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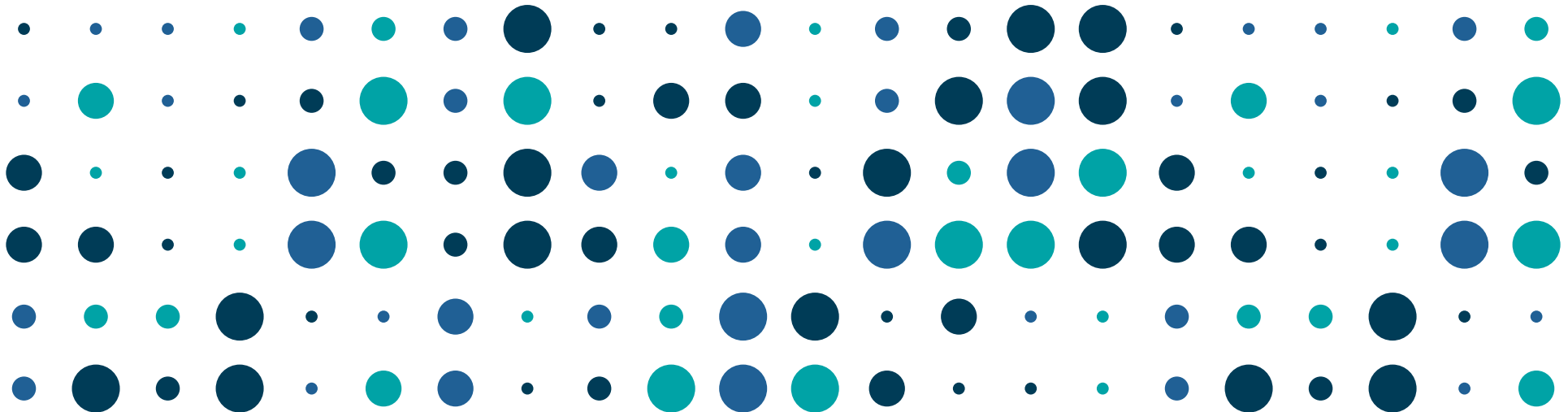National Statistics

UK Statistics
Authority

Statistics for the global good

High-quality statistics to improve lives globally

ONS International Development Strategic Plan 2022-25

Contents

Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to launch our first brilliant strategic plan for our international development programme, where high-quality statistics to improve lives globally, will be at the heart of everything we do. Since it was established in 2016 the international development programme has achieved so much. It is due to these great successes, and its substantial impact, that it has gained well deserved recognition from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and renewed funding for the next three years.

These successes have included: facilitating improvements in national statistics offices' data collection, as demonstrated in Kenya ahead of its first digital census in 2019; building data science capabilities in Rwanda which is now a leader in the region, sharing best practice with its neighbours; collaborating closely with UNECA to deliver a programme of leadership training across Africa; and enabling open and transparent reporting of Sustainable Development Goals progress in Africa and beyond.

Over the next three years we must continue to build on these great successes, by being radical in the advice we offer and ambitious in our reach across the globe. As we look to expand, we must do so collaboratively and sustainably, not only offering our advice and expertise but also learning from the experiences of partners, so that we build more enduring and cooperative partnerships for the future.

Just as the ONS adapts to the changing needs of policy makers, the advice and expertise we offer the developing world must also adapt. This will support our colleagues at other national statistical offices to provide a sound evidence base for the key decisions of the day.

Health, inequalities, and climate change are areas of great relevance to the global agenda and indeed the developing world. Enabling our partners to build the necessary capabilities to monitor the prevalence of infectious diseases, understand inequalities through more inclusive statistics, as well as accurately measure the impact of climate change to their nations and their own contributions to it, will be vital in ensuring their political leaders have the evidence to target polices and interventions accordingly, and ensure no one is left behind.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond
National Statistician, UK

Context

This strategic plan sets out the ONS's vision for international development over the next three years, of high-quality statistics to improve lives globally. This is complementary to the UK Government Statistical Service's (GSS) international strategy, and aligned to the UK statistical system's strategy, Statistics for the public good.

The ONS is the UK's largest independent producer of official statistics and internationally recognised national statistical office (NSO) of the UK. It is the executive office of the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) which oversees the whole UK statistical system and promotes and safeguards the production of official statistics. In 2016, the ONS established the International Development Team to systematise its statistical capacity-building work within developing countries.

The team coordinates and collaborates both domestically and internationally, aligning our work closely with that of the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to ensure our work supports UK foreign policy. The priorities set out in this strategic plan align with those in the UK Government's Integrated Review of Security, Defense, Development and Foreign Policy and UK Government's Strategy for International Development as outlined by the Foreign Secretary.

