Global
Partnership
for Sustainable
Development Data

THEORY OF CHANGE NARRATIVE

The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data

October 2019

Introduction

This document delineates the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data's (GPSDD) *Theory of Change (ToC) Narrative*. It represents the GPSDD in 2019, building on lessons learned since GPSDD's launch in 2015 and is designed to reflect the GPSDD's Five Year Strategy for 2019 – 2023. The intention is to re-visit this narrative periodically as the GPSDD continues to grow and evolve and update it as necessary.

GPSDD's theory of change explains how GPSDD's activities are intended to produce a series of results that contribute to achieving the final intended impacts. GPSDD is a partnership and network and by design aims to achieve change by bringing together stakeholders and organizations to address identified and emerging data for development issues. The ToC is not intended to provide a definitive intervention logic for all the work GPSDD supports – this is not possible, given the entrepreneurial brokering role which GPSDD plays, meaning that it is not possible to define in advance exactly what interventions will be designed and supported, and how partners within the network may engage in practice.

Instead, the ToC provides a conceptual framework within which this work is understood to take place; setting out the most important elements (i.e. levers of change, contributions/inputs from the network) and how these will be activated by GPSDD's work, together with the key assumptions associated between different levels of the intervention logic (e.g. output – outcome) and between different elements within the same level (e.g. between levers of change).

The ToC explains how GPSDD expects to drive better decisions and better lives. In summary, GPSDD's causal logic is that some combination of outputs:

- Partnerships (i.e: Ghana mobile data; ARDC)

- increased visibility for data for development leaders (i.e.: Data for Development Festival; UNGA side events),

- engagement mechanisms (i.e.: Interoperability Collaborative; listservs) , and

- knowledge building and sharing (i.e.: CGD Guide; peer-to-peer exchange)

will contribute to:

1. Scaling new technologies and data sources

2. The mobilization of a global movement of political, business, and civil society leaders promoting responsible data use

3. The embedding of standards of data interoperability into global frameworks on data and statistics;

These three combined will contribute to more and better data being used to achieve the SDGS. Alongside these expected changes, some combination of the four outputs will also contribute to the use of timely and robust data being scaled, which will contribute to more and better data being used to monitor the SDGs.

GPSDD Context

As noted in the A World That Counts report, there is broad recognition that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will require integrated action on social, environmental and economic challenges, with a focus on inclusive, participatory development that leaves no one behind. The report further stipulates that "this in turn will require another significant increase in the data and information that is available to individuals, governments, civil society, companies and international organizations to plan, monitor and be held accountable for their actions. A huge increase in the capacity of many governments, institutions and individuals will be needed to deliver and use this data.[1]"

This report, commissioned by the UN Secretary-General recommended that a novel partnership be forged among diverse stakeholders to ignite "a data revolution for the SDGs." In order to fill the identified gap a wide-ranging group of governments, companies, and civil society organizations came together to launch the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD). What started with informal conversations, networking, and shared ideals, has now grown to more than 200 partners working together to spur new action and partnerships to drive data innovation for the SDGs. These include the private sector, civil society, international organizations, academia, foundations, and governments.

