The global community’s pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has highlighted the importance of reliable, accessible data for guiding efforts to reduce social inequities, particularly those relating to health. Appropriate indicators provide knowledge about the current status of target populations, how their status has changed, and whether progress has been made toward established goals.

But the right data are not always available to researchers, policy advocates, and policymakers, even though many statistics are now more accessible digitally or in open-data platforms. Notably, universities in developing countries are often resource-strapped, yet training future generations of leaders depends on having the most accurate and relevant data.

Population Reference Bureau (PRB) data sheets make critical data points easy to access, visualize, and understand. These poster-size publications and online resources facilitate routine monitoring of many indicators and put data in the hands of those who need it. Data sheets bring new perspectives and understanding to a wide set of current demographic and population-level indicators, particularly in contexts where electronic access to data is limited.

**Activities**

PRB has expanded the package of materials that comprise a “data sheet,” adding online access and features to our traditional printed wall chart. The fundamental component is a data table compiling indicators across countries or regions, enhanced by graphs and explanations that are integral to making the data easy to understand and visualize. Online resources—interactive graphics such as maps, charts, and figures—allow audiences to explore the data in more detail.

Under IDEA, PRB’s data sheets compile country-level data on specific topics. While the signature *World Population Data Sheet* highlights global population indicators, specialized data sheets like the *World’s Women and Girls, Family Planning Worldwide,* or *Kenya AIDS Indicator Survey* assemble indicators around a particular theme or country. Developing an effective data sheet requires gathering indicators and measures from the best sources, and calculating indicators that are not otherwise available.

A global data sheet shows countries in relation to each other. This format enables easy cross-country and regional comparisons; when tracking progress on goals and commitments, such as the MDGs, this type of tool is an asset. Within a country, illuminating data at the subnational level across a given set of indicators enables audiences to develop a more nuanced sense of performance and disparities.

In the field, PRB works closely with partners to bring greater accessibility and understanding of data throughout the country. PRB partners with government ministries and agencies, and civil society organizations to select indicators from large-scale surveys and translate them into digestible information for planning and advocacy. These efforts focus on making the data available and usable at all levels, from national policies to county action plans.

**Results**

Data sheets are prominently displayed on the walls in ministries, clinics, and offices. PRB print data sheets and online versions are a go-to resource for partners around the world. Demand for printed data sheets continues to rise, even as electronic content expands.
**World Population Data Sheet** brings demographic data to the fore. PRB’s annual *World Population Data Sheet*—downloaded nearly 1.3 million times from the PRB website during IDEA—continues to be an important resource to media, researchers, policymakers, and advocates worldwide. The most recent edition, released in August 2014, was downloaded more than 130,000 times in just six months. Every year, this publication informs diverse print and broadcast media, such as the Financial Times, Voice of America (Africa), Christian Science Monitor, Huffington Post, and countless country and local news sources, including the Daily Telegraph (UK), Times of India, Vanguard (Nigeria), and the Korea Times.

Data on women and girls inform organizations from civil society to the private sector. IDEA published the *World’s Women and Girls 2011 Data Sheet* to commemorate International Women’s Day. The data sheet served as the basis for news stories around the world about women and girls in Ghana, India, Jamaica, Malawi, Pakistan, Uganda, and the United Arab Emirates. Beyond the news media, the data sheet was actively used by donors, governments, private companies, NGOs, and civil society groups. The United Methodist Church shared the data sheet at “Healthy Families, Healthy Planet”—a seminar for advocates encouraging the U.S. Congress to increase support for maternal health and international family planning. Kenya’s Ministry of Planning and National Development used the data sheet to develop realistic targets for empowerment as part of their gender mainstreaming policy. In the United States, GAP, Inc. used the data sheet to develop content for their social responsibility website.

**Country-level data inform media and leaders.** In Malawi, IDEA worked with government ministries and NGOs to develop a series of 28 district data sheets in English and Chichewa drawing on the most recent census data and Demographic and Health Surveys. These one-page data sheets highlighted key population and well-being indicators at the district level, and have been in high demand, requiring several reprints, according to IDEA’s country coordinator for Malawi. Journalists at community radio stations throughout the country based local news stories on the materials. Many of Malawi’s local authorities revised their by-laws to deter early marriage and teen pregnancy based on information from the data sheets.

In Kenya, IDEA partnered with the National Council for Population and Development, the National AIDS & STI Control Programme, and the U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to develop two data sheets highlighting key indicators from the 2012 Kenya AIDS Indicator Survey. Translating the complex survey findings into an accessible format helped facilitate use of these critical, HIV/AIDS-monitoring data for program planning throughout the country.

**Lessons Learned and Looking Forward**

In today’s information overload, population data that are centralized and comparable are necessary. PRB selects data from a variety of sources to create a compilation that is accessible, reliable, and highly valued by our audiences.

Print materials remain relevant and in demand, even as technology and internet access enable a broader package of interactive materials.

Innovations in data presentation such as infographics help spotlight the policy relevance of data. This enables policymakers and civil society leaders to manage the overwhelming amount of data available, absorb information quickly, and analyze policy implications.

Data are most useful when they are relevant. PRB ensures that data sheets have the most current indicators, and also that the topics and indicators selected address priority issues for target audiences.

Compiling indicators for different countries or regions from different sources is valuable and can give audiences a new perspective on the data. Complementary visuals and interactive elements enable a deeper understanding of the data, meeting users’ demand to explore the data in new ways.

Partnering with local organizations facilitates both ownership and use of data in planning. Even when large survey results are publicly available, they often go unused in planning because local organizations may not know how to access or interpret the data in ways that are relevant to their policies and programs.

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