Summary

On July 19, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) co-organised a VNR Lab on the use of non-traditional data sources such as citizen-generated data (CGD) for the voluntary national reviews (VNRs), as an effective way to fill data gaps and fulfil the commitment of Leave No One Behind (LNOB).

Presenting experiences by civil society, government, and national statistical office representatives of Ghana, the Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, and the Philippines, among others, the event shed light on the role of CGD for public policy. The lab explored how non-traditional data, particularly CGD is utilized to support monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and for evidence-based reporting and to harness the power of citizens to capture and share more data for the VNRs.

Citizen-generated data refers to the engagement of citizens in multiple processes along the data value chain. Anchored on the core principles underpinning the 2030 Agenda – LNOB, inclusiveness and multi-stakeholder partnerships – CGD is data by, for and about citizens. CGD is gaining momentum – also for the VNR process – and is increasingly recognized for its unique ability to fill gaps for timely, qualitative, open, and disaggregated data required for effective follow-up and review. CGD is also a great channel for National Statistical Offices (NSOs) to engage and connect directly with citizens and further improve transparency, inclusion, and accountability.

Citizen-generated data encourages citizens to participate by sharing insights and experiences. With a clear orientation towards problem-solving, CGD complements official statistics by uplifting the voices of the most vulnerable and of those most at risk of being left at the margins. By including citizens as co-creators and agents of change, CGD leverages ownership, and contextualization and contributes to a whole-of-society approach for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Panelists shared examples of implementing CGD in areas spanning the SDGs. While CGD is not fully institutionalized and many countries lack an established mechanism to involve different stakeholders in SDG monitoring, it was emphasized that it is important to build a relationship based on trust among different actors. Effective communication was identified as a key element of a successful collaboration among NSOs, governments, and other stakeholders, where technologies and solutions are co-developed and co-owned by local people. Investing in capacity-building to benefit from the specialized knowledge of communities, human rights experts,
statisticians, governments, and others was also identified as a necessary step forward to create a dynamic and inclusive data ecosystem.