DEVPOLICYBLOG

The official launch of the Pacific Data Hub

Launching the Pacific Data Hub: a one-stop shop

By Jonathan Kings and Stuart Minchin
10 December 2020

Data and statistics about the Pacific are not easy to find unless you know where to look, or they're your own. Often they can be fragmented, and tangible results from others' research, projects or development work are hard to compare. It's an issue that has long been identified and one that many of us have been working to fix.

New Zealand has had data projects in their sights for some time, but when the Pacific Data Hub started becoming more than just a good idea, New Zealand funded The Pacific Community (SPC) to make it a reality. SPC had already been acting as custodian to a lot of its own collated Pacific data, but what the Pacific Data Hub brings is accessibility and transparency to this information.

Now, easy access to data and statistics is not just an ambition of a few larger nations in the Pacific, and more a reality for many Pacific countries regardless of size. Because of the way the Pacific Data Hub is set up, it allows Pacific countries to own and access the data as their own. It's a digital platform, on which any government, donor, academic, or member of the community can both store, and access, good quality and reliable data. It enables and encourages access to data, which enables more evidence-based decision-making, meaning better long-term outcomes for all.

The Pacific Data Hub has five components, which are designed for functionality and ease of navigation. The data catalogue has the largest central data and publications repository for the region, the SDG Dashboard holds country-specific data on the 132 Pacific Sustainable Development Indicators selected by the region, and PDH.stat is a data explorer for country-specific development indicators and for official statistics. It also includes COVID-19 impact monitoring of economic lead indicators from Pacific government data. The Microdata Library is a gateway to the Pacific region's survey, census, and administrative-based microdata and documentation. And finally the PacificMap spatial data explorer allows for visualisation of geographic data from 22 Pacific Island countries and territories, and has

already been beneficial during two major recent crises in the Pacific – Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold and COVID-19.

In times of crisis, access to spatial data can facilitate a rapid response by identifying where to send rescue and relief teams. Following TC Harold and the emergence of COVID-19, the Pacific Data Hub map tool was used to visualise inputs from different technical divisions of SPC. This data helped them to effectively orient the delivery of international development assistance by offering key information about the affected areas and populations. These maps have also assisted Pacific countries with decision-making around the pandemic by providing population density data. The population grids are per hectare, and are modelled using the most recent census data, projected where possible to 2020.

With the launch of the Pacific Data Hub we now hope to get others on board to help grow this capability. We want more research, statistics, project reports and outcomes on the platform so we can grow our collective knowledge and join up in our goals to address areas of social, health and economic inequality, infrastructure issues, the diminishing health of our oceans and, of course, climate change.

The Pacific Data Hub is an ambitious catalyst for change in how we manage and extract value from open data in and for the Pacific region. The Pacific Data Hub already hosts more than 5,000 datasets and 11,000 publications and counting. It delivers sustainable and secure data infrastructure that will allow countries to protect their datasets, ensures the data legacy of aid projects are stored securely, and most of all, provides data access to the region's decision-makers and their key partners.

Right now, data is more important than ever. The COVID-19 crisis is forcing Pacific governments and development partners to make tough decisions and is squeezing budgets for effective change across the board. Robust data sharing systems will be instrumental in helping countries better collaborate with one another, reduce duplicative data collection which can stretch the capacity of Pacific governments, and help donors work in tandem with multilateral organisations to address the Pacific's greatest needs. The Pacific Data Hub is not just exciting, but a vital piece of infrastructure for the future.

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