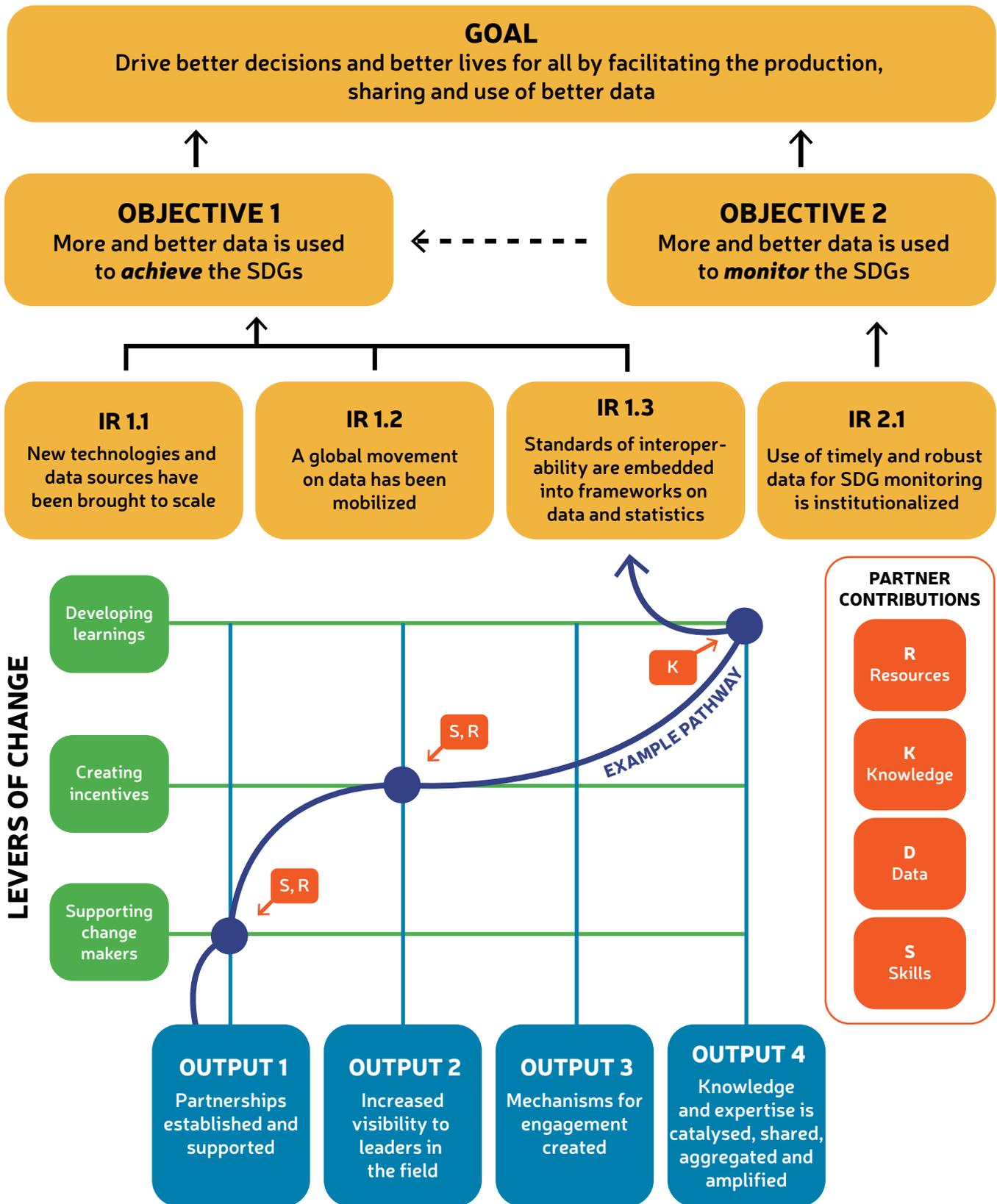By 2023, we could be well on the way towards a more open, collaborative and equal data system at global and national level, where the knowledge that we produce every minute of the day is used in the best way to solve the problems we face. Governments, civil society organizations and companies could have access to reliable and up to date information from many sources, to inform decisions and track progress. People could have confidence that data would be used to help and not harm them, and be able to distinguish between data that tells the truth and data that is used to misinform. And, at the halfway point of the Sustainable Development Goals, we could be able to track progress, identify what is working, and make sure that all resources are used to the best effect to take us to the final goal of 2030 and a sustainable future for us all.

Thanks to the data revolution, there is more knowledge available to humanity than ever before. Advances in technology are creating data at unprecedented levels of detail and speed, and, together with our long-established data systems and methods are turning the stories of people's lives into numbers every minute of every day, across the globe.

