



Issue Brief

# Realising the Principle of Leaving No One Behind

The Imperative of Disaggregated Data in Asia and the Pacific

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## Why Disaggregated Data?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the pledge to ‘leave no one behind’ (LNOB) are centrally rooted in long-standing commitments of UN Member States to human rights and the principles of equality and non-discrimination. Some groups of people—including women; certain ethnic groups; people of colour; people with disabilities; people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and more (LGBTQI+)—have been excluded, disrespected and discriminated against for centuries, with devastating effects on their mental wellbeing and human development at large (UNDP 2022a). Realizing the LNOB principle requires addressing the vertical and horizontal inequality between population groups which stem from various sources.

Horizontal inequality is the consequence of discrimination, disparity resulting from differences in individual capabilities and exclusion from state and society. Poverty and inequality are further worsened due to COVID 19, with worse impact on the low income and conflict countries. Most Afghans were living either in or near extreme poverty in 2019/20, and some estimates even suggest that as much as 97 percent of the population could be in extreme poverty in 2022 due to the conflict and the COVID 19 pandemic. Income declines in 2022 have primarily resulted from reduced employment opportunities and armed conflict. Many women lost jobs by early 2022 due to restrictions imposed since the shift in power (Diwakar et. al 2022).

The pandemic caused a massive collapse in human capital, severely affecting millions of children and young people across Asia and the Pacific. An IMF study found Asia to be the region with the largest proportion of young people not in education or training. It also highlighted the substantial gap in basic educational attainment between young people in the richest and poorest quintiles. The largest disparities were in Bangladesh, India, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar (Jurzyk et al.

2020). These differences in capabilities will perpetuate inequality and exclusion.

Intersectionality impacts on employment, earnings and deprivations of marginal population including youth, LGBTI and people with disabilities (PWDs). Globally, youth unemployment rate is estimated at 15.6 percent in 2021, more than three times the adult rate. In Asia and the Pacific, it is estimated to have reached 14.9 percent in 2022, similar to the global average (ILO 2022a). Young workers are twice as likely as adult workers to live in extreme poverty (below US\$1.90 per day PPP) and are also far more likely to be informally employed. Young women have a much lower Employment to Population Ratio (EPR) than men, and the gender gap has shown no sign of closing over the past two decades (ILO 2022).

Intersectionality impact on earning of LGBTI than the heterosexual or cisgender people. An analysis of multiple income studies found gay men to earn less than heterosexual men with similar skills and experience (World Economic Forum 2015). Similarly, PWDs are disadvantaged on the front of economic opportunities. In Viet Nam, for example, they are more likely to be in low-paid jobs with poor working conditions and limited career prospects. Some research suggests that in developing countries, up to 80 percent of PWDs are unemployed and that PWDs are more likely to be self-employed compared to persons without disabilities. Among the 19 countries that UNDP (2020) studied, on average, 62 percent of the PWDs against 53 percent of persons without disabilities are self-employed and this gap is wider among developing countries (UNDP 2020).

Though significant progress has been made in educational attainment, some population groups still lag far behind. Increasing evidence indicates that LGBTI people experience lower education outcomes due to discrimination, bullying, and violence; higher unemployment rates; and lack access to adequate housing, health services, and financial services (World Bank n.d.). As a result, they

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are likely to be disproportionately falling in the bottom 40 percent of the population (World Bank 2015).

The impacts of gender non-conforming or those of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) is high. The majority of LGBTI youth in Asia-Pacific has been subjected to some form of violence or bullying in school. In some countries, as many as four out of five LGBTI learners are affected. Millions of young learners throughout the Asia-Pacific region are being denied their right to an education. The impacts can be lifelong and devastating in terms of economic and employment opportunities. Studies on the Asia-Pacific region show that up to one in three LGBTI learners report depression; up to seven in 10 report harming themselves and nearly five in 10 attempt suicide (UNESCO 2015).

