

MODULE 4

USER-PRODUCER DIALOGUE

TRAINING SYLLABUS

Curriculum on Gender Statistics Training

This product was developed under the guidance of the Subgroup on Gender Statistics Training, within the Asia-Pacific Network of Statistical Training Institutes.



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Introduction

This syllabus has been designed to guide trainers on how to conduct related training. The syllabus can also be used by learners who wish to know more about this topic and people who are generally interested in gender statistics.

This syllabus is part of a wider module on this area of gender statistics. Other materials within this module might include exercises, sample datasets, PowerPoint presentations and example quizzes. Please refer to the additional set of materials for a comprehensive and effective learning experience.

Who is this module for?

- **Statisticians** and other experts that wish to understand their audience's needs to better cater to these with their gender data and statistical products.
- **Policymakers and decision-makers** who are looking to better understand the gender data available, and to learn about effective ways to influence gender data production in their own national contexts.
- **Academics** who wish to convey their needs to data producers and learn about existing and upcoming data releases.
- **Civil society organizations** that wish to create communication channels with data producers in order to obtain gender data that better suits their needs.
- **Media personnel** interested in finding out more about gender data production, releases and interpretation, in order to better integrate gender data into their media products and influence the overall production of gender statistics relevant to them.

What do I need to know before going through this module?

This module is targeted to both experts and non-experts. No advanced knowledge of statistics is necessary. However, it would be good for the learner to have an idea of what the Sustainable Development Goals¹ (SDGs) are, including their targets and indicators², as well as to have a basic level of gender data literacy and an understanding of how the production of SDG data takes place globally. Thus, it is recommended that the learner has completed Modules 1, 2 and 3 before completing this module.

¹ For additional information on the SDGs see: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

² See: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>

Learning objectives

The expected learning outcomes for this module include:

- After going through this module, the learner is expected to become familiar with the concepts of data users, data producers and statistical production processes.
- The module also provides an understanding of the importance of aligning the needs of users with the supply of gender data in order to maximize its use.
- Finally, trainees will be presented with examples of existing user-producer dialogues and will be provided with the necessary tools to establish effective dialogues in their own national contexts.

Note to trainer: Depending on the pace of trainer and trainees, it is expected that training for this module can be delivered in 15 to 30 minutes, with an additional 30 minutes needed to practice conducting dialogue.

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1. What is usually referred to as user-producer dialogue?

Data ecosystems – in which various actors interact to produce, exchange and consume data – are increasingly complex. In any given country, there might be a large amount of data producers, which may or may not be coordinated among themselves, and a large number of data users. For data producers to generate statistics that meet the needs of users, and for users to understand what statistics are available, where to find them, and how to influence production, dialogue is necessary.

Box 1. User and producer definitions

Users vs. producers

- Data producers: Usually referred to as organizations that are in charge of generating data. In the context of producing gender statistics for SDG monitoring, data producers include national statistics offices, line ministries, other government departments, some international organizations and, in rare instances, the private sector and civil society organizations that generate statistics.

- Data users: any consumer of data is generally considered a data user. The most common users of gender-related SDG data include policymakers and other forms of decision-makers, government bodies, civil society organizations, academics and researchers, private-sector institutions and international organizations.

Drawing the line between data users and producers is not always easy, as many actors can both be users and producers. For instance, the Ministry of Health in a country can be a data producer if it generates health statistics, such as those obtained from vital registries. However, such a Ministry might also be a user, as it might consume population statistics or other forms of statistics generated by different producers in order, for instance, to estimate the prevalence of a certain disease.

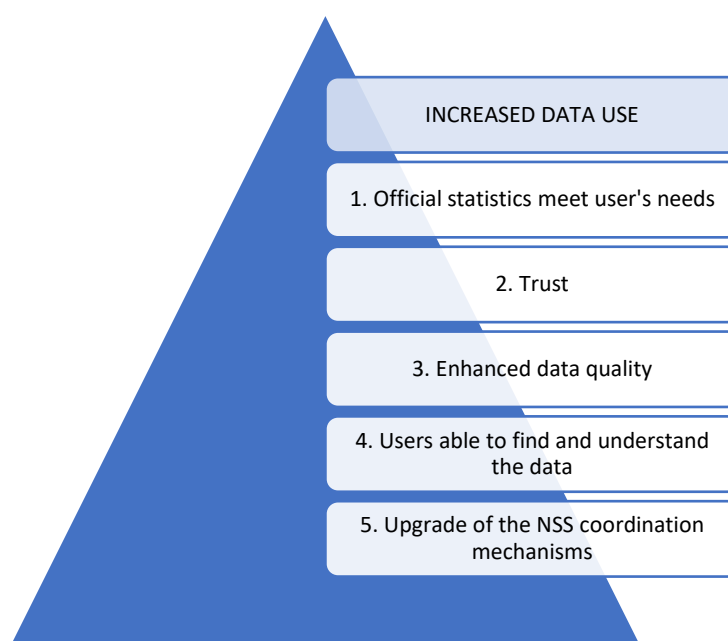
An efficient dialogue that is institutionalized, and includes all key actors, can improve the production process of statistics, strengthen trust and understanding among stakeholders, forge new networks, and educate all those who take part. This ultimately increases the use of statistics³. Using gender statistics to inform decision-making is an essential avenue to effective policymaking and the achievement of the SDGs for women and girls.

