?

We want a clear signal that we are achieving our objectives

“Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.” The maternal mortality ratio is a good signal.

“End all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere.” What would a clear signal look like?

■ Why learn from data?

We want a signal of the effectiveness of a particular policy

“To what extent did a policy contribute to a reduction in maternal mortality?” Cluster randomized control trial of intervention assigning clusters into control and intervention groups, measuring maternal mortality before and after.

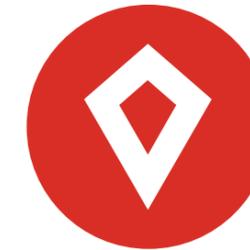
“To what extent did a policy reduce discrimination against women and girls?”

■ Experience on the use of data in decision-making

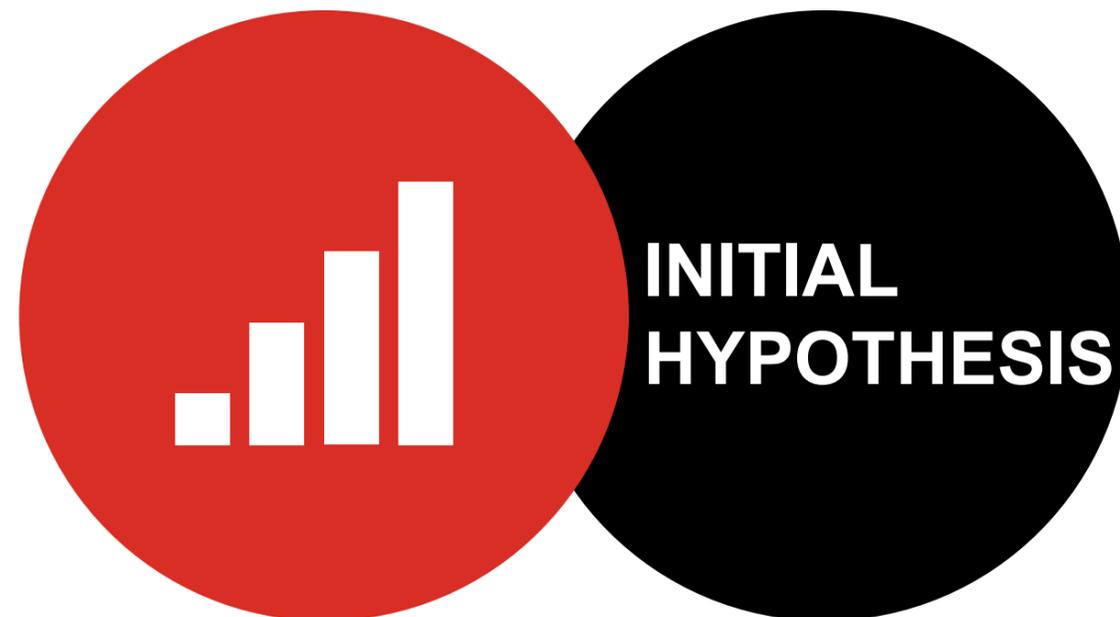
UNESCAP partnered with UNESCO to assess the ways data were used in decision-making and to determine strategies to improve their use



Relevant data exist, but may not be used in the policy process



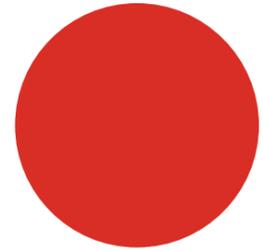
Data may not be exactly what is required



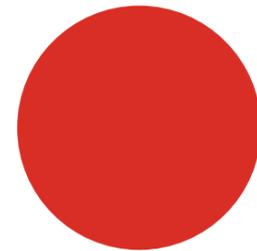
Data may not exist at all

What did we learn?