Gender inequality in access to digital technologies exacerbates the existing inequities in health outcomes. Connectivity is unevenly distributed in Asia-Pacific countries. For example, the quality of access to information technology and their use differs by areas and population groups in the Philippines leading to the differences in opportunities (UNDP 2021). Disparities and inequalities in access to services prevails even between women groups. For example, working women with education or with health insurance coverage are more likely to have four or more Antenatal Care

(ANC) visits than those with no educational attainment (Denny et al. 2022). The burden of ill health disproportionately falls on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, including diverse women and LGBTI people. As gender-based vulnerability intersects with other forms of discrimination based on income status, race, ethnicity, sexuality, HIV, indigeneity, age and/or migrant status, the people who most frequently face stigma and discrimination have the least personal autonomy or influence on decisions that impact their health. They face the highest structural

barriers to access to health care services and ultimately suffer the worst health outcomes.

In Asia-Pacific countries, access to basic services differs by geographic, demographic and socio-economic discrimination as well as from policy bias. These differences yield a substantial gap in outcomes and opportunities for different population groups. An analysis of DHS country data provides some vivid examples:

- In Bangladesh during 2019 access to sanitation varied widely by the level of educational attainment. Highly educated people (with secondary and higher education) were 1.6 folds more likely to have access to sanitation compared to those with lower level of education.
- In India, stunting among children under 5 of bottom 40 percent households was 1.6 folds more likely than the children of the top 60 percent of households in 2016.
- In Kiribati access to clean fuels was 18 folds higher among the urban population as compared to the rural population in 2019.
- In Lao PDR in 2017 people (18 – 35 years) of urban areas were 5.5 times more likely to complete higher education than those living in rural areas. And among those living in rural areas, only 2 percent of the bottom 40 households completed their higher education as against 12 percent among the top 60 percent households.
- In Mongolia in 2018 children (24 – 59 months) born in rich households (top 60%) were 1.7 folds more likely to receive early childhood education compared to their counterpart born in the bottom 40 percent of households.
- In Nepal in 2019 top 60 percent of the population were 2.4 folds more likely to use internet services than those of the bottom 40 percent.



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- In Thailand in 2019, violence against women was two times more likely to be justified among the minorities (speaking minor language) than among those who speak Thai.
- In Tonga in 2019, violence against women were 1.8 folds more likely among the bottom 40 percent compared to top 60 percent population.

Several previous studies also present the differences in opportunities and outcomes for different population groups and show how differential access to opportunities lead to differences in wellbeing outcomes. For example,

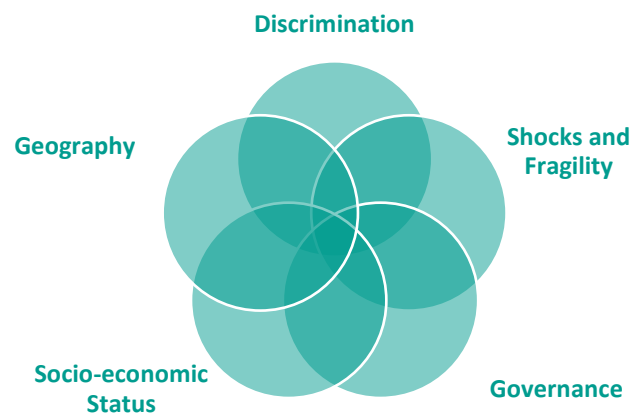
- In Cambodia and the Philippines, adolescent mothers with high labor force participation had 3.5 times greater odds of attending the first ANC early compared to the adult mothers with low labor force participation (Denny et al. 2022).
- In Bangladesh women and older people were significantly more likely to report having disabilities than men and younger people in 2020. For middle and rich families, there was a 14 percent lower likelihood of reporting disabilities than for the poor families (GOB 2020).
- In Southeast Asia, a cis woman was 59.6 percent more likely to receive a positive response to a job application than a trans woman. She was 64.2 percent more likely to be invited to an interview (World Economic Forum 2015).
- Persons with disabilities are between 2-4 times likely to be killed during disasters compared to others (UNDP, 2019b).

The likelihood ratio presented above for binary population groups provides clear guidance as to how to uplift the poor, women, youth and PWDs and other disadvantaged populations who are left

behind. Disaggregated data and estimates of wellbeing indicators play a crucial role in performing such an exploration. They provide clear evidence useful for policy making, resource allocation and targeting (Tiwari 2020). Despite this fact, disaggregated data and their analysis is sorely lacking in five overlapping dimensions of LNOB (Figure 1).

