

African data is not “user-friendly”

ABUJA, Nigeria: A serious problem in “data user-friendliness” has been identified in Africa, according to stakeholders at the recent Africa Open Data Conference.



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Ahead of the July launch of The Africa Data Revolution Report (#ADRR2016) in Accra, stakeholders attending the Africa Open Data Conference (#AODC17) spent several hours assessing the state of African data ecosystems at national, sub-regional and continental levels.

During the one-day workshop, which took place on 19 July 2017 at the Accra International Conference Centre under the theme, *The Role of Open Data in The Africa Data Revolution*, Eromosele John, who leads the open data team at the Edo State ICT Agency in Nigeria said there's a serious problem of data user-friendliness in Africa.

“Data presentation format is crucial in dissemination. Unfortunately most of our data is presented as scientific documents, as if to target only experts. This automatically disqualifies a big portion of our audience. We need to work on making our data more user-friendly, digital and accessible.”

Participants also mentioned that technology has increased the number of players in data production on the continent but that national statistics offices are slow and sometimes unwilling to incorporate them.

Radio was identified as one of the most effective but underused channels of dissemination in Africa. The need to involve communication professionals in data production processes was highlighted among other things.

Opening up data can yield benefits

Commenting on the raison d'être of the workshop, the organisers, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); World Wide Web Foundation; and Open Data for Development Network (OD4D), said consultation and collaboration with all stakeholders are key to improving the quality, quantity and accessibility of data in Africa.

Speaking on behalf of the ECA, Chukwudozie Ezigbalike, chief of the Data Technology Section at the Africa Centre for Statistics, said the workshop, "allowed us to engage at a deeper level with the data community, get feedback on the inaugural Africa Data Revolution Report and prepare stakeholders for their input in the 2018 edition of our biennial ADRR report."

UNDP's, Serge Patrick Kapto, policy specialist at the Data for Development Post-2015 Team, said, "This workshop has been instrumental to capture insights from African data communities on action-oriented recommendations from the ADRR2016 and rich perspectives to take into account to ensure that the 2018 report, which will focus on open data, responds to the development priorities of the continent as embodied in Agendas 2063 and 2030."

For his part, Fernand Perini, coordinator of the OD4D, said, "This is an African Agenda by Africans for Africa and so the workshop is an opportunity to bring together the broad African national statistics offices and data communities to work together towards data revolution in Africa."

The Web Foundation was represented by senior policy manager, Nhenna Nwakanma, who said, "Opening up data can yield benefits for businesses, civil society and governments. It can create new business opportunities, help to stamp out waste and corruption, and help governments deliver services more effectively."

Nwakanma added that Open Data is "one sure avenue to digital equality. We therefore actively lend our support to actors in Africa through our engagement with the ADRR, the Gender initiatives and the Regional Snapshots of the Open Data Barometer."

The workshop organisers are also publishers of ADRR2016, which maps the data ecosystem in Africa with reference to the production, distribution and use of data by public, private and civil society actors, as they relate to the 17 SDGs.