Theme:

9. Data and Methods

Title: Using DevInfo For Evidence-Based Decision Making on Population-Related Issues

Overview

It is well recognized that policy-makers dealing with population-related issues such as fertility, migration, mortality, ageing and labor markets require relevant, sound and timely data as pre-requisites for evidence-based decision making. This paper discusses how DevInfo is being used to organize, monitor and disseminate human development data on a broad spectrum of population-related indicators, with the objective of contributing standardized statistical data for sound policy and decision making.

DevInfo is a database system which harnesses the power of advanced information technology to compile and disseminate data on human development. In particular, the system has been endorsed by the UN Development Group to assist countries in monitoring achievement of the MDGs. DevInfo provides methods to organize, store and display human development data in a uniform way, in order to facilitate data sharing at the country level across government departments, UN agencies and development partners.

DevInfo has simple and user-friendly features which produce tables, graphs and maps for inclusion in reports, presentations and advocacy materials. The software supports both standard indicators (the MDG indicators) as well as user-defined (country-specific) indicators. DevInfo is compliant with international statistical standards to support open access and widespread data exchange. The software is distributed royalty-free to all Member States for deployment on both desktops and the web. As a result, governments, UN agencies, development partners, NGOs and civil society can all use this common database platform to monitor and evaluate country progress on human development, prepare related reports and presentations, and press for evidence-based decision-making on a range of population-related issues.

DevInfo is being used as an advocacy platform to engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders in policy choices for human development. Member States and UN agencies worldwide are using DevInfo to help support the reform of development planning policies. As of December 2009, over 275 DevInfo adaptations have been launched in more than 130 countries, including 10 European countries and regions. This number continues to grow, as countries launch new adaptations with updated data sets and additional country-specific indicators. These databases are being used to improve the capacity of results-based planning and monitoring of national development priorities by highlighting the importance of tracking data disaggregated by sub-national administrative units and by sex, location, wealth index and other socio-economic dimensions.

Following are three specific examples of how DevInfo database technology is making a difference in evidence-based decision making on population-related issues.

1. MDG Info

MDG Info 2009 is a customized version of DevInfo providing wide access to the official MDG dataset maintained by the UN Statistics Division. It is available on the web at www.devinfo.info/mdginfo2009, allowing stakeholders worldwide to access to key human development data on all UN Member States, including the countries of Europe.

The online database contains country-level data for 56 European Member States and 123 indicators representing various sectors (economy, education, environment, health, information and communication, nutrition and women). The multitude of available indicators facilitates the performance of cross-sectoral analysis, allowing users to identify correlations (or the absence thereof) between two or more indicators. The dataset covers 20 time periods from 1990 to 2009, allowing users to conveniently track trends across a broad spectrum of relevant indicators over a twenty-year period.

2. CME Info (Child Mortality Estimate Info)

In the transition countries of Eastern Europe and the former Commonwealth of Independent States, the infant mortality rate reflects the extent to which children's needs are being met in such fundamental areas as proper nutrition, clean water, adequate sanitation, and the availability of basic preventative health services. In 2004, the Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (IGME), comprised of UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank, and United Nations Population Division, was established to advance the work on monitoring progress made in the reduction of infant and child mortality. The primary objective of the group is to produce and disseminate global, regional and country estimates of levels and trends of mortality in childhood, including age-specific mortality estimates. Another important objective is to enhance the capacity of countries to produce timely and properly assessed estimates of child mortality.

In 2008, IGME launched the first version of the CME Info database, powered by DevInfo database technology, to provide online access to child mortality estimates. This web-based data analysis tool provides methods for uploading data, generating child mortality estimates with thorough background documentation, and visualizing the results. An updated version, CME Info 2.0, was released in 2009 with a brand new user interface, more user-friendly features, and a map option. This latest version can be accessed at www.childmortality.org.

Through a collaborative process of data collection, analysis and review, the IGME creates child mortality estimates based on the latest data, which are then uploaded to a public website. This latest CME Info release allows users to view child mortality estimates by clicking country maps. Users can also easily generate spline estimate graphs, view data series, view estimate uncertainty ranges and compare different estimates. The database allows for different types of users with increasing levels of administrative rights to import/export data series, perform data entry, and create/edit estimates.

3. CensusInfo

CensusInfo, a software package developed to help countries disseminate census data, was officially launched at the 40th session of the UN Statistical Commission in February 2009. Developed by a joint UN programme of the United Nations Statistics Division, UNICEF and UNFPA, CensusInfo is a database system that provides a method to organize, store and display data in a uniform format to facilitate census data sharing at the country level across government departments and UN agencies. Adapted from DevInfo database technology, CensusInfo is an integrated desktop and web-enabled tool containing simple and user-friendly features that can be used to produce tables, graphs and maps for inclusion in reports, presentations and advocacy materials.

CensusInfo provides a module that allows for the customization of the system to country-specific requirements, including the name of the system, images, graphics, logos and color scheme. A second module allows for all language elements of the system to be customized. Most importantly, the content of CensusInfo can be customized to country-specific requirements. Through the CensusInfo Database Administration application, new national, regional and local indicators can be added to the database. The system also supports an unlimited number of levels of geographical coverage, from the global level to national and sub-national levels down to sub-district and village levels. Data can be imported into CensusInfo from spreadsheets in standardized formats and from industry-standard statistics software packages such as CSPro and Redatam. The system allows for the user to generate customized census data reports, as well as to export the data to XLS, HTML, PDF, CSV and XML files.

While CensusInfo is based on the DevInfo platform, specific functionalities have been added to meet census dissemination requirements. These include enhanced performance, template reports for dissemination at any geographical level, and mapping facilities. Although a standard list of indicators will be released with the software, countries will be able to customize the list of statistics/indicators to suit their own national data needs. CensusInfo will contribute to setting universal standards for data storage, access and dissemination of national census data. The long-term vision for CensusInfo is for the system to make a major contribution to strengthening the processes at the country level for the use of census data for monitoring, planning and advocacy.

Conclusion

DevInfo is contributing to the standardization of statistical data that are indispensable for sound policy and decision making related to population and other human development issues within and among countries.