As evident from Figure 1, some Individual and population groups are left behind not only because they live in inaccessible and remote areas or being uneducated or have poor health or are living with disability but also because of the discrimination by state and society or shocks and fragility which is not under their control (UNSDG 2022, UNDP 2018). People get left behind when they lack the choices and opportunities to participate in and benefit from development progress (UNDP 2018).

**Figure 1:** Five dimensions of LNOB



Source: UNDP (2018)

People have multiple identities which indicate that they can be advantaged or disadvantaged in various ways. Intersectionality recognizes that identity markers (e.g., “woman” and “Dalits”) do not exist independently of each other, and that each reinforces the other, often creating a complex convergence of oppression. As these identities overlap, the intersectional theory asserts that

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people are often disadvantaged by multiple sources of oppression: their race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and other identity markers. When gender identities overlap with other identities, they combine and intersect to generate distinct and greater prejudices and discriminatory practices that violate women's equal rights in society (UNDP 2019a).

Furthermore, the intersectional nature of discrimination or exclusion results in vulnerability. The Independent Expert of SOGIE states, "The dynamics of exclusion are exacerbated when it intersects other factors, such as during humanitarian crises, or in the case of persons who face multiple forms of discrimination, for example migrants, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities."

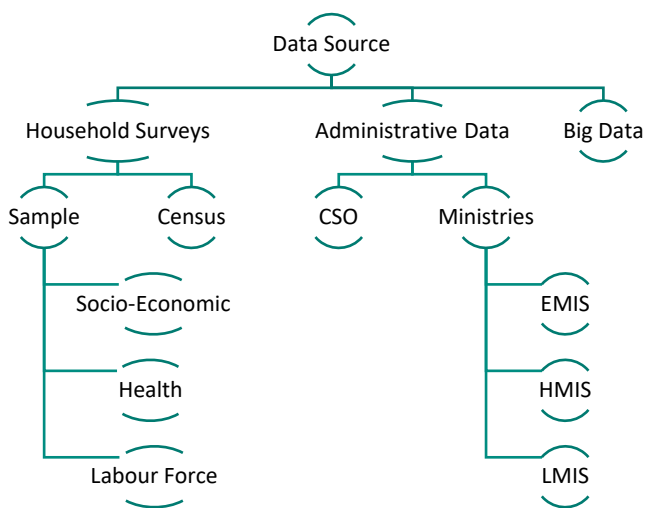
The exclusion and discrimination are also because of wrong informal values and institutions which are still deeply rooted in our society and in our expression. Biased gender social norms—the undervaluation of women's capabilities and rights in society—constrain women's choices and opportunities by regulating behaviour and setting the boundaries of what women are expected to do and be – thus retarding the level of human development of a country. Biased gender social norms are a major impediment to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Almost nine out of 10 men and women worldwide still hold biases against women. Almost half the world's people think that men make better political leaders than women do, and 43 percent think that men make better business executives than women do (UNDP 2023). In the Maldives Values in Crisis Survey 2021, more than 60 percent of the participants either strongly agreed or agreed that men made better political leaders than women. Such perceptions are to be corrected through discarding wrong social values and institutions through various means including through formal policies, legal acts and laws (UNDP Maldives and the Maldives National University 2021).

## Major Data Sources

Surveys, administrative data and big data are the major sources for empirical analysis and tracking the status of left behind groups (Figure 2). In addition, past literature also provides some data and evidence about them. International organizations have implemented projects focusing on some vulnerable groups which offer some evidence on those groups. However, addressing LNOB at country level requires a regular source of data which is part of the official statistical system.

Among the surveys, sample surveys hold much promise as they are flexible, efficient and timely. Demographic Health Survey (DHS), Labour Force Survey (LFS), Living Standards Measurement Surveys (LMIS), and Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS) are some major national level sample household surveys that provide data on population wellbeing. In addition, some countries conduct multitematic household surveys on their own such as Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) survey and Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey. These surveys are part of the official statistical system and are used for tracking national and international development goals such as SDGs (Tiwari 2019). International organizations, NGOs and the private sector also generate data while implementing some projects focusing on the left behind groups. The Equality of Opportunity for Sexual and Gender Minorities (EQOSOGI) project collects comparable cross-country data on legal frameworks that impact sexual and gender minorities' access to markets, services, and spaces in a country and examines how those laws either enable or inhibit their inclusion (World Bank 2023). Such data sources could be numerous, therefore, difficult to map out here. These project-based data are generally not part of the official statistical system. However, they can be used for research purposes, as well as are helpful for triangulation of other data.