³ European Union Medstat. Regional Guidelines: Supporting dialogue between users and producers of statistics. See: https://circabc.europa.eu/sd/a/9dab4cbb-4539-4b35-87a2-68dc5efd6b11/EN_Regional%20Guidelines%20for%20Users-Producers%20Dialogue_HD.pdf

2. Why is user-producer dialogue important?

As stated above, user-producer dialogue is important because, ultimately, it enhances the use of gender data and this has potential impacts in the lives of women and girls. In the context of monitoring the SDGs from a gender perspective, user-producer dialogue usually revolves around aligning policymakers' needs with the production of official gender statistics. Such statistics are trusted only if they are credible and produced impartially. Thus, there are several reasons why dialogue is important⁴.

Figure 1. Potential outcomes of user-producer dialogue



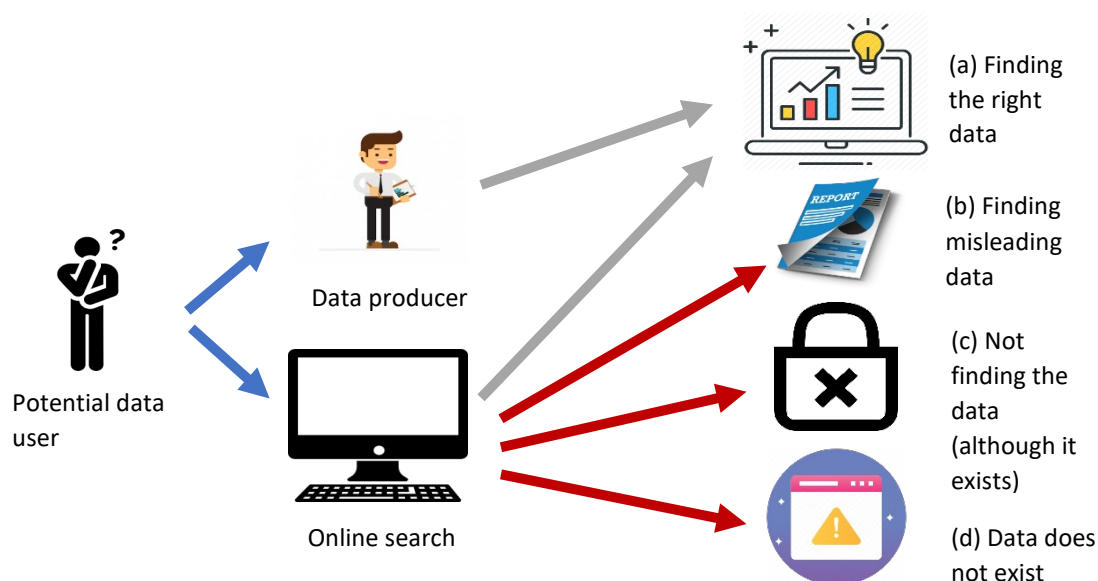
1. Official statistics meet user's needs: Gender data producers within National Statistical Systems make choices about what data should be produced. The choice of "priority gender indicators" for data production is sometimes political and sometimes technical (e.g. only those indicators that are relatively easy to generate are selected and/or prioritized). Although these are important reasons, a consultation with users can create opportunities to generate gender data that is better suited to the needs of potential users, and therefore more broadly used. Adaptation to user's needs should be both thematic and format-based:
 - a. As policy priorities change over time, so do data needs. For instance, producing environment statistics from a gender perspective to better capture how women and men contribute to environmental management and degradation differently, is now much more relevant than it was a decade ago in view of the accelerated impact of climate change. User-producer dialogue can enable stakeholders to discuss their work programmes so that data demands can be anticipated and responded to in a timely manner.