But too often, narrow institutional interests, lack of resources and knowledge, lack of trust or lack of leadership inhibit the effective use and sharing of knowledge and the application of the right information at the right time, to solve global problems. GPSDD's activities are designed to address these issues. The following sections provide a description of how GPSDD expects to contribute to achieving the change described above.

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[1]undatarevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/A-World-That-Counts2.pdf, pg. 4

Theory of Change Diagram

GOAL
Drive better decisions and better lives for all by facilitating the production, sharing and use of better data

OBJECTIVE 1
More and better data is used to *achieve* the SDGs

OBJECTIVE 2
More and better data is used to *monitor* the SDGs

IR 1.1
New technologies and data sources have been brought to scale

IR 1.2
A global movement on data has been mobilized

IR 1.3
Standards of interoperability are embedded into frameworks on data and statistics

IR 2.1
Use of timely and robust data for SDG monitoring is institutionalized

LEVERS OF CHANGE

Developing learnings

Creating incentives

Supporting change makers

K

S, R

S, R

EXAMPLE PATHWAY

PARTNER CONTRIBUTIONS

R Resources

K Knowledge

D Data

S Skills

OUTPUT 1
Partnerships established and supported

OUTPUT 2
Increased visibility to leaders in the field

OUTPUT 3
Mechanisms for engagement created

OUTPUT 4
Knowledge and expertise is catalysed, shared, aggregated and amplified

Hypotheses of Change

GPSDD's theory of change is based on the fundamental logic that change is dynamic and non-linear. Given the facilitative nature of GPSDD's work, the change pathways from outputs to outcomes are dependent on a combination of mutually reinforcing and sometimes overlapping activities categorized as levers of change (supporting changemakers, creating incentives, and developing learnings) and contributions from partners (skills, data, knowledge, resources). The initiatives or interventions which GPSDD supports will contribute to change at the outcome (intermediate result) level by supporting activities within one or more outputs that leverage one or more of the levers of change and crowd in (or activate) contributions or inputs from the partners.

Levers of Change

- **Supporting Changemakers:** We establish and support partnerships that help individuals and organizations achieve their objectives in strengthening enabling policies and data ecosystems.

- **Creating Incentives:** We use our communications and advocacy expertise to provide visibility to leaders in the field, create mechanisms for engagement, and build coalitions for change, to promote innovation and investment in data.

- **Developing Learnings:** We share, aggregate, and amplify our network's knowledge and expertise, so all partners can learn and show what can be done and how to do it.
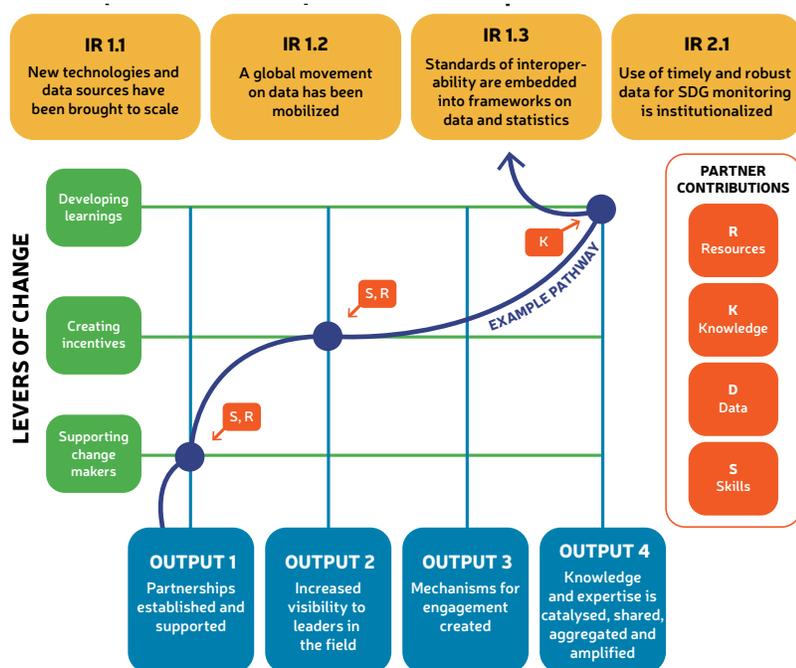
Contributions from Partners

The effectiveness of the network is defined by the partners and their engagement. As a facilitator, GPSDD connects demand and supply of skills, data, knowledge and resources to strengthen the data ecosystem.