**Figure 2:** Major data sources



Administrative data are generated in the process of providing services, keeping inventories and maintaining accounting exercises. These practices provide basic information on the inputs of the programmes, the activities carried out, and the basic goods and services provided. While the production of such data is fairly straightforward, its management and uses requires significant efforts. Some ministries have made substantial progress developing management information systems to compile and analyse such data. Of particular note are the education management information system (EMIS) and Health Management Information System (HMIS).

Another emerging source is the big data that contains greater variety, arriving in increasing volumes and with more velocity. They are characterized by three V's – variety, volume and velocity. These massive volumes of data can be used to address problems which have not been managed before. But these data sets are so voluminous that traditional processing software cannot manage them.

## Pros and Cons of Survey versus Administrative Data

Scientific sample surveys follow a robust sampling design with verified data collection instruments. These surveys are designed to serve a specific purpose and collect data on the subjects under investigation. Therefore, they are highly relevant and useful. But unlike sample surveys, collection of administrative data does not involve a separate cost. They are generated in the process of providing services such as education and health. While enhancing statistical quality, administrative data also saves costs. In fact, nationally representative surveys such as household income and expenditure surveys (HIES) are expensive and cost on average about \$1.7 million to conduct (SDSN 2015; SDSN TReNDS 2018). However, processing of administrative data could be also a costly affair in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) or lower income countries which lack system and capacity. Moreover, unlike surveys, the administrative data are less flexible, and are on input-outputs, therefore, may not serve the purpose of tracking wellbeing of people. Further details are presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3:** Advantages and disadvantages of survey and administrative data

Administrative Data	
Merit	Demerit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data are generated almost automatically as a by-product of the government's daily activities. No additional management and cost are involved for data collection.</li> <li>They reflect the existing programmes of the government and allow to monitor the resources and outputs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administrative data systems are static forms of data production and are largely internal to the government. They are inflexible and passive.</li> <li>It requires a higher cost for</li> </ul>

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<p>generated from those resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These data permit to analyze the efficiencies and cost-effectiveness of the government activities.</li> <li>• They are collected for all units of the population, and thus can provide estimates at a disaggregated level.</li> </ul>	<p>processing as per the need.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is bias, thus the possibility of over- and under-estimation of the values of indicators.</li> <li>• It takes a long time to improve the administrative data.</li> </ul>
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Household Survey Data	
Merit	Demerit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It provides active data and is used more often.</li> <li>• The data collection is guided by the needs, and therefore is flexible.</li> <li>• It helps find out the bias of the administrative data as the data is generally collected outside the government.</li> <li>• It contributes to policy making.</li> <li>• It helps to determine the effectiveness of policies and programmes and measure their impact.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It demands additional resources.</li> <li>• There is a possibility of bias due to sampling and non-sampling errors.</li> <li>• There is a lack of systematic household surveys.</li> <li>• There is a lack of data for policy planning, especially in developing countries.</li> <li>• They do not allow for much disaggregation because of the limited sample size.</li> </ul>

## Reasons for Insufficiency of Disaggregated Data

Significant improvement in data availability is occurring over time. Between 2017 and 2022, the number of SDGs indicators with sufficient data availability doubled in Asia and the Pacific, from 63 to 128. At the same pace of progress, the region

could have sufficient data to track SDG progress well ahead of 2030. But it seems less likely because the rate of increase in the availability continues to slow down over the years, with only a four percent increase in 2022 as compared to 32 percent in 2018 (UNESCAP 2023). At the regional level, only energy goals have sufficient data. Among the rest, the level of sufficiency varies widely. SDGs 1, 3, 6, 15 and 17 have sufficient data for more than 70 percent of their indicators. Gender equality (SDG 5) and life below water (SDG 14), followed by peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16) are with lowest data sufficiency. In terms of ‘no data at all’ SDGs 11 and 13 fare worst as they do not have any data at all for at least 38 percent of indicators. This implies that SDGs 5, 14 and 16 have a larger of indicators with some data but that are insufficient to track the progress (UNESCAP 2023).

