



# SDG ACCELERATION ROADMAP

UNLEASHING THE POWER OF  
PRIVATE-SECTOR DATA IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

## Mapping Private Sector Contributions to the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development: Insights from the Global South



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## Executive Summary

In 2021, Cepei and LIRNEasia launched the Exploring the private sector's role in the SDG Data Revolution project, supported by the Local Development Research Initiative (LDRI) in Kenya, the Caribbean Open Institute (COI) in Jamaica, and the Centre for Continuing Education (CEE) based in Palestine. With just eight years remaining to achieve the SDGs, the project's purpose is to understand just how far the private sector's data-related contributions to public policy in the Global South extend. Our primary research question is: **what is the private sector doing to make more and better data available to achieve and monitor the SDGs in the Global South?**

To answer this question, over 2022 and 2023, we will be undertaking, publishing, and fostering discussion around research that seeks to capture and examine examples of private sector support to public institutions across Latin America and the Caribbean, The Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia. Our research is taking place in two stages. Firstly, through the structured mapping of public-private data partnerships in the Global South; secondly, through the production of eight in-depth case studies of public-private data partnerships. The insights and trends from these research outputs will inform our engagement and advocacy in sustainable development-focused global fora in 2023 and beyond.

This brief synthesizes and presents the emerging findings and reflections we have identified through an in-depth mapping of private sector support to governments' data collection, interpretation, and user capacity. The underlying data compiled through the mapping exercise will be available online on Cepei's website in August.

Our research has mapped over 400 public-private data partnerships across five regions. Our research has explored partnerships between companies of all sizes and across most of the SDGs, focussing primarily on thematic areas around quality education, gender equality, health, decent work and economic growth, industry and innovation, sustainable cities, climate action, and partnerships for the SDGs.

Through this research, a number of emerging trends have been identified that we believe are a vital contribution to global dialogues centered on the role of the private sector in the SDGs and within the data revolution for the sustainable development community. Our emerging themes include:

## **1. Large companies dominate data actions**

The dominance of large companies –mostly but not exclusively from the Global North– raises valid questions about the competitiveness of smaller, southern-based companies in engaging in public-private partnerships. The gap is concerning for two reasons. Firstly, the ability of smaller local companies to engage in data philanthropy is key to developing sustainable partnerships and models that can thrive and strengthen local data ecosystems. Secondly, it is also important because local firms with local leadership and actors are likely to better understand the context and needs of the public sector in their countries of operation. Moving forward, we will need to investigate further the challenges and obstacles to smaller companies' engagement in data philanthropy and how they can potentially be overcome.

## **2. Incentives for private sector involvement in 'data philanthropy' remain profit-driven**

During the infancy of the data revolution for sustainable development back in 2015, it was envisaged that technologies and innovations would be shared between the public and private sectors for the common good through mechanisms such as the UN Global Compact. While there has certainly been an uptick in establishing public-private data partnerships –as the scale of our research shows– it remains unclear how much of this is being done in “the common good.”

Although this is to be expected to a degree, given the priorities and pressures that private companies face, there are open-ended questions here about the assumptions that underpin the data revolution and the degree to which the data revolution community of practice and governments around the world should expect and rely on the private sector to share data, knowledge, tools, and capacity moving forward. This again is an area that we hope to explore further in our research.

### **3. Partnership facilitators and convenors play an outsized role in successful partnerships**

Partnership convenors such as the UN Global Compact, Trust for the Americas, Pulse Lab Jakarta, and GPSDD, among others, are crucial in facilitating and enabling data philanthropy and public-private data partnerships in the Global South.

This is an important emerging theme as it validates several assumptions. Firstly, it validates that there is an appetite for public-private data partnerships. Secondly, the need can only be met, or can be better met, if specialist convenors intervene to establish the right conditions for the partnership to flourish and help facilitate it. Thirdly, the need for independent convenors to intervene and facilitate partnerships points to the gap between the incentives, language applied, metrics used to measure success, and operational approaches adopted to match public sector needs to private sector data actions. Fourthly, the availability of public and philanthropic funding to finance facilitators and convenors is also a critical need within the data revolution for sustainable development.

Moving forward, this theme will also require further exploration. Particularly, it will be important to establish the degree to which independent facilitators and convenors actually create the conditions and enabling environment needed to establish public-private data partnerships –as opposed to just harnessing existing conditions and enabling environments.

## **4. The language of the SDGs is not universal and remains largely alien in business circles**

A striking feature across most partnerships matched across all regions is the degree to which the language employed by the private sector to describe its data philanthropy differs from that used by the public sector in the context of the SDGs.

This is not just a matter of semantics but an issue that creates obstacles across all stages of a partnership's lifecycle. If the language around how public-interest targets and goals differ between stakeholders from the outset, it is hard to envisage how common agendas are set, common targets and outcomes identified, and how reporting is done. This chasm in terminology is one of the reasons why independent facilitators and convenors play such an important role in public-private data partnerships. Still, it is a theme that deserves highlighting as a standalone issue.

Moving forward, better understanding the differences in terminology and metrics used by public and private entities will be key to assessing how differences might be overcome to better facilitate public-private collaboration in the future.

## **5. Identifying 'results' and measuring success in public-private data partnerships is challenging**

As it stands, there is very often a cliff edge in the availability of information and data about specific public-private data partnerships following their initial announcement. This is a significant barrier to the ability of the public to see and assess the degree to which initiatives have been successful or not in their objectives.

It also points to a broader gap within the data revolution community –a lack of standardized monitoring tools that could help companies and countries document and measure the results their public-private data partnerships produce. Exploring the need, feasibility, and value of such metrics is another area we wish to explore further in our future research.

We plan to undertake eight case studies to further explore these themes over the remainder of 2022 and through 2023. These case studies will showcase examples of successful public-private partnerships and document how companies' data actions have helped public institutions in the Global South respond to major public policy challenges such as climate change, the promotion of gender equality, increased innovation, and employment opportunities, and digital literacy among others. They will examine the factors that have made the partnerships successful while also exploring challenges overcome along the way and lessons that can be learned and replicated elsewhere.