- **Data** refers to a variety of types of data (mobile, satellite, etc.) as well as datasets.

- **Skills** refers to technical expertise on tools, methodologies, and systems that builds capacity.

- **Knowledge** refers to information in a variety of forms (papers, webinars, discussions, etc.) that support individual and collective learning.

- **Resources** refers primarily to financial investments, but also includes time and personnel investments to a defined data objective.

The three levers of change are mutually reinforcing sets of activities, that are made possible by and build on partner contributions to produce each of the four outputs, and in various permutations contribute to outcomes level changes.

Theory of Change Diagram (partial)

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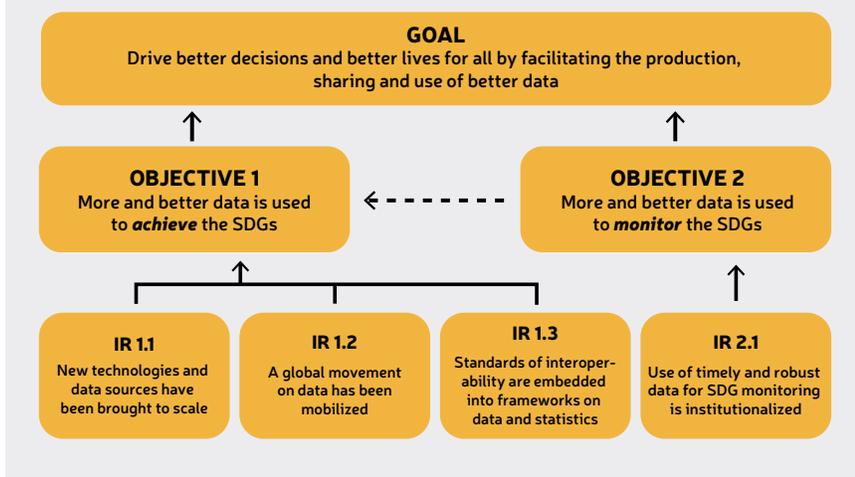Knowledge and expertise is catalysed, shared, aggregated and amplified

For example (shown by the **purple pathway** in the ToC diagram), an initiative designed to support the continued development and uptake of the **interoperability guide** might involve: a) establishing and supporting a partnership to work on and develop such a guide **(Output 1)** and at the same time engaging with change makers at the political level to socialize the guide **(Lever of Change 1)**, b) promoting the guide and increasing its visibility **(Output 2)** and influencing the development of incentives that encourage uptake **(Lever of Change 2)**, and c) supporting the use of the guide in target countries, sharing experiences and encouraging uptake elsewhere **(Output 3)** through developing learning and sharing this throughout the partnership **(Lever of Change 3)**. Ultimately, through working on the initiative in this way, the GPSDD expects to positively contribute to **Intermediate Result 1.3: Standards of interoperability are embedded.** Throughout the process described, partners contribute to the various activities by providing skills, data, resources, and knowledge.

Change is also achieved through mutually reinforcing and iterative activities harnessing multiple levers of change that lead to more than one outcome. For example, activities designed to support use of the **Africa Regional Data Cube** might involve supporting changemakers develop institutional and governance structures **(Output 1 and Lever of Change 1)** while sharing knowledge of the data cube capabilities **(Output 4)** and building political buy-in to adopt non-traditional data sources **(Lever of Change 2)**. However, in order to maintain and increase buy-in and policy relevant use, GPSDD may support ongoing and additional trainings **(Output 4)** and opportunities to showcase outputs **(Output 2 and Lever of Change 2)** that incentivize more stakeholders to use the data cube and contribute to Intermediate Result 1.1: New technologies and data sources being scale and Intermediate Results 2.1: The use of timely and robust data for SDGs monitoring being scaled.