High-quality statistics to improve lives globally

Through collaborative peer-to-peer partnerships we have supported many aspects of statistical modernisation. We currently have five active partnerships with:

- The Ghana Statistical Service
- The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS)
- The National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR)
- The UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)
- The Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA)

We have also completed an initial six-month project with the Department of Statistics in Jordan (DoS), from October 2021 to March 2022, and are now considering next steps.

Across these partnerships we have improved the collection and use of census data, vital statistics, economic and labour market information to enable international comparisons and better-evidenced socio-economic policies. We have built leadership and encouraged the production and use of relevant and high-quality statistical data. These activities have supported improved governance, transparency and decision making. We have also influenced and built capacity and capability in the use of digital and data science techniques, to improve the efficiency and granularity of statistical data, and to monitor progress on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We have built strong relationships and drawn on the expertise of a number of relevant stakeholders, domestically and internationally including with NSOs and other key organisations to help build statistical capacity in low-income countries. We are now leading and participating in global events on building statistical capacity and capability, and contributing to, and learning from, global best practices.

The emergence of COVID-19 led us to adapt our ways of working. Our programme now incorporates remote events and training alongside face-to-face engagements, to enable the best use of time and resources. The pandemic presented opportunities to demonstrate the importance of good data to inform evidence-based policy and decision making. We were also able to support other nations by sharing our newly developed expertise in large-scale testing surveys, transforming approaches to data collection, and producing new types of analyses.

As we look to the next three years we will continue to build on our existing partnerships and seek out opportunities to work with other developing countries. Where we have had successful work programmes, we will look to package these into products that can be readily delivered to new partners. We will also explore opportunities to support more on health, gender, climate, economic and administrative data.

Vision and Core Principles

Vision: High-quality statistics to improve lives globally.

The work of the international development team will be aligned to the UK statistical system's strategy principles by being:

Radical in the expansion of subjects covered and scope of advice, keeping pace with innovation within the ONS and looking to work alongside a wider group of experts to prepare statistical systems for the future.

Ambitious in our reach and impact across the developing world working adaptively to prioritise and respond to changing and complex environments.
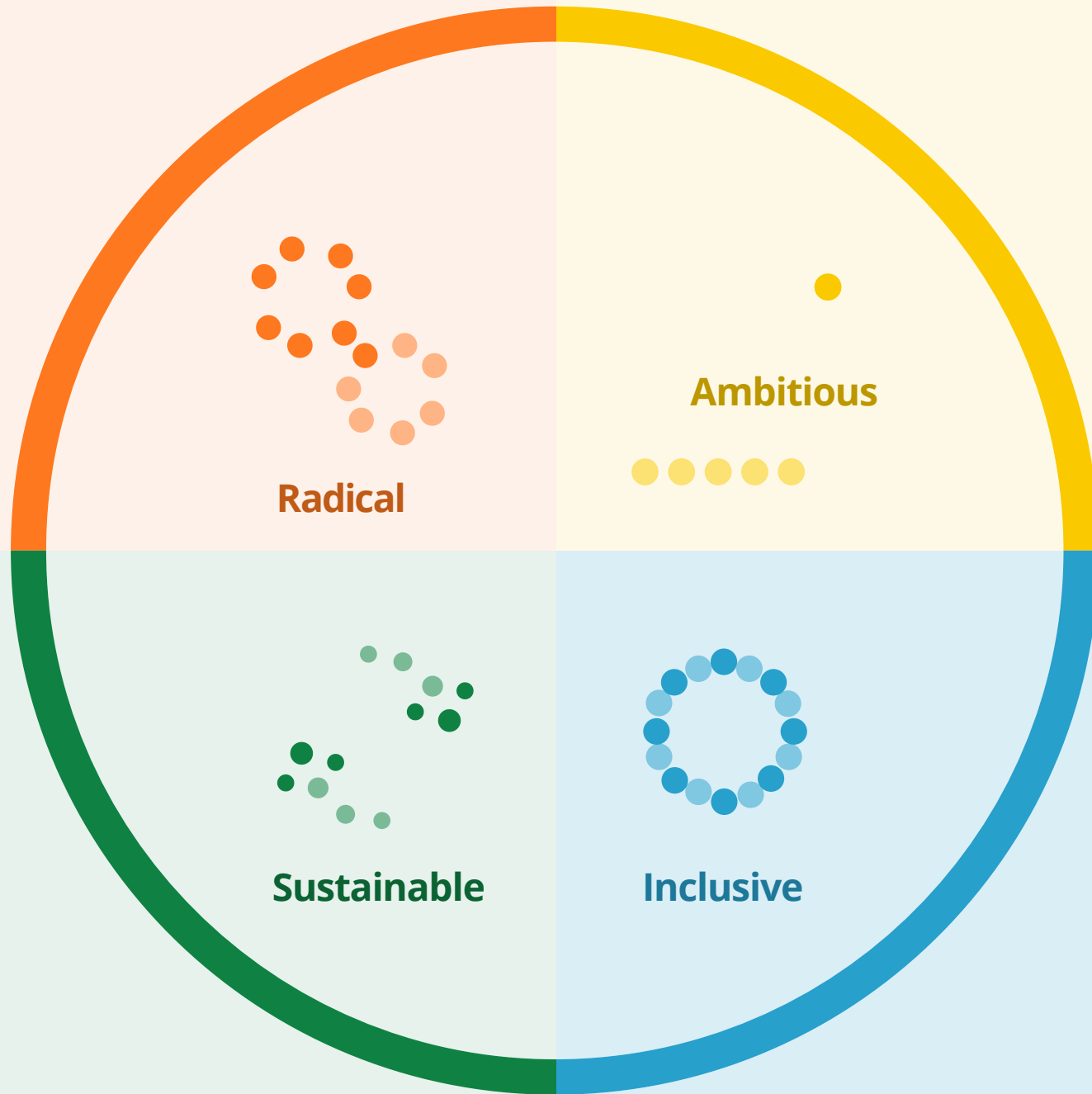
Inclusive in our engagement with partners and their stakeholders in the development and implementation of their work and promoting inclusivity of data as part of collection, analyses and dissemination.