In 2023, the case studies will be showcased through multi-stakeholder events at global fora, including but not limited to the UN's annual High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and General Assembly, to demonstrate the value of public-private partnerships that center on the exchange of data know-how. These events will also offer both parties in each case study, public and private, an opportunity to showcase their work on the global stage and to influence the direction of future public-private partnerships that center on data actions.



## 1. Establishing a baseline of private sector data contributions to the SDGs in the Global South

### 1.1. Background and purpose of this brief

There is a significant shift taking place within the world of business. In recent years, environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) has risen in prominence among an increasingly socially and environmentally conscious consumer base. ESG investing has attracted substantial interest, with reporting on environmental and sometimes social metrics becoming a must-do in many companies' annual reporting and shareholder meetings. Viewed from a public policy perspective, the turn towards more socially and environmentally conscious capitalism creates opportunities for alignment between business and government; for instance, between ESG metrics and political targets such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that centre on people, planet, and prosperity as the three pillars of sustainable development.

One area of alignment is in the field of data and digital transformation. Whether framed as ESG, the SDGs, or corporate social responsibility (CSR), companies worldwide are providing support to public sector institutions in ways that help improve their capacity for evidence-based decision-making. Activities, or 'data actions,' range from the transfer of actionable data to the public sector directly to providing tools or services that help improve the public sector's ability to capture and utilize insights from data repositories.

Examples of public-private data interactions abound. For instance, business-generated call detail records (CDRs) in Sri Lanka and Colombia have been used to predict population-level socioeconomic characteristics and displacement after natural disasters. In Africa and India, social media data have been used to map the population and provide alternative data to predict credit scores to expand financial inclusion.

Within this context, in 2021, Cepei and LIRNEasia launched the Exploring the private sector's role in the SDG Data Revolution project, with support from Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). With just eight years remaining to achieve the SDGs, the project's purpose is to understand just how far the private sector's data-related contributions to public policy in the Global South extend. Our primary research question is: **What is the private sector doing to make more and better data available to achieve and monitor the SDGs in the Global South?**

To this end, over 2022 and 2023, we will be undertaking, publishing, and fostering discussion around research that seeks to capture and examine examples of private sector support to public institutions across Latin America and the Caribbean, The Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia. Our research is taking place in two stages. Firstly, through the structured mapping of public-private data partnerships in the Global South; secondly, through the production of eight in-depth case studies of public-private data partnerships. The insights and trends gleaned from these research outputs will inform our engagement and advocacy in sustainable development-focused global fora in 2023 and beyond.

This brief synthesizes and presents the emerging findings and reflections that we have identified about our research question above. These findings are based on an extensive structured mapping exercise undertaken between March – June 2022 by our research consortium across the Global South. The dataset used to glean these findings will be available online in August at the [Cepei website](#). In addition to laying out the insights gleaned from our mapping activities, this brief also establishes the emerging themes that have become visible through our mapping activities and helps to establish a baseline of assumptions for the remainder of this project.

## 1.2. Research partners

The project involves a consortium of five partners, led by Cepei and LIRNEasia.

- **Cepei:** A Colombia-based think tank. For 20 years, Cepei has advanced multi-stakeholder dialogue, generated evidence for decision-making, and expanded the production and use of qualified open data across sectors and regions with partners like multilateral organizations, the private sector, academia, government, and civil society. More information about Cepei can be found here: [www.cepei.org](http://www.cepei.org)
- **LIRNEasia:** A pro-poor, pro-market think tank working on digital policy issues in the Asia Pacific. LIRNEasia has extensive experience in digital access, ethical use of data, AI and algorithms, and policy. LIRNEasia conducts research, disseminates research to policymakers, and provides capacity building for policymakers. More information about LIRNEasia can be found here: [www.lirneasia.net](http://www.lirneasia.net).
- **Research partners:** The Caribbean Open Institute<sup>1</sup> (COI) at the Mona School of Business & Management at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica; the Local Development Research Institute<sup>2</sup> (LDRI) in Kenya; and the Center for Continuing Education<sup>3</sup> (CCE) at Birzeit University in Palestine.

## 1.3. Research methodology

Undertaking a structured mapping exercise such as this requires balancing regional differences and unique researcher expertise with sufficient standardization to ensure the data collected are comparable between regions.

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1. Caribbean Open Institute. 2022. Homepage. Online at: [www.caribbeanopeninstitute.org](http://www.caribbeanopeninstitute.org), accessed 11 July 2022.
  2. Local Development Research Institute. 2022. Homepage. Online at: [www.developlocal.org](http://www.developlocal.org), accessed 11 July 2022.
  3. Centre for Continuing Education. 2022. Homepage. Online at: [www.birzeit.edu/en/community-affairs/institutes-centers/center-continuing-education](http://www.birzeit.edu/en/community-affairs/institutes-centers/center-continuing-education), accessed 11 July 2022.

Our objective in undertaking this research was to map the types of actions, scale, and geographic and thematic spread of private sector data contributions in the Global South.

In adopting this approach, we hoped to establish a baseline of evidence that gets us closer to answering our primary research question set out above: **What is the private sector doing to make more and better data available to achieve and monitor the SDGs in the Global South?**

To achieve these objectives while balancing regional uniqueness with the need for internationally comparable data, we adopted the following methodological parameters:

### **1. We focused our mapping efforts on a subset of SDGs, including:**

1. (4) Quality Education;
2. (5) Gender Equality;
3. (3) Good Health and Wellbeing;
4. (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth;
5. (9) Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure;
6. (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities;
7. (13) Climate Action; and
8. (17) Partnerships for the Goals.

This helped to focus our resources and time on areas we deemed most urgent and universally comparable.

**2. Key-term definitions were standardized across research hubs to the extent possible. For instance, the term 'data action' was broadly limited to include, with some exceptions where they were justifiable:**

1. Capacity building;
2. Skill sharing;
3. Data collection;
4. Data analysis;
5. Data sharing;
6. Data visualization;
7. Data governance;
8. Data reporting; and
9. Funding.