Theory of Change Diagram (partial)

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GPSDD's theory of change is that the outputs will contribute to each of the outcomes through a dynamic process that involves one or more of the levers of change and one some combination of identified contributions from partners. The outcomes achieved through the dynamic change process described above, contribute to two objectives:

1. More and better data is used to achieve the SDGs

2. More and better data is used to monitor the SDGs.

Objective 2 is in theory a subset of objective 1 given that monitoring the SDGs is a component of successfully implementing and achieving the SDGs. However, for the sake of clarity and ease of communication, it is presented as a distinct objective. Each of the outcomes contribute to change at the objective level in the following ways:

Outcomes to Objectives

- IR 1.1: Scaling new technologies and data sources ➔ Decision-makers have the data they need available to identify development needs and inform policy decisions ➔ More and better data being used to achieve the SDGs

- IR 1.2: A global movement of political, business, and civil society leaders ➔ Increased interest in, publicity for, and commitment to data for development among influential leaders ➔ Promoting responsible data use and build public trust ➔ More and better data being used to achieve the SDGs

- IR 1.3: Embedding standards of interoperability into global frameworks on data and statistics ➔ Enabling environment including guidelines and examples on the processes and benefits of joining up data systems ➔ Prioritizing efficiencies across data systems is the norm ➔ More and better data being used to achieve the SDGs

- IR 2.1: Scaling the use of timely and robust data ➔ Data users have access to good quality and current data relevant to the SDGs ➔ Provide accurate and timely updates on progress to decision-makers ➔ More and better data being used to monitor the SDGs

Objectives to Goal

The use of more and better data will contribute to better decisions because decisions will be based on data that is more reliable, comprehensive, and timely. In addition, more and better data will contribute to better lives for all through better decisions being made in relation to monitoring and achieving the SDGs. The SDGS represent the international consensus on better lives for all. As noted above, monitoring the SDGS (objective 2) directly contributes to achieving the SDGs (objective 1) through timely, robust data on the SDG indicators. A feedback loop between the two objectives ensures that the development of national, regional, and global level data ecosystem enabling environments, including political commitment, contributes to the production of timely SDG indicator data that further supports achievement of the SDGs.

Assumptions

Assumptions Between Outputs and Outcomes

- **It is necessary to have both technical and political components** to advance data for development and activities must target both simultaneously and iteratively to achieve change at the outcome level. In order to build awareness of, access to, and capacity to use more and better data, it is necessary to have an enabling political environment that supports changemakers' ability to invest time and resources. Showcasing examples of technical products leads to political leaders being incentivized to engage and support investments in data.

- **Partner engagement and contributions of data, skills, knowledge, and resources are necessary** to operationalize the three levers of change and achieve each of the outputs and contribute to the outcomes. The following are a set of assumptions about partners and their engagement with each other and the partnership as a whole that contributes to achieving the outcomes. Depending on the nature of partners and the specific engagement, a combination of some or all of these elements needs to be in place to achieve outcomes:

  - Partners perceive that it is possible to form mutually beneficial partnerships among different sets of stakeholders that contribute to producing and using more and better data

  - Governments, donors, and other stakeholders can be persuaded to invest financially in data for development

  - Partners produce and share data that is relevant to stakeholders

  - Partners are willing to learn from each other and can show what can be done and how to do it to advance data for development

- **Focusing on a systems approach is important** because simply building new tools or platforms, or releasing new data, does not lead to sustained change, unless they are embedded within a system that is incentivized and organized to promote data production, sharing and use. A system, and most particularly a government system, where people and institutions can clearly understand what data they need, can receive it in the right way, and are then committed to using insights to shape policy and decisions is the key factor in making the best use of data to solve problems. This means bringing together technical solutions with political and institutional change.