When disaggregation by eight attributes of the 2030 Agenda is considered, the inadequacy issue becomes worse. Out of the 232 indicators, only 29 indicators have disaggregation by sex, location or combination of age and sex. In developing Asia-Pacific, there are several reasons for data inadequacy (UNESCAP 2023). They can be technical and non-technical, including some political reasons. Some of them are explained below.

### Limitations of household surveys

Household surveys are still major sources of data for SDG tracking; however, they have several limitations associated with their limited content, sample size, quality, frequency, timeliness and availability of updated values. Some of these challenges yield data gaps or inadequacy to perform LNOB analysis. As these national surveys are conducted at an interval of about five years, it is difficult to report updated indicator values regularly. Lack of harmonization in definition and methodology across household surveys provides differences in the indicator values. This does not allow to track a particular indicator using data from different surveys. Moreover, only some standard

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national surveys provide robust and valid estimates of the population parameters.

One major concern of the national sample surveys is that their data are inadequate for an intersectionality analysis because they do not have much disaggregation by different attributes of various population groups. The 2030 Agenda and SDG indicators require disaggregation by at least eight attributes to perform LNOB analysis which the existing surveys cannot fulfill. Several reasons can be advanced as to why data obtained from the national sample household surveys have such constraints. Firstly, household surveys have limited sample size which hardly permits to provide estimate of wellbeing indicators up to the second level of administrative tiers, and in few cases up to the third tiers such as in case of Pakistan – country, provinces and district (Tiwari 2019). Second, generally surveys are designed considering administrative units rather than population groups. They therefore provide estimates of an indicator at the spatial level than by population groups or by left behind groups.

However, with the advancement in gender and development, most national level surveys like DHS and MICS do provide data by gender, but sex as a category is a very large group, therefore disaggregation by such broad groups is hardly useful for looking into intersectionality unless data are broken down further by age, caste and ethnicity, economic status or other attributes such as disability or sexual orientation. It is a noteworthy attempt of some countries like Nepal that collects census data on the intersex/ third gender population. Recently, there have been some developments in data collection methods too which demonstrate an increasing number of tools available to understand the lives of sexual and gender minorities around the world (Park 2016).

In fact, the level of disaggregation for the LNOB analysis calls for a huge increase in sample size of the national surveys. Unfortunately, a sizeable increase is a formidable task. It not only requires

larger resources – both time and money – but also decreases data accuracy through increasing errors. As sample size increases, sampling errors decrease but non-sampling errors generally increase. In fact, beyond a certain sample size, the decrease in sampling errors cannot outweigh the fast-increasing non-sampling errors. Therefore, it is less wise to increase the sample size after some point as the survey cost as well as non-sampling error is always an increasing function of the sample size.

### **Limitations of administrative data**

Unlike sample surveys administrative data enumerate each household or member of the population, therefore, is useful for LNOB analysis. They can provide disaggregation by various population groups. However, admin data is replete with several issues. First, they may not be unbiased. As the MIS data are institution-based, they are linked with the government's incentive structure and budget. For example, the data related to school enrolment rates are generally upward biased, whereas the data on, say water and sanitation coverage, is downward biased in order to attract more public budgets from the Government treasury.

Second, the purpose of collecting administrative data is just to keep records about inputs and outputs or service delivery and/or tracking whether citizens received basic services. On their own, they can provide information about the coverage of a service but are not appropriate for looking into further details. Thus, they are better for responding to 'what' than 'why'. They can be helpful in identifying left behind groups but may not provide information about why they are left behind unless these data streams are linked with other statistical systems. Finally, unlike survey data, administrative records are less flexible to make necessary changes in the process of using them for LNOB analysis. Moreover, it takes longer time to make any changes such as in data content or definition of a variable because this requires a change in the forms and schedules used



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for recording administrative data. Since these forms are rolled out all over the country by the Government, it requires approval from the authority and necessary briefing and training to all those who record and maintain such data.