Additionally, for analysis within this brief, we have adopted the term “data philanthropy,” first coined by UN Global Pulse. UN Global Pulse uses the term to describe collaborations and partnerships between public and private entities which share data for public benefit. Our use of the word is slightly broader in that it includes data actions beyond just ‘data sharing.’ Our use of the term throughout the remainder of this brief is based on its simplicity and effectiveness in capturing the ethos of public-private data partnerships. It does not reflect any association between this project and UN Global Pulse or other discussions about data philanthropy more broadly.

**3. All research hubs captured data on the same set of 'core' elements while often capturing insights on additional elements relevant to their research. This enabled us to develop a set of comparable metrics across regions. Our core elements include data on:**

1. The regional hub collecting and inputting data;
2. The region in which the data action(s) took place;

3. The country/ies in which the data action(s) took place;
4. The name of the business/es involved;
5. The size of the business/es involved;
6. The years of operation (of the data action/project);
7. The name of the initiative/project;
8. The type of initiative (public-private partnership, network, etc.);
9. Links to specific SDGs;
10. The primary and secondary types of data action (data sharing, data reporting, etc.);
11. The government partners involved in the project; and
12. The source URL for the project.

#### **4. All research hubs approached the identification of data actions using the same or very similar approaches:**

As a first step, all researchers started by reviewing the information available from UN websites (including reports, the SDG compact website, Member State Voluntary National Reports (VNRs), annexes, etc, and government websites. This initial step ensured consistency and a degree of direct comparability of data across the regions. Moreover, all regional hubs sought to capture data on at least 60% of countries in their region.

As a second step, researchers used their regional knowledge by following leads they are familiar with and incorporating an element of random sampling through keyword searches, scanning company reports, and similar actions. This second step ensured flexibility and adaptability across the regions, harnessing research hubs' regional and local knowledge.

As a result of these methodological considerations, the data published in the next section of this brief are generally comparable across regions, subject to the above limitations. While our dataset does contain some gaps and unknowns, which reflect a lack of freely available and easily accessible information online, these have been minimized to the extent possible.



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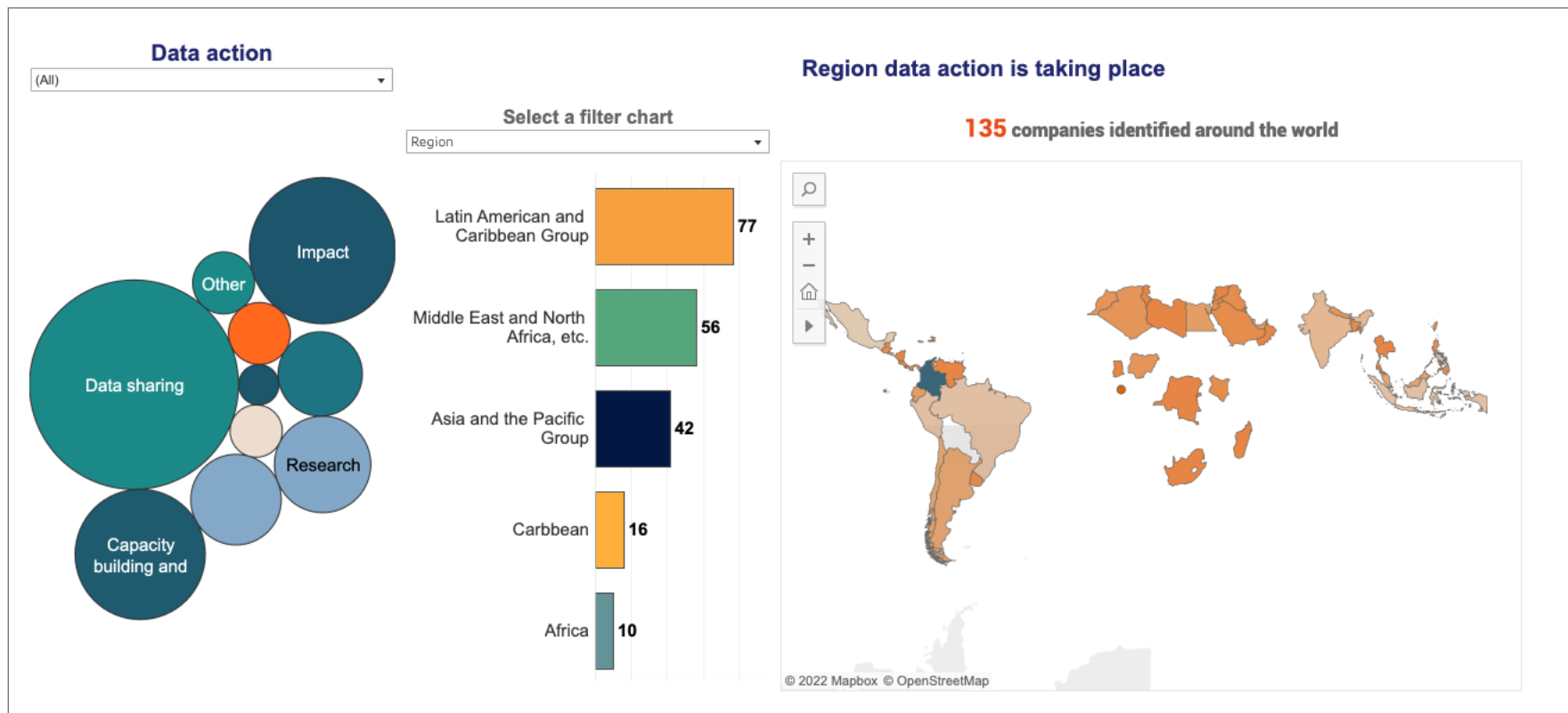
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# 2.

## Initial findings and reflections

This section outlines the initial findings of our mapping exercise and our researchers' reflections on their work. Overall, our collective findings and reflections can be categorized into four areas: The incentives for data philanthropy; factors that enable successful partnerships; challenges and limitations; and cross-cutting gender issues. All our findings are based on examples mapped in the underlying dataset, and reflections come from the researchers directly.