■ We learned two main lessons



**Ask the right questions,
require the right evidence,
and adapt in response**



**Produce the data required and
invest in better statistics and
data systems**





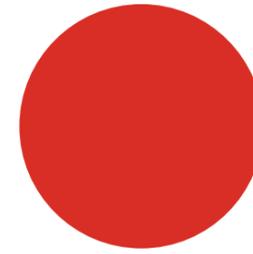
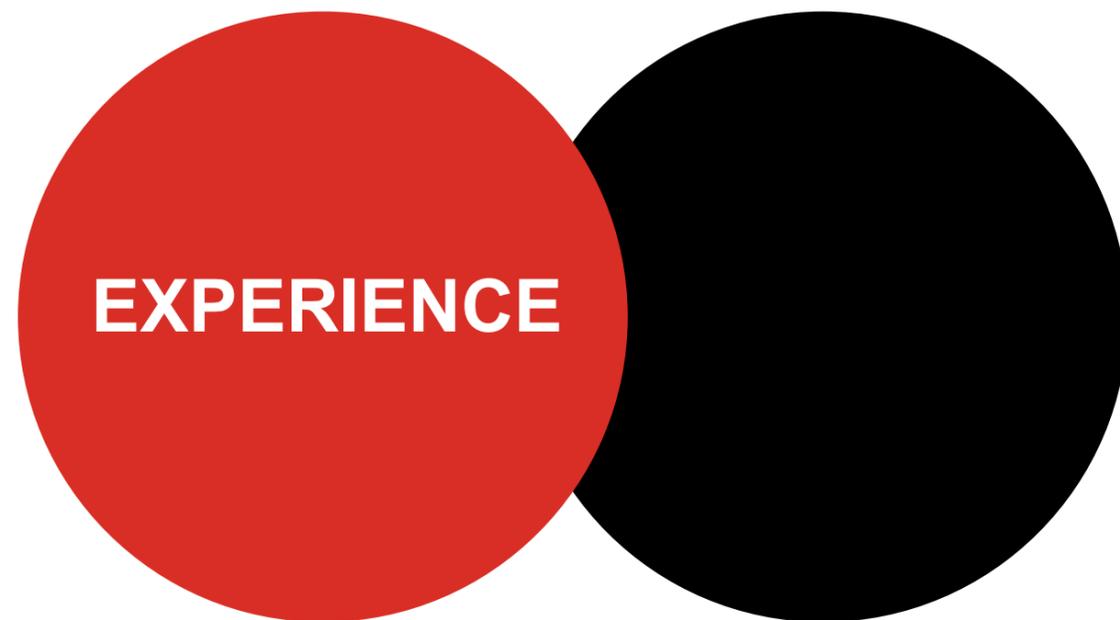
■ LESSON ONE: OWNING THE QUESTION

Data-driven social policy requires asking the right questions, requiring the right evidence and adapting in response to evidence

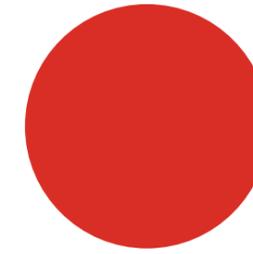
■ Ask the right questions with key performance indicators

Key performance indicators are a core component in data-driven policy

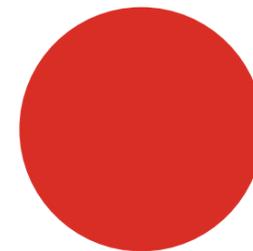
The process of developing indicators should be led by policymakers in collaboration with national statisticians



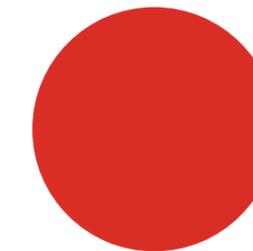
"It appears that the indicator framework has not been developed as of yet[, but is under development]"



"The use of indicators is not mentioned, or considered mandatory."



"The [policy] does not include an indicator framework, which would allow a measurement of progress towards [related] objectives."



"There are indications of attempts to use certain outcomes as measures, but this has never been part of the overall policy."

Indicators must be disaggregated by characteristics where marginalization is likely

■ SUPPLEMENTING STRONG DEMAND WITH CLEAR OBJECTIVES

If policy targets are clear to us but ambiguous to statisticians,
our answer will be likewise ambiguous

Strong demand for data without a clear indicator framework leaves a high degree of ambiguity about what is required from the national statistical office

Indicator frameworks, developed by policymakers in consultation with national statistical offices through regular user-producer dialogues, are the best way to ensure we ask the right questions

■ TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR GETTING THE RIGHT DATA

To get an idea about how effective our policies are, we must record and collect data related to the policy actions

Data collection supports monitoring and evaluation, as well as derivative research on impact and effectiveness

1

“There is no evidence of qualitative data and only descriptive quantitative data are available.”

2

“There are minimal efforts in stock-taking and official compiling of data.”

3

“Evidence of token or minimal effort to engage [in the integration, aggregation, disaggregation and sharing of data.]”

4

“Insufficient detail is provided [as to] how databases will be created and what information will be recorded.”

5

“No evidence of qualitative data; [despite] a large amount of data accumulating, [accessing] this requires familiarity with the project in question.”

6

“Lack of specific M&E budgets prevented routine evaluations”