### **Inadequate data and research on wellbeing of the marginal and vulnerable population groups**

The United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon recognized the relationship between data and decision-making when he observed that “good data and statistics are indispensable for informed decision-making by all actors in society.” Policymakers and advocates often operate without reliable information about important aspects of the lives of sexual and gender minorities, including socioeconomic status, educational attainment, patterns of exclusion from employment, information about physical and mental health, ability to participate in civic institutions, and other development outcomes. Increasing the disaggregated data availability for the marginalized would help improve the quality and effectiveness of public policy (UCLA Williams Institute 2016).

Until recently, there has been very little quantitative research about the life experiences of sexual and gender minorities. Most research targeting sexual, or gender minorities has been conducted in the context of HIV epidemiological or prevention research and tends to not focus on anything beyond sexual risk involving those assigned male at birth. There is also a general lack of research about people with intersex conditions.

While administrative data have a larger coverage of the population compared to the surveys, at times, they fail to reflect the coverage of some groups like those who do not have national identity or citizenship, or land ownership certificate, therefore, are not regarded as eligible to get government services. For example, slum populations who lack a

legal right to the land where they live very often do not have access to private tap water connections.

Furthermore, national household surveys conducted by the government do not include part of the population such as migrants, population who are not registered with government bodies and/or those lacking citizenship certificates. They are therefore not included in the sampling frame prepared for selecting the sample. However, some NGOs and projects focusing on such groups do collect some data on the welfare such marginal population groups.

### **Lack of the culture of evidence-based planning and decision making**

The governments in developing countries attach low priority to measuring and tracking development progress. This is also because monitoring could make governments accountable to their sluggish progress. While inadequacy of funds is important, this is not the sole reason. There does not seem to be a perfect relation between income per capita and data availability in Asia-Pacific countries. Gaps in SDG data have other causes apart from limited resources for statistical development or technical capacity building. It may reflect insufficient demand by Government and lack of national ownership for those indicators (UNESCAP 2023).

### **Lack of the detailed statistical plan**

Inadequate planning and sequencing of surveys is another big issue on the way to regular data availability. Data collections are very often undertaken on an ad-hoc basis in several countries. Government and development partners at times take a quick decision to conduct a survey to serve their own purpose, thus leading to lack of a systematic availability of data through proper sequencing of surveys. Such an ad-hoc decision results in duplication of surveys at some point, whereas absence of data at some other time. Over

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and above, such a practice gives rise to the inefficient use of scarce funds in developing countries.

## Strengthening Statistical System for Increased Data Availability

### Addressing the limitations of household surveys

There are several limitations of household surveys. Chief among them are the limited sample size and content, small coverage of indicators, different values for the same indicators, irregularity of the surveys, among others. Some of these limitations can be addressed through harmonizing sample designs, and definitions of the variables for which data is gathered across surveys. In fact, efforts have already been underway to harmonize towards these ends. For example, now sample design of the MICS has been aligned with that of the DHS, making it possible to compare their estimates. Similarly, several surveys have additional modules which can be added to fulfill the demand for additional data requirements.

One major limitation of the inadequacy of survey data for LNOB analysis is that they do not allow for much disaggregation. This calls for a huge increase in sample size resulting in an increase in the cost of survey as well as non-sampling errors. Nationally representative surveys such as household income and expenditure surveys (HIES) are expensive and cost on average about \$1.7 million

(SDSN TRenDS 2018). Therefore, by harnessing existing administrative data, the content of surveys can be reduced which can allow to gather data from a larger sample size at a lower cost and with low level of non-sampling errors (ADB 2022). In this process, questionnaires of household surveys can be cut down by excluding the subjects on which data is available from administrative sources. This way the time saved from enumeration of a household can be used to collect data from other households

by increasing the sample size. Moreover, the reduced interview time will help improve the non-sampling bias which results very often due to interview fatigue.

The increase in sample size should consider the overall size of errors. As sampling error and non-sampling error run in different directions, it is necessary to determine a sample size at an optimum point at which the cost of the survey and imputed cost of the non-sampling error is at its lowest.