## 2.1. Our findings in numbers





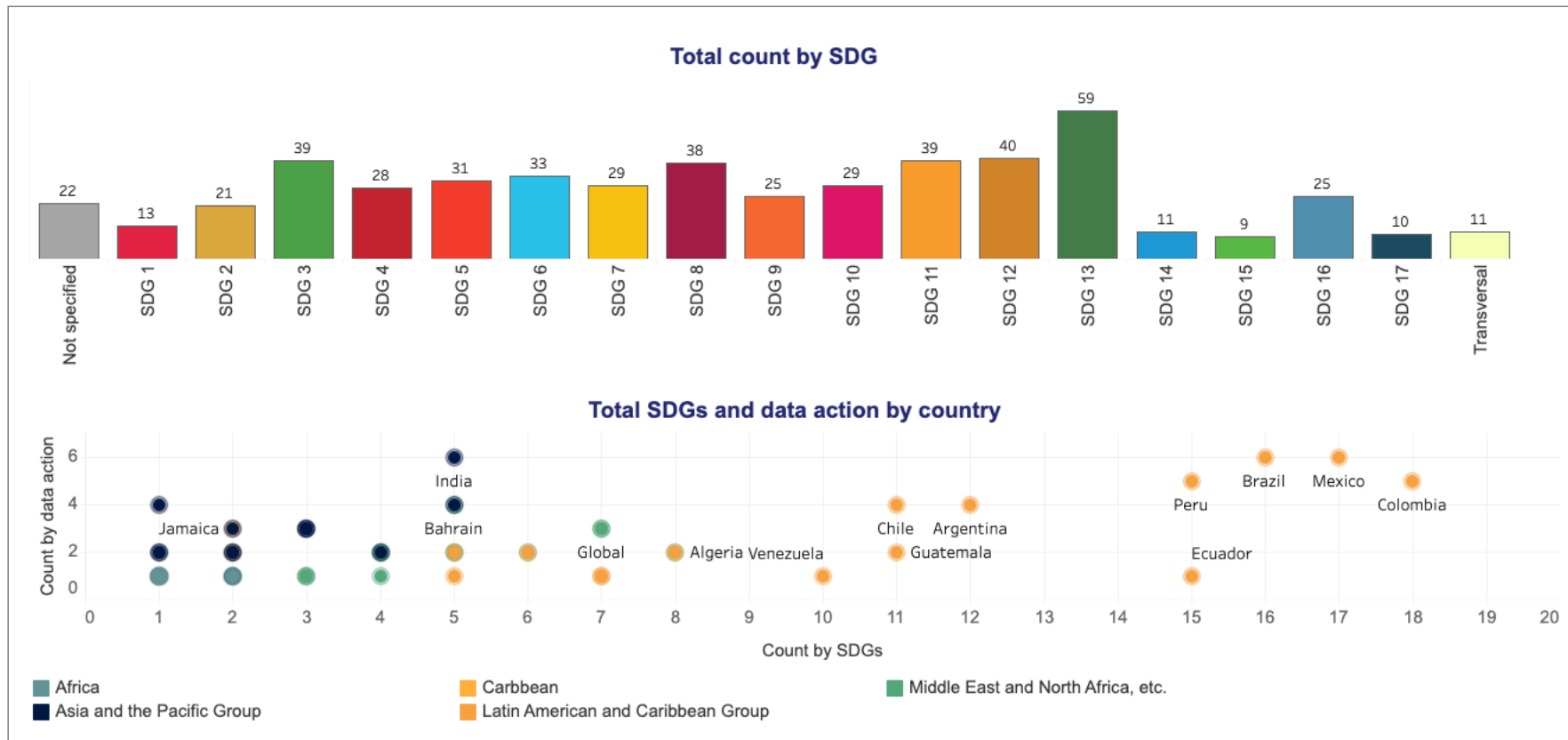


Figure: The geographical spread of our mapping exercise

## 2.2. Incentives for private sector engagement in data philanthropy

Our mapping exercise indicated that incentives for data philanthropy are similar across the Global South. Two major threads for private sector engagement emerged from the mapping exercise.

Firstly, **our research indicates that many companies engaged in data philanthropy still require external incentives.** As researcher Maurice McNaughton from COI reflected:

“Many of the more prominent initiatives mapped originated externally through the impetus of multilateral funding, with local private companies participating primarily as local partner recipients of support rather than proactive drivers of partnerships.”

Researcher Muchiri Nyaggah reinforced this view from LDRI in Kenya, reflecting that “companies in Africa seem to be sharing data in efforts to access grant financing for broader projects, or as part of financing requirements of broader projects.”

Secondly, it was noted by several researchers that **a further incentive for companies to engage in data philanthropy in emerging markets appeared to be to promote their proprietary services and intellectual property.**

These findings and reflections on incentives offer insights into the structural realities and constraints of the data revolution for sustainable development. They point to the reality that for many private sector actors, engagement with public authorities in emerging markets is still driven by: a) a desire to capture a market share for their products and services in those countries; b) an aversion to the risks of engaging in emerging markets without the security and certainty of external financing and support; or, c) a preference to invest their resources and brand in an already established, structured initiative that is facilitated by an external, reputable convener that provides them with a ready-made business case including specific goals, objectives, and timelines that reduce risks.

From the perspective of the data revolution community, these insights raise important questions about the enabling economic, political, and regulatory environment that is necessary to reduce companies' perceived levels of risk to a point at which they would be prepared to initiate public interest data partnerships, alongside their core investments and business operations in the Global South.

## 2.3. Factors that enable successful partnerships

Researchers across all regions identified three common factors that enable successful public-private data partnerships.

Firstly, engaged convenors and partnership brokers are key enablers within the data revolution ecosystem. Researchers Gayashi Jayasinghe and Ruwanka De Silva from LIRNEasia noted that:

"Partnership convenors play an important role in catalyzing data philanthropy – whether they are multilateral or bilateral development organizations or non-profit organizations. Convening entities help to initiate projects, supply technical support, develop common agendas for public and private stakeholders, and enable private sector involvement in public initiatives. From a company's perspective, the role of convenors who help to facilitate and structure initiatives provides them with a business case for engaging in data philanthropy by establishing specific goals, objectives, and timelines and reducing risks. From public bodies' perspective, the involvement of third-party convenors helps by providing the capacity and technical know-how needed to foster public-private partnerships, while also exposing public sector employees to new approaches to partnership and thus bolstering knowledge."

