IHSN Management Group

Response to the Independent Evaluation of the International Household Survey Network (IHSN) and Accelerated Data Program (ADP)

October 2013

This document summarizes the response of the IHSN Management Group to the Independent Evaluation of the International Household Survey Network (IHSN) and Accelerated Data Program (ADP). The evaluation was conducted by Oxford Policy Management Ltd from January to August 2013 (i) to assess the impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the IHSN and ADP, (ii) to assess their relevance in the context of the evolving statistical capacity development agenda, and (iii) to provide guidance on how the programs could be improved in the future. The complete evaluation report (http://www.ihsn.org/home/node/627) was presented and discussed at the IHSN Management Group meeting held in Rome on 18th September 2013.

1. General

1.1. We appreciate the usefulness of the Independent Evaluation of the IHSN and ADP. The evaluation was conducted on the basis of broad consultation and it provides a comprehensive review of the performance of IHSN and ADP since their inception. The report helps to identify the strengths and challenges of the programs. The findings and recommendations are relevant and useful for developing future strategies and work programs.

1.2. We recognize the need to think strategically about the future of the IHSN to foster its relevance and its impact in a changing data environment.

2. Response to the evaluation findings

2.1. In general, we concur with the overall findings on the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, and governance of IHSN and ADP. However, we would like to clarify a few areas in the effectiveness and impact of the programs:

   a. Regarding the limited effectiveness and impact of IHSN on **survey coordination**, it should be noted that although better survey coordination is a widely acknowledged and much desired objective, how to achieve it at the international level remains the greatest challenge. We recognize the need for further information sharing between our Agencies and we are committed to be more ambitious on this. We also stress that the regional level institutions and the national statistical offices need to play greater

roles themselves. We should encourage all relevant partners to engage with the IHSN Secretariat to leverage its impact.

b. We agree with the overall findings on the **effectiveness** of IHSN/ADP activities. We believe that the effectiveness of the IHSN activities lies in their integration in the IHSN member agencies' and ADP client agencies' core work programs. We also stress the importance for the IHSN/ADP Secretariat to work directly with agencies (notably national statistics offices - NSOs) at country level, in particular for the piloting of technical assistance programs.

c. In its broad definition, the evaluation report has underestimated the effects of IHSN/ADP activities on improving **data quality** produced by National Statistical Offices and development agencies. Although IHSN/ADP are not directly involved in the implementation of surveys, their activities have indirectly contributed to improved relevance, usability, accuracy and timeliness of survey data. Improving metadata enables further work in data harmonization and reconciliation. The on-going work on Question Banks and assessments of survey designs also aims to improve the relevance and quality of data collection. The assistance provided to NSOs in the formulation of microdata dissemination policies further improves the timeliness of survey data. Importantly, promoting best practices in data documentation and dissemination has led to a cultural change in several national agencies that directs more attention to data quality.

d. While the impact on **data use** is hard to measure, there is abundant evidence of an increasing demand for microdata, such as the number of registered users and downloads on National Data Archives (NADAs), World Bank Microdata Library, WHO and IPUMS microdata catalogues. While it is difficult to measure how much of the data use in developing countries has led to policy-making or to map policy decisions to a particular data source, microdata made available has been used in publications of national and international partners. Furthermore, the on-going Open Data movement is further broadening the user community and diversifying the range of analytical output.

e. The report found limited impact on the **collaboration between data producers and data users**. We agree that more needs to be done to foster this collaboration. The Microdata Outreach Workshops that ADP has supported in Nigeria, Guinea and Rwanda and are currently supporting in a number of other countries are precisely aimed at promoting user-producer dialogues and strengthening the user-producer relationship at country level.

f. We would also like to call attention to the important **impact** of IHSN/ADP on forming an informal, previously non-existent network that goes beyond the IHSN member agencies; composed of heads and staff of NSOs and line ministries, regional statistical communities, user organizations, and other groups such as the DDI Alliance, ICPSR, NSD Norway, etc. At country level, the ADP activities also promoted the culture of different stakeholders working together.

3. Response to the recommendations

Outputs and activities

3.1. **Extend the scope of activities beyond household survey data.** We will continue to focus on surveys and survey data (although not exclusively on household surveys) as they will remain a critical component of the upcoming data revolution and a critical source for monitoring the post-2015 agenda. IHSN/ADP will continue to play a key role in promoting microdata access and improving the quality of surveys. In the meantime, we will explore possibilities of extending the scope of activities to include other data sources and types.

3.2. **Raise awareness of the importance and availability of microdata through improved advocacy**. We agree with the need to invest more in improving outreach and advocacy.

3.3. **Ensure IHSN activities are included in the national and regional strategies for development of statistics.** We acknowledge the importance of strengthening links between IHSN activities with strategic approaches to capacity building at national and regional levels. We also stress the relevance of dedicated and easy to mobilize financial resources to spearhead innovation in specific statistical areas.

3.4. **Develop a strategy for engagement and disengagement with ADP partner countries.** A formal disengagement strategy is not a priority as the ADP is not involved in the long term in any country. Technical assistance will remain a critical component of IHSN and will evolve to include new areas such as anonymization and survey methodology harmonization. We agree that leveraging on the technical assistance programs of the IHSN Agencies should be systematic for mature activities, such as survey metadata management.

Governance and institutional arrangement

3.5. **Reaffirm the involvement of partners in the Network and strengthen the Management Group**. We would like to open our membership to all types of interested

organizations, in order to engage a diverse range of stakeholders interested in the IHSN focus.

3.6. We agree with the need to strengthen the Network and the Management Group. We need to keep the network informal, non-legal, preserving its flexibility, while at the same time, strengthening the governance and advisory role of the Management Group. The Management Group should be composed of 10-12 agencies with a rotating chair to guide the IHSN work program, advise on budget and resource allocation and support fundraising if needed. We agree with the proposed composition of the Management Group. The Management Group will hold two meetings per year as recommended by the Evaluation: one open to all IHSN member agencies in the margins of the United Nations Statistics Commission (around February), and one meeting of the core Management Group around September.

3.7. **Institutional arrangements.** We believe that network, technical work and technical assistance should be integrated. We agree with the model of specific ad hoc task teams proposed, which are composed of IHSN agencies staff and supported by external experts and IHSN financial resources. The organization and financing must be flexible and responsive, leaving space for innovation and a "right to fail" in the "incubation of innovation" projects.

3.8. **Initiate the involvement of IHSN with UNSC.** We have already started engaging with UNSC and the broader development data community. It is important to establish the link to the Global Partnership on Development Data, and generate meaningful responses for the call for a data revolution.

Reporting

3.9. Progress against the recommendations will be recorded in the periodic progress reports produced by the IHSN/ADP secretariat.