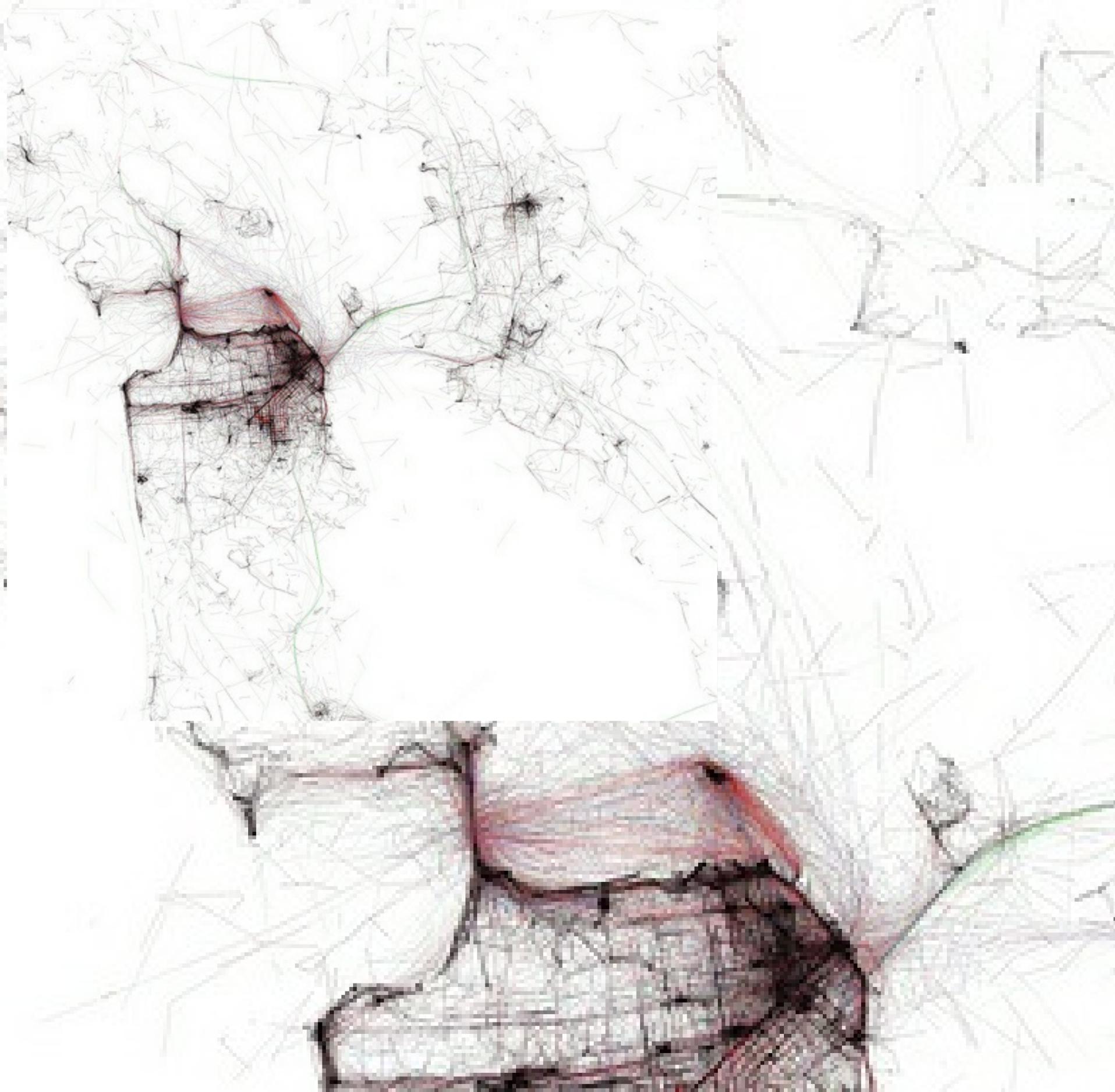
■ OWNING THE QUESTION

Make decisions on the basis of conscientious, explicit, judicious and reasonable use of modern, best evidence

Engage in a process of problem-based learning in which crafting effective social policy creates the need for rigorous evidence

Ensure that relevant data, including key performance indicators, are selected and can be produced by allocating resources

Ensure that policy objectives are specific and measurable through key performance indicators



■ Lesson Two: Produce the right data

Data-driven social policy requires investing in a transformation of statistical systems and related infrastructure

■ Invest in official statistics and statistical capacity



Good existing capacity

In all countries, the national statistical office was composed of highly-competent and skilled professionals



Demand exceeds capacity

Nonetheless, in all countries, the national statistical offices expressed an inability to respond adequately to the requests for monitoring data



Investment and modernization key

All countries in the project relied nearly entirely on traditional data sources, like censuses and surveys, as data sources; these are important but do not scale well; need to invest in data integration and other approaches to improve data reuse

■ BUILDING STATISTICAL CAPACITY

National statistical offices were expected to collect Herculean amounts of data with relatively modest funding and resources, in addition to other challenges:

1 “There were a number of data gaps at the time the [policy] was prepared, and that several of these gaps still exist.”

2 “Few of the indicators are available from existing sources, and none are published on a regular basis.”

3 “No consistent definitions [on the policy issue] used across the national statistical system.”

4 “No standards applied to data collection; lack of funding.”

5 “Multiple data sources [with unclear consistency] and relationships.”

6 “[Complications arose from the application of] different definitions and concepts related to [the policy issue].”

■ KEY BARRIERS TO STATISTICAL CAPACITY

Need to modernize and upgrade statistical processes, tools, and skills

Need to invest in technologies that promote the integration and re-use of data through better management and analytics

Need to apply common standards, preferably internationally-agreed ones, in the collection, production and dissemination of data

UNESCAP STATISTICS

<http://www.unescap.org/stat>

Regional Programme on
Economic Statistics

Regional Programme on
Population and Social
Statistics

Capacity building projects
on big data infrastructure,
disaster statistics, and
gender

ESCAP has several of statistical capacity building initiatives that stand ready to assist countries in pursuing this strategy