### Pulse Lab Jakarta: Facilitating data philanthropy in Southeast Asia

In Indonesia, Pulse Lab Jakarta operates as a convenor and facilitator of data philanthropy. One successful example of an initiative brokered by the Lab is Haze Grazer.

Haze Gazer is a crisis analysis and visualization tool that provides real-time information on fire and haze hotspots in Indonesia. The platform aims to provide insights on the location and strength of fire and haze hotspots as well as on the response strategies of affected populations. It uses advanced data analytics and data science to mine open data, such as fire hotspot information from satellites (Global Forest Watch), as well as social signals in the form of text (Twitter and LAPOR!), image (Instagram), and video (YouTube). (Industry/sector - Social Networking).

(Source: [www.unglobalpulse.org/2016/03/haze-gazer-a-crisis-analysis-tool/](http://www.unglobalpulse.org/2016/03/haze-gazer-a-crisis-analysis-tool/))

The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data<sup>4</sup> (GPSDD) is a notable example of a successful convening entity in Africa and Latin America. In the Caribbean, the Trust for the Americas<sup>5</sup> also significantly facilitates public-private data partnerships. As Maurice McNaughton at COI reflected:

"The most significant initiatives are mobilized through partnerships, typically involving multilateral agencies or international development partners in collaboration with the local private sector and public sector actors."

4. Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data. 2022. Homepage. Online at: [www.data4sdgs.org](http://www.data4sdgs.org), accessed 11 July 2022.

5. The Trust for the Americas. 2022. Homepage. Online at: [www.trustfortheamericas.org/our-presence](http://www.trustfortheamericas.org/our-presence), accessed 11 July 2022.

### **Democratizing Innovation in the Americas (DIA) - Unleashing the Potential of Jamaican Youth through Empowerment & Training (JET)**

DIA is a regional initiative facilitated by the Trust for the Americas and including private sector partners such as Microsoft and Citi among others. It was launched to foster innovation and empower new generations through access to technology training, specialized curricula, collaboration spaces, mentorship, and financial resources for social and economic ventures. Since 2016, DIA has impacted over 6,484 young people and representatives from diverse sectors of society. Over 1,126 participants have developed innovation projects, of which 142 have received seed funding.

DIA is the most significant example of an initiative that is mobilized through partnerships in the Caribbean region, involving international development partners, global firms, and a consortium of local private sector actors. Moreover it explicitly targets SDGs: 1, 4, 5, 8, 10 and 17.

(Source: [www.thetrustfortheamericas.org/programs/dia/unleashing-potential-jamaican-youth-through-empowerment-training-jet](http://www.thetrustfortheamericas.org/programs/dia/unleashing-potential-jamaican-youth-through-empowerment-training-jet))

Secondly, **coalitions within the sphere of data philanthropy often rally around specific 'pain points' or common challenges.** Several regions identified COVID-19 as a whole-of-society challenge that created a clear need and opportunity for closer data partnerships. The degree to which those partnerships materialized significantly varied across and within regions. In some regions, the pandemic exposed the weaknesses of public sector data systems. As researcher Abed Khooli from CCE at Birzeit University in Palestine reflected:

“COVID-19 exposed the lack of resilience, the need for rapid digital transformation, and the urgent need for better data to monitor and measure public policy targets, including the SDGs that exist in many Arab states.”

Overall, identifying common acute challenges that create pain points affecting both public and private sectors –whether COVID-19, climate change, price inflation, etc.– often played a significant role in driving data philanthropy.

Thirdly, the final common factor that emerged from our research is that **technology companies with a global reach are more likely to engage in data philanthropy**. This is perhaps an unsurprising reflection but an important one. Researchers from LIRNEasia reflected that around two-thirds of the data actions they mapped in their region involved large regional and global companies and that most of those companies were telecommunications and ICT providers.

It was noted by Muchiri Nyaggah at LDRI in Kenya that large multinationals such as Uber, Google, and IBM, among others, were less likely than other companies to rely on partnership facilitators. This is likely due to the global reach and resources that they have at their disposal. Importantly for our research agenda, Abed Khooli from CCE noted that while “multi-country presence is mostly limited to Global North companies, the extent to which national governments benefit from such actions in the MENA region remains unclear.”

## 2.4. Challenges and limitations

A common limitation identified across all regions' mapping efforts related to how the private sector documents its support to initiatives designed to tackle issues they deem to be of public importance –for instance, companies' contributions to reducing carbon emissions– versus support that can be classed as data philanthropy. As Hernán Muñoz, a researcher for Cepei in Colombia reflected:

“In the extractives and mining sectors in Latin America, while there is an established focus on reporting and disseminating data and information on extractive companies' efforts to reduce their environmental impact, this published information is not accompanied by the underlying datasets. This limits the ability of public institutions such as national statistical agencies (NSOs) to incorporate the data into its own modeling and statistical production.”

A further observation across all regions is that “there is little evidence that data actions are being implemented or used at any significant scale, let alone that the impact of any such actions is being tracked.” (Abed Khooli, CCE). This observation raises the issue of public sector institutions’ role in providing supporting frameworks and ‘translating’ private sector contributions into public policy language. This remains a serious gap. It also feeds a further limitation: The duplication of efforts and lack of coordination over how private sector data philanthropy is delivered and used by public sector institutions.

Linked to this reflection, our mapping exercise has shown that there is often a sudden cliff edge in the availability of information and data about specific public-private data partnerships following their initial announcement. Regular updates on progress, developments, and impact are severely lacking, making measuring success and impact all but impossible in many instances.

Tied to section 2.3. above on factors that enable successful partnerships is the challenge that many countries lack the legal and regulatory environments that are needed to establish national data ecosystems in which the risks to the private sector are sufficiently mitigated. As noted in section 2.3. the enabling environment is often ‘set’ by third-party convenors and facilitators. It was noted by researchers in MENA that even in cases where states own firms outright or hold large stakes in them, there remain missed opportunities to leverage the data generated from such state-owned firms for broader public policy objectives, including those tied to the SDGs.