- **Scaling is important across space and time.** Influencing systems is a slow and labor-intensive process. Scaling successful technologies, products, and processes enables impact beyond partner countries and organizations at a faster pace and contributes to achieving the global vision of the SDGs.

What is a Data Ecosystem?

A data ecosystem consists of actors and processes that are interrelated and interdependent. Actors include state and non-state stakeholders such as local and national governments, private sector, civil society, and academia, encompassing both data producers and users. Systems and processes such as regulatory frameworks, governance systems, communications mechanisms, and information management systems are critical to the data ecosystem but are self-contained systems that have functions and implications beyond the ecosystem. The interdependent nature of the ecosystem means that the functioning of each of these actors and processes is not only important in and of itself, but critical to the strengthening of the ecosystem as a whole to ensure that data is effectively produced, shared, and consumed. Within the context of optimizing the intersection of data demand and supply, GPSDD considers governance and leadership, capacity and resources, principles and standards, and technology, innovation and analysis to be the four key components of a national level data ecosystem.

Assumptions About the Levers of Change

- Unless tools, platforms, and data are embedded within an ecosystem that incentivizes and actively enables data production, sharing, analysis and use, they will not lead to sustained change in either public or private sector. As such, it is important to support changemakers within existing systems, both public and private, because evidence suggests that investing in data ecosystems is the key to better data.

- To safeguard public interests and drive progress at scale, governments are in the lead, through their role in producing, sharing and using data within the national statistical system and through the legal and regulatory frameworks they create to guide the production, sharing and use of data by others in the system. Working together, national governments set the global norms, rules and frameworks which ensure that data works for all. As such, it is important to create incentives for change at the national level.

- Making the data revolution a force for good will require partners from inside and outside governments to work together in new ways, in the process building the global system that works for all. Partnership is vital. Bringing together data producers and data users from different sectors will help them to understand each other, work together to solve common problems, and, in the end, produce a more robust and equitable data ecosystem for the benefit of all. As such, it is important to build knowledge to increase the basis for mutually beneficial partnerships based on shared understanding of the evidence.

Photo by Ulet Ifansasti/CIFOR

Stakeholder Groups

- **Governments** indicate their receptiveness to be influenced by data and base decisions on evidence and data-use through their interest in engaging with GPSDD. Governments are important stakeholders given their regulatory power and as entities responsible for all their citizens and delivering on the SDGs.

- **Private Sector** entities indicate commitment to a double or triple bottom line through their interest in engaging with GPSDD. Private sector stakeholders collect and hold data that the public does not have access to but can provide more and better SDG relevant insights.

- **Civil Society** organizations express citizen interests through independent data production and advocacy for issue-specific data generation and use addressing the SDGs.

- **Academia/Research Organizations** generate and own data for development knowledge. In particular, they foster innovation and have the capacity to test robust methodologies and tools that can be applied to monitoring and achieving the SDGs.

- **Donors/Foundations** have resources to support the operationalization of data for development solutions and through their engagement with GPSDD indicate their interest in identifying activities and initiatives to support and influence achievement of the SDGs.

Geographic Levels of Change

- **National** – activities address sector specific data gaps and needs that contribute to strengthening of the national level data ecosystem. Data activities use whole of government and multi-stakeholder approaches and are aligned to national priorities.

- **Regional** – activities address institutionalization and knowledge sharing across peers

- **Global** – activities address influencing models of engagement and priority areas for knowledge building, coalition building, and influencer attention

GPSDD Network
For the network to be successful, it must be

- **Broad** – comprising institutions from different sectors and regions, and a mix of data producers and users, large and small players

- **Engaged** – finding value in their GPSDD membership and prepared to invest time and resources in it to achieve common objectives.

- **Open** – willing to engage with each other and overcome challenges to drive progress.

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