Sustainable in the relationships and partnerships we build, prioritising activities that will deliver meaningful impact and long-term change.

This strategic plan fits within the UK statistical system's Statistics for the Public Good strategy which recognises the importance of international collaboration in the production of high-quality comparable statistics and data to address global issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

It says:

"Successful collaboration in the modern statistical world must be international too. As the pandemic and environmental issues have vividly demonstrated, users need data that can be understood in the international context, not in national isolation. We will provide global statistical leadership in those fora, and on subjects central to the UK's interests. We will promote transparency and high standards, and support coherence and comparability across the global statistical community. And, we will continue to work with, and learn from, our partners in the developing world to ensure statistics and data are at the heart of the UK's development policies and agenda, and provide help to those most in need."

Radical

Ambitious

Sustainable

Inclusive

Delivering this strategic plan

Delivery of this strategic plan will be centred on building strong collaborative relationships with partners, enabling each partnership to learn from each other's experiences. Whilst we will be led by our partners' priorities, we will also use our influence and expertise to steer the direction of the work so that it is aligned with UK foreign policy.

We will align our activities to objectives set out in the UK Government Statistical Service's international strategy.

Build

Over the next three years we will strengthen existing partnerships with NSOs and build new ones, expanding into new countries and regions. We will draw on the successes and lessons learnt from where we have successfully built capability within NSOs, such as in data science, data collection and reporting of SDGs. We will look to offer these as distinct products or packages to new partners. We will also explore opportunities to build new capability and capacity in areas of strategic interest including, but not limited to, climate change, health and gender statistics.

Lead

We will lead the UK government's work sharing our statistical expertise with developing countries, expanding our networks and drawing on expertise from a range of relevant areas of the ONS and beyond. We will continue to co-lead activity with relevant bodies as part of developing regional leaders and statistical systems for the future.

Influence

We will use our expertise to influence the global statistical system to support developing countries as well as in helping NSOs in developing countries to employ new ways of work to ensure their statistics are relevant to users and serve the public good.