## 2.5. Gender considerations in data philanthropy

The most important observation regarding gender in data philanthropy is the extent to which it is absent. The overwhelming majority of data actions mapped did not mention gender issues or disaggregate data by gender where appropriate. Researcher Abed Khooli at CCE summarises the situation well in his reflection that:

“Apart from a limited number of indicators, and regardless of private sector participation or lack thereof, available SDG data in the MENA region is not disaggregated across gender or other demographic

dimensions. This is a global issue<sup>6</sup> but is more pronounced in the Global South and MENA. For example, no MENA countries are members of the Inclusive Data Charter<sup>7</sup>, and the region has improved by only three points in the SDG Gender Index since 2015<sup>8</sup>. There is also a considerable gender gap in mobile ownership and usage<sup>9</sup>, leading to limitations on the use of big data derived from mobile phones, given the bias against female users. SDG 5 on gender equality remains the region's major challenge.<sup>10</sup>

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6. Data2X. 2022. Transforming the Data Landscape: Solutions to Close Gender Data Gaps. Online at: [www.data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Solutions-to-Close-Gender-Data-Gaps-FINAL.pdf](http://www.data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Solutions-to-Close-Gender-Data-Gaps-FINAL.pdf), [www.opendatawatch.com/publications/gender-data-gaps-a-comparison-of-three-regions/](http://www.opendatawatch.com/publications/gender-data-gaps-a-comparison-of-three-regions/), accessed 11 July 2022.

7. GPSDD. 2022. Inclusive Data Charter. Online at: [www.data4sdgs.org/inclusivedatacharter](http://www.data4sdgs.org/inclusivedatacharter), accessed 11 July 2022.

8. Equal Measures 2030. 2022. 2022 SDG Gender Index: The Middle East and North Africa. Online at: [www.equalmeasures2030.org/2022-sdg-gender-index/regions-2/the-middle-east-and-north-africa/](http://www.equalmeasures2030.org/2022-sdg-gender-index/regions-2/the-middle-east-and-north-africa/), accessed 11 July 2022.

9. GSMA. 2022. The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022. Online at: [www.gsma.com/r/gender-gap/](http://www.gsma.com/r/gender-gap/), accessed 11 July 2022.

10. UNSDSN. 2022. 2022 Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboard Report. Online at: [www.arabsdgindex.com/static/downloads/files/MBRSG-UNSDSN-AGDA\\_2022\\_SDG\\_Index\\_and\\_Dashboard\\_En\\_w.pdf](http://www.arabsdgindex.com/static/downloads/files/MBRSG-UNSDSN-AGDA_2022_SDG_Index_and_Dashboard_En_w.pdf), accessed 11 July 2022.





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# 3

## Emerging themes

Our research findings and reflections point toward five emerging themes that help to establish a baseline of assumptions and analysis as we strive to answer our core research question: What is the private sector doing to make more and better data available to achieve and monitor the SDGs in the Global South?

### 3.1. Large companies dominate data actions

The first emerging theme is that large companies, mostly but not exclusively from the north, dominate data actions in the Global South. This is perhaps unsurprising given that larger companies will have a longer operational reach, deeper pockets, and an interest in accessing emerging markets. However, it raises several important questions as we progress with our research.

In the first instance, there is a question about the degree to which large companies' data philanthropy and support in the Global South translate into a sustained improvement in local public sector capacities, knowledge, and data use. As documented in the previous section, there are signs that this is not yet happening. Moving forward, we need to understand better why by exploring the structural barriers in the enabling environment, misalignment of incentives, and other obstacles to the greater transference of knowledge.

Moreover, the dominance of large companies raises issues around the competitiveness of smaller, southern-based companies to engage in similar actions. This gap is concerning for two reasons. Firstly, the ability of smaller local companies to engage in data philanthropy is key to developing sustainable partnerships and models that can thrive and strengthen local data ecosystems. Secondly, it is also important because local firms with local leadership and actors are likely to be better placed to understand the context and needs of the public sector in their countries of operation. Here again, we need to unpack further what the challenges and obstacles to smaller companies' engagement in data philanthropy are and how they can potentially be overcome.

### 3.2. Incentives for private sector involvement in 'data philanthropy' remain profit-driven

The second theme that emerges from our mapping exercise is that the incentives for the private sector's involvement in data philanthropy remain largely profit-driven rather than public-interest driven. During the infancy of the data revolution for sustainable development back in 2015, it was envisaged that technologies

and innovations would be shared between the public and private sectors for the common good<sup>11</sup> through mechanisms such as the UN Global Compact.<sup>12</sup> While there has certainly been an uptick in establishing public-private data partnerships –as the scale of our research shows– it remains unclear how much of this is being done in ‘the common good.’

As noted in the previous section of this brief, much private sector engagement in public-private partnerships remains largely driven by self-interest. Although this is to be expected to a degree, given the priorities and pressures that private companies face, there are open-ended questions here about the assumptions that underpin the data revolution and the degree to which the data revolution community of practice and governments around the world should expect and rely on the private sector to share data, knowledge, tools, and capacity moving forward. This again is an area that we hope to explore further in our research.

### **3.3. Partnership facilitators and convenors play an outsized role in successful partnerships**

Partnership convenors such as the UN Global Compact, Trust for the Americas, Pulse Lab Jakarta, and GPSDD, among others, are playing a crucial role in facilitating and enabling data philanthropy and public-private data partnerships in the Global South.

This is an important emerging theme as it validates several assumptions. Firstly, it validates that there is an appetite for public-private data partnerships. Secondly, the need can only be met, or can be better met, if specialist convenors intervene to establish the right conditions for the partnership to flourish and help facilitate it. Thirdly, the need for independent convenors to intervene and facilitate partnerships points to the gap that remains between

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11. UN. 2014. *A World That Counts*. Online at: [www.undatarevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/A-World-That-Counts.pdf](http://www.undatarevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/A-World-That-Counts.pdf), accessed 11 July 2022.

12. UN Global Compact. 2022. *Homepage*. Online at: [www.unglobalcompact.org](http://www.unglobalcompact.org), 11 July 2022.

the incentives, language applied, metrics used to measure success, and operational approaches adopted to match public sector needs to private sector data actions. Fourthly, the availability of public and philanthropic funding to finance facilitators and convenors is also a key need within the data revolution for sustainable development.

