DATA TALKS FEBRUARY 2018: *DATA PARTNERSHIPS*

The first meeting of the Data Talks in 2018 discussed the potential of creating sustainable partnerships with companies that are able to provide new forms of data to better inform the work of international organisations. While the amount of data that is being generated is increasing exponentially, the majority of this data is collected and owned by the private sector, from social media and mobile data to GPS and e-commerce data. To reap the full benefits of this data revolution, international organisations need to engage in partnerships with those organisations that hold the data, and these partnerships could be tricky to negotiate. How to ensure trust between the parties, when dealing with sensitive data? How to ensure that the partnership complies with an ever-changing legal framework? Is there a need for a systematic and comprehensive framework that guides the development of partnerships, or should they be negotiated at an ad-hoc basis?

Twitter data for UNAIDS

The discussion was guided by practical experiences of crafting such partnerships. First, Taavi Erkkola, Senior Adviser at the Strategic Information Department of UN-AIDS, discussed the partnership between his organisation and Twitter, which was established to obtain data on Twitter discourse related to HIV. The research aimed to explore whether a rise in Twitter discourse about HIV, following an anti-discrimination campaign, would result in an increase of people testing for HIV. The co-operation with Twitter was created with the help of UN Global Pulse, which maintains regular contact with the social media platform. Twitter made the relevant dataset available for analysis against a fee. Erkkola advised partnering with an experienced body, in this case – UN Global Pulse. In addition, he emphasised the importance of setting a clear hypothesis from the outset, in order for the research to be focused, and for all parties to be aware of the roles and objectives. This should be further spelled out in a contract or Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

Facebook data for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The second case was related to Facebook data used to measure population density and patterns. For example, this could be used to better prepare immunisation efforts or to measure connectivity to the Internet after a disaster. The case was presented by John Crowley, Manager of Knowledge and Learning at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

(IFRC). The partnership between Facebook and the IFRC was created through a MoU, and the data was made available for free, as part of Facebook's Disaster Maps service. Facebook data provides information at a much higher resolution than traditional data, which often aggregates information to administrative boundaries. Yet, with this deeper view into community-level views, data protection concerns arise. Crowley recommended consulting the ICRC Handbook for Data Protection for guidance. In addition, Facebook analyses its own data and only sends the IFRC the aggregated results, which further minimises privacy concerns. Crowley emphasised the need to consider the relevance and quality of the data, explaining that there has been a lot of back-and-forth communication on what was needed, as well as 'ground-truthing' (verifying the results of the data with the reality on the ground) to ensure the data's relevance and accuracy.

E-commerce data for the International Trade Centre

Anders Aeroe, Director of the Division of Enterprises and Institutions of the International Trade Centre (ITC), discussed the creation of partnerships with e-commerce platforms, including Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba, informing the participants about ITC's activities and research. Aeroe highlighted the utility of e-commerce data to measure the inclusion of Least Developed Countries in the global e-commerce market, as well as the categories of products that are traded worldwide. That said, partnerships with e-commerce platforms can be difficult to negotiate, as their data is their most valuable resource, and gives them a competitive edge. This means that data will only be shared once sufficient trust has been built, and that partnerships, such as between ITC and Alibaba, are created through continuous engagement and trust-building.. Aeroe furthermore explained that it is important for international organisations to remain neutral and not be perceived as promoting some companies and not others, which means that ITC actively seeks partnerships with different e-commerce companies.

Discussion:
The above-mentioned case studies were discussed among the participants, representing seventeen different organisations in Geneva, providing their experiences, questions, and lessons learned. The discussion focused in part on the transparency and trust that is needed for a partnership to work, as well as the incentives of both sides of the partnerships. These incentives are necessary to understand, as it is important for

Internet companies to see the benefit of the partnerships. Yet, partnerships should not just be created for the sake of creating partnerships and getting access to new forms of data. Research objectives should guide the creation of partnerships, rather than vice versa.

Furthermore, the discussion focused on ethics and legal elements, in particular related to data protection. For example, to improve their activities in conflict zones, international organisations need better data. Yet, there is a great, justified, reluctance to rely on external data, as this data is extremely sensitive, clouded by data protection concerns, and could have been manipulated by actors in the conflict. Any data management by international organisations needs to be accompanied by the principle of do-no-harm.

Key takeaways:
- It is important to set clear objectives, hypotheses, and roles, and to have a contract or MoU to avoid misaligned expectations
- To optimise capacity and networks, it can be fruitful to work with a trusted intermediary, such as UN Global Pulse
- While Internet companies can have impressive datasets, they might not be representative if they are only used by a subset of the population. Counter misrepresentation by collecting data from different sources
- It is of utmost important to ensure the principles of data responsibility, extending the 'do no harm' principle to data protection
- Trust is necessary for partnerships, especially when data is sensitive or valuable for the companies that hold it. Trust-building takes time and requires continuous engagement