Showcase of our work

We have gained a wealth of experience in building statistical capacity and capability since our international development programme began in 2016. Some of our key successes can be found in the following case studies.
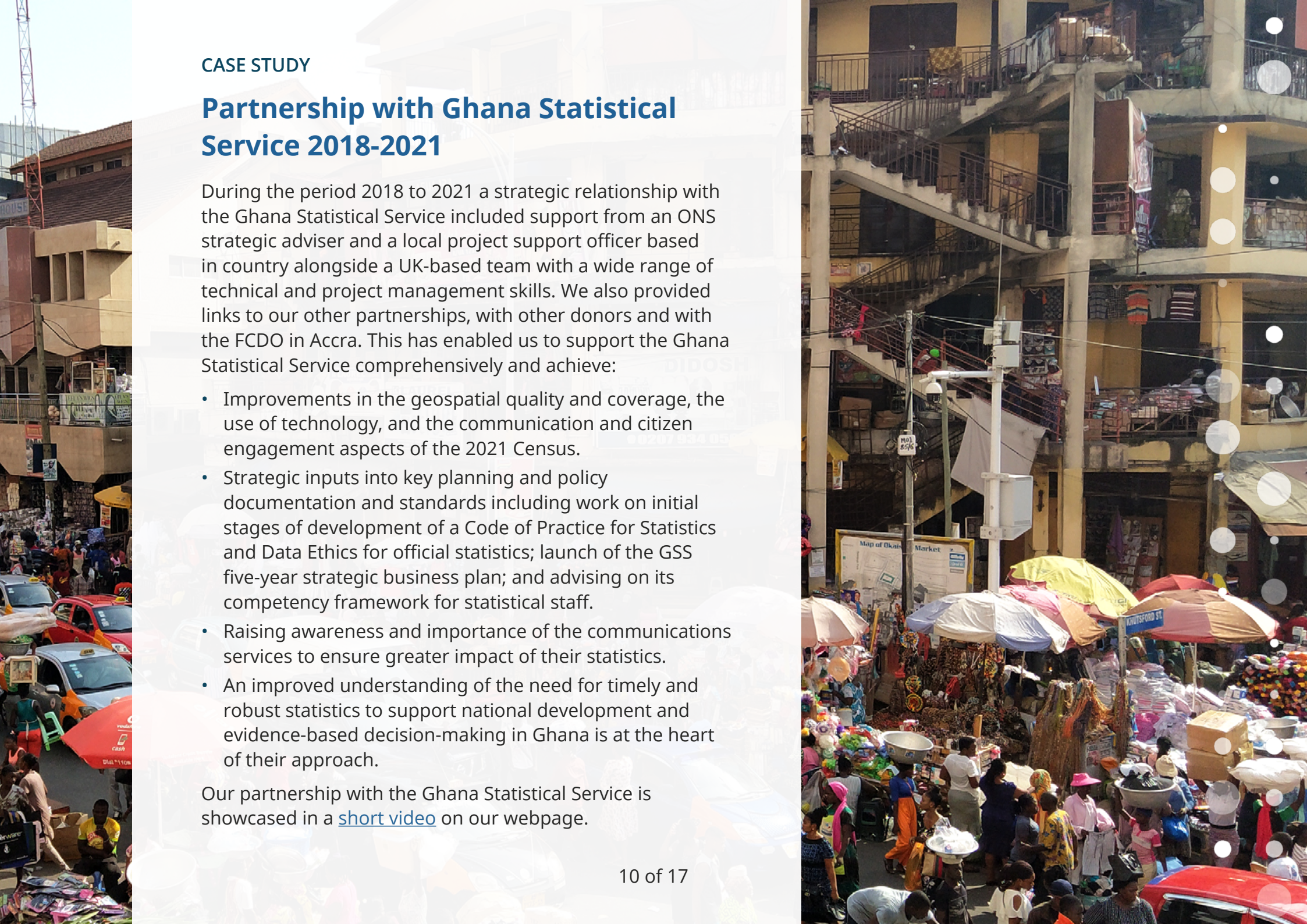
Partnership with Ghana Statistical Service 2018-2021

During the period 2018 to 2021 a strategic relationship with the Ghana Statistical Service included support from an ONS strategic adviser and a local project support officer based in country alongside a UK-based team with a wide range of technical and project management skills. We also provided links to our other partnerships, with other donors and with the FCDO in Accra. This has enabled us to support the Ghana Statistical Service comprehensively and achieve:

- Improvements in the geospatial quality and coverage, the use of technology, and the communication and citizen engagement aspects of the 2021 Census.

- Strategic inputs into key planning and policy documentation and standards including work on initial stages of development of a Code of Practice for Statistics and Data Ethics for official statistics; launch of the GSS five-year strategic business plan; and advising on its competency framework for statistical staff.

- Raising awareness and importance of the communications services to ensure greater impact of their statistics.

- An improved understanding of the need for timely and robust statistics to support national development and evidence-based decision-making in Ghana is at the heart of their approach.

Our partnership with the Ghana Statistical Service is showcased in a short video on our webpage.

Open SDG platform

The UK is a lead contributor to the development of Open SDG, an open source, multilingual, fully customisable and free-to-reuse SDG-reporting platform. Open SDG is used for the UK SDG data website and has a growing user community including many countries, regions and cities around the world.

We have supported the development of guidance, video tutorials, information and case studies on the Open SDG website to enable other countries to create their own version.

We have also, through our international development work, directly supported developing countries to set up their SDG platforms. This has included working with Rwanda and Ghana through our partnerships.