Moving forward, this theme will also require further exploration. Particularly, it will be important to establish the degree to which independent facilitators and convenors actually create the conditions and enabling environment needed to establish public-private data partnerships –as opposed to just harnessing existing conditions and enabling environments.

### **3.4. The language of the SDGs is not universal and remains largely alien in business circles**

A striking feature across most partnerships matched across all regions is the degree to which the language employed by the private sector to describe its data philanthropy differs from that used by the public sector in the context of the SDGs.

This is not just a matter of semantics but an issue that creates obstacles across all stages of a partnership's lifecycle. If the language around how public-interest targets and goals differ between stakeholders from the outset, it is hard to envisage how common agendas are set, common targets and outcomes identified, and how reporting is done. This chasm in terminology is one of the reasons why independent facilitators and convenors play such an important role in public-private data partnerships. Still, it is a theme that also deserves highlighting as a standalone issue.

Moving forward, better understanding the differences in terminology and metrics used by public and private entities will be key to assessing how differences might be overcome to better facilitate public-private collaboration in the future.

### **3.5. Identifying 'results' and measuring success in public-private data partnerships is challenging**

Finally, linked to the above two themes is the challenge of identifying results and measuring success in public-private data partnerships. As reflected upon in the previous section, as it stands, there is very often a cliff edge in the availability of information and data about specific public-private data partnerships following their initial announcement. This is a significant barrier to the ability of the public to see and assess the degree to which initiatives have been successful or not in their objectives.

It also points to a broader gap within the data revolution community –a lack of standardized monitoring tools that could help companies and countries document and measure the results their public-private data partnerships produce. Exploring the need, feasibility, and value of such metrics is another area we wish to explore further in our future research.

## 4. Next steps

### 4.1. Testing our assumptions: Prompting a global discussion on data philanthropy

This brief and the dataset that underpins its findings and reflections are the first outputs of this research project. Moving forward, we want to test the assumptions identified within the above section, namely:

- We need to understand better whether large companies' data philanthropy in the Global South translates into a sustained improvement in local public sector capacities, knowledge, and data use. We hope to do this by exploring the structural barriers in the enabling environment, misalignment of incentives, and other obstacles to the greater transference of knowledge.
- Linked to the above, we also need to unpack further the challenges and obstacles to smaller companies' engagement in data philanthropy at the national level and how they can potentially be overcome.
- Moreover, given the current dearth of private sector entities engaging in data philanthropy in the true sense of the word –i.e., for the public good– there are open-ended questions about the assumptions that currently underpin the data revolution. This is especially true regarding the degree to which the data revolution community of practice and governments worldwide should expect, and rely on, the private sector to share data, knowledge, tools, and capacity moving forward.
- Additionally, in light of the outsized role independent facilitators and convenors of public-private data partnerships currently play in the

ecosystem, moving forward, it will be important to establish the degree to which independent facilitators and convenors create the conditions and enabling environment needed to establish public-private data partnerships –as opposed to harnessing existing conditions and enabling environments.

- It will also be important to understand better the differences in terminology and metrics used by public and private entities so that we may then assess how differences might be overcome in ways that can facilitate more direct public-private collaboration in the future.
- Finally, the lack of standardized monitoring tools that could help companies and countries to document and measure the results that their public-private data partnerships produce is a serious gap in the current data revolution for sustainable development. Exploring the need, feasibility, and value of such metrics is another area we wish to explore further in our future research.

As we proceed with this research agenda, we also want to engage in conversations with the data revolution community and explore what our current findings and emerging themes mean for the stakeholders involved in these partnerships and projects.

## 4.2. Taking a closer look: What makes data philanthropy successful in the Global South?

To address the above issues, as an immediate next step, we plan to undertake eight case studies through the rest of 2022. These case studies will showcase examples of successful public-private partnerships and document how companies' data actions have helped public institutions in the Global

South respond to major public policy challenges such as climate change, the promotion of gender equality, increased innovation, and employment opportunities, and digital literacy among others. They will examine the factors that have made the partnerships successful while also exploring challenges overcome along the way and lessons that can be learned and replicated elsewhere.

In 2023, the case studies will be showcased through multi-stakeholder events at global fora, including but not limited to the UN's annual High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and General Assembly, to demonstrate the value of public-private partnerships that center on the exchange of data know-how. These events will also offer both parties in each case study, public and private, an opportunity to showcase their work on the global stage and to influence the direction of future public-private partnerships that center on data actions.

Ultimately, we hope that as we enter 2023, we will be able to positively contribute actionable recommendations and suggestions to strengthen public-private data partnerships within the data revolution for sustainable development.



## Annex A: The Research Team

### CEPEI

#### **Philipp Schönrock (Director - Cepei)**

Philipp has more than twenty years of experience in strategic international cooperation to optimize governance, finance, and data for sustainable development. He was the co-chair of Beyond 2015 and serves as a board member of Together 2030 and Core Women and the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century. He is also a member of the Technical Advisory Group of the Global Partnership on Sustainable Development Data, the Programme Committee of the UN World Data Forum, and the SDSN Thematic Research Network on Data and Statistics (SDSN TReNDS).

#### **Hernán Muñoz (Senior Data Policy Advisor)**

Hernán is a researcher and professor specializing in strategic planning and statistical capacity building and good practices. During his tenure as the National Director of Planning, Institutional and International Relations of the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INDEC) of Argentina from 2015 to 2019, he was a member of the UN High-Level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He also co-chaired the Program Committee of the first World Data Forum and was a Friend of the Chair Group on the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics of the United Nations Statistical Commission.

#### **Jaime Gallego (Junior Data Researcher)**

Jaime is currently engaged in Cepei's Data Lab, working to improve the data and evidence-base for decision-making with a focus on Latin America and the Caribbean. He manages institutional partnerships with key technology providers working on sustainable development data challenges, including Microsoft and Tableau. Over the last five years, he has designed data schemes for projects with major global partners like IDRC, The UN Executive Office, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Tableau Foundation, and National Statistical Offices in the region.

