

**Case study for Road Map on Statistics for SDGs 2.0**  
**United Kingdom: International collaboration**

**Description**

The UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) International Development Team (IDT) was created in September 2016 to use the UK's Official Development Assistance budget to support statistical modernisation in countries in the developing world. The team prioritises, plans and leads the provision of high-quality technical assistance, by its experts, to build the capacity of statistical systems in developing countries.

Working with the rest of UK government to ensure that our work complements and supports our international objectives, we work at two levels:

We have developed medium-term peer to peer partnerships with some core National Statistical Offices on statistical modernisation. These are led by an ONS adviser who is based in the partner organisation, we work with the partner to jointly develop a work plan, and are able to draw upon expertise from across ONS (and the wider UK Government Statistical System) to provide strategic and technical advice in a wide range of areas, and undertake joint projects.

We harness ONS expertise to support global statistical programmes and share best practices through the international statistical system. For example, we work on SDG monitoring and Data Science projects around the world, utilising ONS strengths in these areas.

**Advantages**

Our first four years have shown that ONS expertise is in huge demand; that the lessons we have learned on our modernisation journey can benefit others. We have learned that the key questions partners have are often organisational as well as technical: they are interested in how we have improved our communications with stakeholders, how we lead and manage a modern statistical service, and how we establish the right policy and legal environment to keep data safe and build trust. The main advantages to our approach are that we can be flexible, and draw in a wide range of expertise in all of these areas. And that by embedding ONS staff into the partner organisation we can build really high levels of trust and understanding.

We have also learned that ONS staff gain enormously from the experiences of working overseas – applying their skills in a new environment, often with constrained resources. The learning is very much two way.

Some of our key results from the first four years have included:

- Good quality leadership training is now available to African National Statistical Systems through the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) (and has been delivered in 5 countries).
- UNECA's role in supporting 2020 census round in Africa has been strengthened to ensure best use of digital technology is made.
- The capability of African national statistical offices to respond to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has been strengthened.
- A sustainable data science team in NISR Kigali has been established and there are improved approaches to data security, and an appropriate legal and policy environment in preparation for establishing a Big Data Lab in Rwanda.
- The geospatial quality and coverage for the 2020 Ghanaian Census has been improved.

- Public policy analysis to support national development and evidence-based decision-making in Ghana has been improved.
- Communications has been professionalised at the Ghana Statistical Service.
- Data collection in Kenya's first digital census was improved.
- 15 countries and 3 sub national governments are now using the UK SDG platform to disseminate SDG progress to their users.
- A data science hub focussing on international development has been established at FCDO offices in East Kilbride – they are mentoring several NSO partners, and have worked on a wide range of projects including using satellite data to monitor cattle in South Sudan, and using data from shipping transponders to provide early estimates of economic impact of COVID19 in Africa.

### Challenges

Our resources are only human – we do not have access to finance for hardware, software, surveys etc, and this can often frustrate partners.

This is a fairly new initiative for ONS, and we are still tackling internal challenges including freeing up staff to do this work and building up skills and experiences in applying your skills in a different context. We are progressing in this field, but it can be challenging to get the right people at the right time, especially now that ONS is very busy with the UK's own COVID response.

### Future steps

Our hope is to scale up this work, to increase the number of partnerships and the number and type of global and regional initiatives that ONS is providing technical assistance to. But this is all resource dependent.

### More information

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/whatwedo/programmesandprojects/internationaldevelopmentteam>

<https://vimeo.com/446398330/f9388b4b86>