Through these collaborations we have identified the types of skills and knowledge that countries need to develop and use their platforms to greatest effect; we have then built up the type of training and support that we are able to offer.

We are therefore able to expand the offer of support to other interested developing countries and have now also worked with the statistical offices of Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Lao PDR and Sierra Leone.

Improving capacity to respond to COVID-19

Following the onset of the pandemic the ONS's international development work pivoted to help partner national statistics offices (NSOs) supply data and analyses governments needed to mitigate the impact.

The ONS advised on a reorganisation of teams at the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), which it has an existing partnership with, enabling it to better support member state NSOs. We supported collaboration between NSOs and UN organisations on the impact of COVID-19 on statistical organisation and mitigation measures, enabling the continuation of key outputs including civil registrations data and Consumer Price Indices (CPI). This included advising on the creation of the Africa Statistical System Collaboration Platform which enables NSOs to better collaborate and share best practice.

In Ghana, the ONS put remote data collection processes in place to enable the continuation of CPI during pandemic restrictions. The ONS also helped Ghana Statistics Service gain a key role in supplying data and expertise to the British High Commission-led epidemiology modelling study that aims to predict the spread of COVID-19.

In addition, the ONS also published a range of guidance to assist NSOs in beginning their first telephone interviews as well as further guidance for NSOs working from home for the first time. Both were published by UNECA and actively shared with NSOs across the continent.

Improving labour statistics

High-quality labour market statistics are essential for governments to boost jobs, wages and productivity in low-income countries. Yet, in many parts of the developing world, improvements to labour market statistics are still much needed.

To help address this, the ONS has been working with the FCDO, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Bank to improve international labour statistics. This also reflected the need for better evaluation of the jobs-related impacts of the various economic development programmes carried out by FCDO and the World Bank.

The ONS then assessed the current situation regarding labour market statistics in Jordan, Ghana and Kenya. This was done as part of ongoing partnerships. The assessments looked particularly at the development requirements for each country's labour market statistics. These included more detailed statistics on the informal sector and informal employment, which tend to make up the largest part of the employed labour force in those countries.

The assessments also highlighted the need for national statistical organisations to have more support with selecting and applying the ILO's recommendations for data collection. We have since assisted the Ghana Statistical Service with drafting a new strategy for the development of a more comprehensive system of labour statistics. The ONS is contributing to the further development of this strategy helping it to reflect international recommendations and best practice where relevant.

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Detecting trucks in East Africa

Road traffic is useful for measuring economic activity as it represents a large proportion of the movement of people and goods, and it can be very timely. However, many countries in the developing world lack regular estimates of road traffic activity.

To address this, we applied machine learning techniques to generate estimates of traffic volume using open-source imagery from the satellite Sentinel 2.

We were able to spot large vehicles as they appear as a series of blue, green and red pixels. This enabled us to estimate the number of trucks on a stretch of the M1 between Leicester and Sheffield, and part of the main road running from Mombasa to Nairobi in Kenya.

Our new methodology successfully identified large changes following the lockdowns and easing of COVID-19 restrictions throughout 2020. Data from this project also have the potential to be used by governments when making decisions on infrastructure such as improvements to roads, as well as those affecting the import of goods and services. [Read the full blog](#).

Kenya's census

The 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census was the country's first ever paperless census, with digital technology used during mapping and enumeration.

The ONS, with funding from the FCDO, supported the census exercise through its partnerships with Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) and UNECA. We provided strategic advice and expert technical assistance, particularly in handling the deployment of 170,000 tablet computers to the field for data gathering.

The partnership also supported the development of a central dashboard to monitor and manage incoming census data and report back to senior officials within the Government of Kenya. As a result of this collaboration, the census took place digitally and on time, with headline results produced ahead of schedule.

Definitions

UKSA

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body at arm's length from government, which reports directly to the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

ONS

The Office for National Statistics is the executive office of the UK Statistics Authority. It is the UK's National Statistical Office and largest producer of official statistics.

GSS

The GSS is a UK network, spread across a whole range of public bodies, including the devolved administrations and UK government departments which produces and analyses statistics. It includes professional statisticians, data scientists, geographers, researchers, economists, analysts, operational delivery staff, IT specialists and other supporting roles.
The GSS is also a part of the cross-government Analysis Function, which has built a community of analysts of various professional backgrounds working to provide the evidence base for understanding the biggest challenges of the day. Both the Analysis Function and the GSS are also led by the National Statistician.

NSO

A national statistical office is the body that has the responsibility for coordinating all activities at national level for the development, production and dissemination of official statistics within a country. It should be noted that particularly in federated statistical systems other national authorities responsible for the development, production and dissemination of official statistics may also exist.

Contact the team

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