### **Luisa Córdoba (Strategic Partnerships Advisor)**

Luisa works on strengthening partnerships across sectors—international cooperation, private sector, and nonprofit— to serve communities in low- and middle-income countries. She designs and implements full-cycle grant management and resource development programs for implementing organizations

## **LIRNEasia**

### **Helani Galpaya (CEO - LIRNEasia)**

Helani serves on the Board of Editors of the Information Technology and International Development (ITID) journal, is on the Board of Directors of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD), a member of the Working Group on Innovation and Commercialization of the Global Partnership on AI (GPAI), and an advisor for the Data for Development Network. She was a member of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) of the UN Internet Governance Forum, the Advisory Board of the Harnessing and Sharing Economy for Local Development initiative of the Centre for Implementation of Public Policies promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC), Argentina and an Advisor to the UN Broadband Commission's Working Group on Bridging the Gender Divide.

### **Isuru Samaratunga (Research Manager)**

Isuru is currently engaged in ICT-related qualitative research projects in Asia and the Pacific. Some of the major qualitative research projects he has led have been for global funders such as ESCAP, GSMA, Ford Foundation, IDRC, USAID, Asia Foundation, UNFPA and UN-Habitat. The projects include landscape study and assessment of ICT capacity building needs, developing Mobile solutions for persons with disabilities, online privacy and security of marginalized communities, countering misinformation using AI, empowerment through online platforms, developing communication strategies for family planning programs and social impact assessments of development projects

### **Gayashi Jayasinghe (Senior Researcher)**

Gayashi is currently engaged in research on persons with disabilities and assistive technologies. She is also working on public utilities policy and regulation in Sri Lanka to develop a policy framework for the water services sector of the

country. Additionally, she is engaged in researching information disorder in APAC. Gayashi has experience in qualitative research methods including conducting key informant interviews and incorporating human centered design methodologies to enhance analysis.

### **Ruwanka De Silva (Junior Researcher)**

Ruwanka is currently working as a Junior Researcher, working on gaining experience with both qualitative and quantitative research methods. She holds a BSc in Economics and Management from the University of London and is presently working on completing CIMA Management Level.

### **Sukitha Bandaranayake (Junior Researcher)**

Sukitha graduated in June 2021 with a BA (Honours with distinction) in political science from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver Canada, where he was an Editor and then Senior Editor for the UBC Journal of Political Studies. While an undergraduate, he was a research assistant at LIRNEasia (2018) and the Lakshaman Kadirgamar Institute for Strategic Studies (2019). Prior to LIRNEasia, he worked as a Research Executive at a market research firm.

## **CCE**

### **Abed Khooli**

Abed is a physicist by education and an ICT specialist by practice. He is currently working in the data for development field (infrastructure, policies and regulations, ethics, digital transformation, research and development). Over the past few years, he worked with the Palestinian national committee for open government data to draft the national open data policy and set up the open data platform (opendata.ps). Recently, he led the MENA research for the Global Data Barometer (released in May, 2022). He also conducted a research study on mapping the data economy in the MENA region covering the ecosystem and stakeholders in 12 countries and was the lead researcher in the data for development multi-partner project funded by IDRC through Birzeit University's Center for Continuing Education. Abed was also a researcher and country reviewer for the Open Data Barometer – 2016 edition. Data journalism and data science are part of Abed's current interests and he participated in local capacity building programs and contributed to the body of knowledge as a community

participant, especially in Arabic language modeling (NLP), data visualization and data mapping. He is an active policy and education reforms advocate and ICT community member. During the private sector data actions mapping, Abed was assisted by Alaa Abu Ghoush, Qusai Suwan, Hashem Elasaad, Hatem Ben Yacoub and Fatma Mosaad.

## **LDRI**

### **Muchiri Nyaggah (Executive Director - LDRI)**

Muchiri has more than 20 years of experience working on software development and technology innovation for those living on irregular income in Africa, online strategy for African organizations, and public policy implementation for development data. His background in innovation consulting has allowed him to bring to our project the same multi-disciplinary approach LDRI does to support African governments in the implementation of programs to achieve the Malabo commitments. His experiences include: leading the inaugural cohort of the Code4Kenya Fellowship in 2012; serving as deputy director at the Open Institute Trust based in Nairobi, Kenya; acting as co-founder and executive director of the Local Development Research Institute (LDRI) in Nairobi; leading the LDRI in co-convening — together with the Government of Kenya and the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research — the first national Forum on Harnessing the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, which resulted in the launch of the National Partnership on Sustainable Development Data. Muchiri has a diploma in computer studies and is an expert in user-centered design, workshop facilitation, and open data strategy. He speaks English, Swahili and Kikuyu.

## **COI**

### **Maurice McNaughton (Principal Director - COI)**

Maurice has a track record of academic applied research and has managed a significant portfolio of research grant funding and external partnerships (multilateral, public and private sector) over the past 10 years. He is currently Director of the Centre for IT-enabled Innovation at the Mona School of Business & Management, the University of the West Indies and his active research interest spans the domain of emerging Open ICT ecosystems and Digitalization.

**Lila Rao-Graham (Senior Researcher)** is a Professor in Information Systems at the Mona School of Business and Management, The University of the West Indies (UWI). Her research interests include Business Intelligence; Data Quality and Decision Support Systems with a particular focus on providing organizations with solutions in order to leverage the value from data for effective decision making.

**Suzana Russell (Senior Researcher)**

Suzana is a Senior Lecturer at the Mona School of Business and Management, The University of the West Indies (UWI). Her research interests and expertise include sustainable manufacturing, industrial ecology and operations management. She has been a key member of the COI research team that led the studies for the Global Data Barometer 2021.

## DataReady

**Tom Orrell**

Tom is the Managing Director of DataReady Limited ([www.dataready.org](http://www.dataready.org)), a social purpose company that helps entities in the sustainable development and humanitarian sectors improve their data governance. Tom is supporting CEPEI's management of this research project by coordinating between the research hubs and synthesising regional research.

## About Cepei

Cepei is an independent think tank headquartered in Bogota, Colombia. Using data and analysis, we empower people and institutions to find pathways towards sustainable development. We work globally and specialize in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

For 20 years, Cepei has advanced multi-stakeholder dialogue, generated evidence for decision-making, and expanded the production and use of qualified open data across sectors and regions with partners like the multilateral organizations, the private sector, academia, governments, and civil society.



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