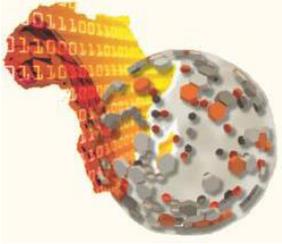


### Open data for accountability and inclusiveness



Every year, on 18 November, African countries celebrate the African Statistics Day (ASD) with the objective of raising public awareness about the importance of statistics in economic and social development. This year's

theme is "Open data for accountability and inclusiveness" and is being covered in the current issue of SM news.

#### What is open data?

Open data refers to data that can be freely used, reused and redistributed by anyone.

The key characteristics that make data open are:

- **Availability and access:** the data should be available to the public either free of charge or at a very low price, and in various formats, including as an Internet download that allows for interoperability and processing, and as a hard copy available in public places such as libraries.
- **Reuse and redistribution:** there should not be restrictions on the use and sharing of the data; the data must be provided under terms that allow their reuse and redistribution, as well as their intermixing with other datasets.
- **Universal participation:** there should be no discrimination against the categories of uses of the data or against certain persons or groups in the use of the data.

#### How can open data improve inclusiveness and accountability?

Open data improve

- **inclusiveness** by giving citizens the information they need to participate in public decision-making. By involving citizens in decision-making, Governments can achieve more efficient and equitable outcomes; and

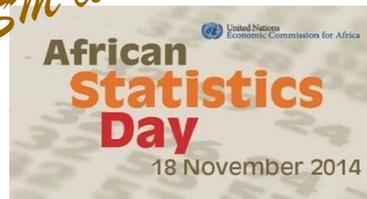
- **accountability** by giving citizens the information they need to review the outcomes of government policies and to evaluate how effectively and efficiently public resources are being used.

#### Benefits of Open Data

The benefits for an NSO like SM are manifold and include:

- **Increasing the use and re-use of data:** Open Data leads to a wider range of users being able to access, use, manipulate and combine NSO data in new and innovative ways. If data are put to only one use, the return to investment in data production relates to one single use. But if the same data are used and re-used several times, this increases the return to investment in data production.
- **Reducing costs of data dissemination:** Open Data allows users to access the information directly. In addition, NSOs are often required to send data to international agencies in specified formats—requirements that are both time-consuming and costly. Making data available as Open Data can reduce both time and costs related to responding for requests for statistics and for international reporting.
- **Raising the profile and influence of the NSO:** Open Data initiatives bring together a wide range of government ministries and agencies to work together. This is a golden opportunity for NSOs to increase their relevance and engagement with the wider work of government.
- **Improving data quality:** Wider and more intense use of data can often help NSOs improve the quality of their data. The more data users there are, the more is the likelihood of identifying inconsistencies, gaps and other quality issues. This will lead to greater feedback which can help NSOs improve their outputs.

*SM celebrates*



### Open data at SM

In line with its mandate to 'collect, compile, analyse and disseminate accurate, relevant, timely and high quality statistics', SM makes official statistics accessible to all users and provides a free service for basic statistical data. The main ones are:

- Free access to official statistics and relevant materials on SM's website: SM releases all its publications on its website free of charge. These can be downloaded in both PDF formats, and in Excel and Word to enable users to easily process the data according to their needs. Further, policies, methodologies, classifications as well as some statistical literacy materials aimed at students are posted on SM's website for consultation by users at no cost.



- Free use of Interactive Statistical Data Portal: This portal provides multiple customized tools to gather, analyse, and export indicators into multiple formats. Through the portal, users can access tables, maps and charts as well as perform analysis on a national and regional level.



- Free access to census and survey documentation through the National Data Archive (NADA) of Mauritius: Through this web-based cataloguing system, researchers can browse, search, compare, and download relevant census and survey information.



### Challenges

As established in legislation, SM has to protect the confidentiality and privacy of its data providers, who may be individuals, households or businesses, and can only release individual statistical records to users 'solely for bona fide research or statistical purposes' after removing all identifying information. The user to whom the data are being granted has to take an oath that he will abide by the provisions of the law and not redistribute the data to another user.

As such this poses a challenge to SM to make microdata 'open'. Open Data best practices require that data producers provide clear terms of use with minimal restrictions on how data can be used.

Another concern relates to the resources and institutional capacity required to implement Open Data which inevitably engages larger user groups, some of which are new and unanticipated.