### Addressing the errors and biases

A (sample) statistic or an estimate of a wellbeing indicator can represent well the population parameter or the true value when there is low sampling and non-sampling errors. While sampling errors are low in case of the national sample surveys because they are designed following a robust probabilistic sampling design, it is difficult to decrease non-sampling errors in developing countries where awareness of people who provide data is low. There is various evidence of strategic bias by interviewees. A respondent becomes strategic in responding to a question when he strategically thinks that his response is associated with some personal gains. For example, if the respondents think that by making a false statement, he or his neighbours can get a benefit such as provision of safe drinking water at his yard or nearby, he will do so. Similarly, households do not like to disclose some of the data such as their income or disability status of their family members. Therefore, the estimates of income or persons with disability (PWD) are under reported. While thorough training to the enumerators can reduce partly such biases through probing, it is also necessary to educate the respondents about how false reporting can disrupt governments' planning and programming. Establishing mutual trust between the government and the citizens is necessary. Apart from educating the respondents, effort is to be made to reduce other forms of biases which can creep in due to faulty instruments of the

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measurement or the defective questionnaire or communication issues and/or lack of comprehensive training to the enumerators.

### **Improving data collection methods for the hard-to-reach groups**

The relationship between data and decision-making has been well established. In spite of this, often decisions are made without reliable information about important aspects of the lives of sexual and gender minorities, including socioeconomic status, educational attainment, patterns of exclusion from employment, information about physical and mental health, ability to participate in civic institutions, and other development outcomes. Therefore, increasing availability of data about sexual and gender minorities would help improve the quality and effectiveness of public policy (UCLA Williams Institute 2016).

Until recently, there has been very little quantitative research about the lived experiences of sexual and gender minorities in most parts of the world. Governments and civil society leaders have come to realize that data about sexual and gender minorities is needed for a number of reasons, including: (i) their inclusion in the SDGs and other development priorities; (ii) identifying the impact of stigma and prejudice on development outcomes as well as identifying the preferences and life-goals of sexual and gender minorities; and finally evaluating the effectiveness of programmes meant to reach sexual and gender minorities as well as assessing government efforts to respect, protect and fulfill their human rights. A human rights-based approach is therefore necessary for addressing the LNOB principles which require gathering more and more data on these hard-to-reach groups.

### **Investing in administrative data system and tools**

Some of the limitations of household surveys such as extending the level of disaggregation can be addressed from administrative records. But this requires enough investment in improving data collection structure, harmonizing the definition of indicators of household surveys in order to address any discrepancies in the indicator values, apart from increasing spending on the management information systems and digitalization whose necessity is growing over time. Furthermore, in order to use admin data together with survey data, systems and tools such as small area estimation and other methods need to be used. This requires provision of specialized training and other capacity development measures for the relevant staff of government including from the CSO of developing countries.

### **Strengthening inter-linkages of statistical systems for the availability of disaggregated data**

Administrative data is mainly useful for tracking inputs, activities and output level indicators, whereas survey data provides information on the outcome and impact level indicators. Both are interlinked and can complement each other. The objective of a government is to improve the wellbeing of people by performing various functions. Therefore, these two data sources are not to be seen as separate exercises, but a part of the inter-linked system which can provide governments with the data necessary for understanding the link between government interventions and people's standard of living and help guide future planning.

Apart from increasing sample size of the national household survey, it is also necessary to look for other avenues for addressing the issues of lack of disaggregated data, such as:

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- Focusing on attributes that are the root of other attributes.
- Integrating sample surveys.
- Integrating different data sources through tools like small area estimation to provide estimates at a lower level of geographical areas or groups.

Two or more sources of data can be integrated. For example, labour force surveys and household income and expenditure surveys can be combined to provide a disaggregated estimate of an attribute. Similarly, a household survey can be combined with a census to provide a disaggregated estimate based on the small area estimation method (Tiwari 2020 and 2019).

### **Collaboration between various organizations**

A national statistical system encompasses the production, dissemination, and use of data in a country. Making the national statistical system unified and a coherent whole requires strong coordination among numerous contributors. The contributors are line ministries, other government agencies, and economic actors, including the national statistical office (NSO) and through it, households and individuals in the country.

There is also a need for coordination between data providers and policymakers, as well as inter-agency cooperation to establish standards and capacity-building to improve data collection. Governments and intergovernmental partners must continue to coordinate closely to build national technical capacity for statistics and ensure that data collection and use remain a top priority. Updating legislation needs to be a priority to facilitate data sharing and production.

### **Empowering statistical organizations**

A national statistical system is complex and requires a significant level of coordination. Coordinating with all the constituents of the system calls for a nodal

agency which has required authority and capacity. As CSOs are the nodal agency in the Asia-Pacific countries, they need to be empowered through making necessary laws and institutional arrangements. But in several countries, statistical organizations are not attached with higher importance. They have not only an inadequate budget but also weak institutional arrangements. Therefore, empowering the NSOs with appropriate institutional arrangement and budget should be on the priority agenda of the developing countries. As estimated by the data for development experts, a total of US\$1 billion per annum will be required to enable 77 of the world's lower-income countries to catch up and put in place statistical systems capable of supporting and measuring the SDGs. This requires massive efforts from both the donors and recipient countries of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in joining the data revolution.

### **Developing a national statistical plan and strengthening national level monitoring and reporting**

Developing a national statistical plan outlining the strategy and the linkages between the various subsystems is necessary. In each subsystem core priority data should be identified considering national and international development goals. These core data gathering efforts are funded regularly from government sources. The plan should also advance an action plan to move beyond the collection of the core data. In this process support from the development partners be sought.

Data collected without a purpose is a waste of scarce resources of the governments. In the long run collection of that data does not continue. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a national level monitoring and reporting system linking with the planning system. A clear linkage has to be established between the planning agency and statistical agency. The monitoring system should form an essential component of a national plan and be developed involving all the sectoral ministries, planning



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agencies and statistical organization following a participatory approach.

### **Mainstreaming international development goals in the governments' plan**

Developing countries face challenges of multiple reporting. In the lack of synchronization across the various plans including the national plan and international goals, data demand is massive. It is because of this reason generally countries have to collect and provide data for more than 332 SDG indicators. This calls for a massive investment. Collecting data from surveys is also expensive and obtaining them from administrative records requires huge investment. In view of this, one of the options is to decrease the number of indicators of reporting. One way this could be done is to mainstream the national goals with the international development goals.

### **Using data for evidence-based planning and decision making**

Mere collection of data is not the ultimate end. Data is just the means to inform policy and actions to address intersectionality. The disaggregated data also needs to be processed, analysed and used for informing policy. They need to be used for measuring overlapping deprivations or intersectionality. Towards this end, UNDP has made several efforts. Together with Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiatives (OPHI), it has developed multidimensional poverty index (MPI) for overlapping poverty (Alkire and Foster 2011, Tiwari 2019 and 2020). Its use for measuring overlapping deprivations by races, caste and ethnic groups as well as by LGBTI and other disadvantaged groups can be a useful means for addressing LNOB. Another useful effort by UNDP is the development of the LGBTI Inclusion Index and its piloting. With the aim of informing policies, programmes and investments for strengthening LGBTI rights and inclusion, the Index is proposed to consist of as many as 51

indicators across five strategic areas of health, education, personal safety and violence, civil and political participation, and economic empowerment (Badgett and Sell 2018). In Viet Nam, UNDP in collaboration with the United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC), and relevant LGBTI organizations jointly implement the pilot phase of the LGBTI Inclusion Index (UNDP 2022b).

## **Conclusion**

An honest implementation of the measures presented in the preceding section calls for strong political will without which neither a strong statistical system can be developed, nor evidence-based planning and decision making is fostered. Despite efforts made since long for using data for planning and monitoring, many decisions are still taken on an ad-hoc basis. Moreover, competition between different political parties to seek support from the people during election time gives rise to some populist plans and decisions which have far-reaching consequences. Such a practice encourages the practice of ad-hoc planning and decision making.

Data adequacy can address the issue of LNOB through improving governance – which is a major cause of concern in several developing countries. Governance improves when there is evidence-based planning and decision making. Disaggregated data can serve as a tool for improved resource allocation and targeting the left behind groups with adequate provision of resources. In addition to planning, disaggregated data can also help in tracking the situation of the left behind groups. As the data has to do with governance, some governments may not prioritize strengthening the statistical system to become more transparent and accountable to people. This could also be due to lack of awareness of the political leaders about the role of data in planning and monitoring. In view of this, it is necessary to raise awareness and thereby create

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political will and gather broader constituency for fostering data collection and use through strengthening statistical system in developing countries.

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