⁴ Some of the information below has been extracted from Ibid.

- b. In addition, with the development of new technologies and the evolution of education systems, users today might be able to consume data in different formats compared to the past. For instance, communicating data via social media is now an effective way to reach the general public, but this channel did not really exist in the past. Dialogue is also relevant to ensure the data produced fits the technical skills of stakeholders and is usable efficiently.
2. Trust: User-producer engagement can generate trust on both sides. It is in the interest of data producers of official gender statistics, which usually aim to align with the Fundamental Principles⁵, to provide trusted, impartial and accurate information to users. With the increasing availability of ad-hoc studies and non-official statistics, it might be difficult for users to appreciate the quality of gender data and to differentiate accurate from misleading statistics. Long-term engagement between users and producers can help data users understand the differences in quality between different data sources and understand the limitations of existing estimates. Similarly, engagement can build the trust of producers on groups of users and the way they intend to use microdata and/or sensitive data.
3. Enhanced data quality: Dialogue between users and producers can help enhance the quality of statistics, as users – who might be experts on thematic or policy areas – can be quick to identify inconsistencies, discrepancies or issues with the data.
4. Users are able to find and understand the data: User-producer dialogue might also enable users to find the data they need more easily and enhance their chances of interpreting it correctly, as institutionalized and frequent dialogue allows producers to showcase new estimates, communication products, publications and online repositories; while training users on data literacy and the metadata interpretation.
5. Upgrade of the NSS coordination mechanisms: In some cases, institutionalized user-producer dialogue can even be an enabler for an upgrade of the national statistical system's coordination mechanisms. For instance, take the example in Figure 2. In this statistical system, each data producer publishes their own statistics separately, in a non-coordinated manner. When data users wish to find data, they might either try approaching someone they know, or try finding it online. This might result in:
 - a. Finding the right official gender statistic
 - b. Finding other data that may or may not be accurate
 - c. Not finding what the user needed, despite the fact that it is available
 - d. Not finding what the user needed because it doesn't exist

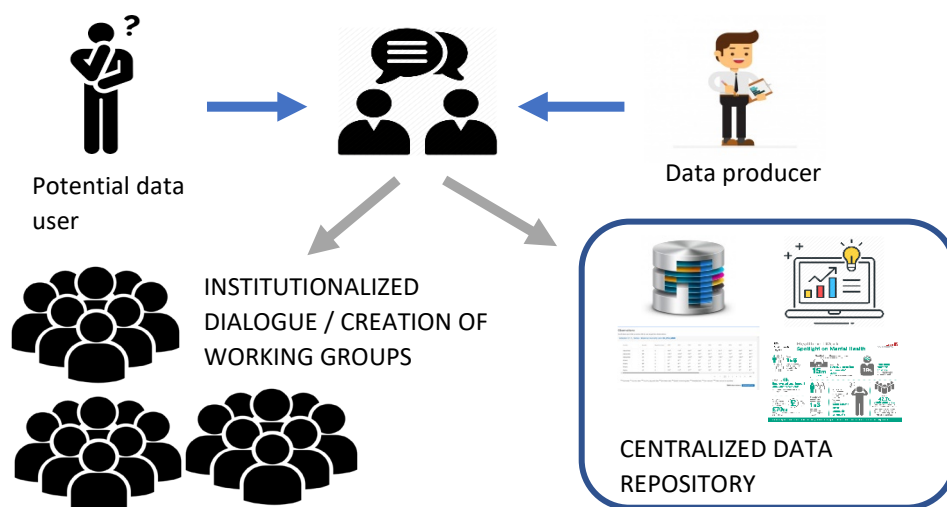
⁵ See: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/hb/E-fundamental%20principles_A4-WEB.pdf

Figure 2. Process of data search and potential outcomes



Options (b), (c) and (d) are not desirable, as they represent misinformation, data waste and data gaps respectively. In a non-coordinated national statistical system, the chances of (a) are very slim, and therefore many user's queries often go unanswered or incorrectly answered. As a result of user-producer dialogue, stakeholders might realize the dangers associated with lack of coordination and redress this issue as depicted in Figure 3. Here, a central database, web portal, or institution (usually the National Statistics Office) is centralizing all data; which allows users to easily locate accurate information and certify the quality of the data. In addition, as dialogue gets institutionalized, users are increasingly aware of the available data and where to find it, resulting in increased use. All of these efforts reduce data waste and misinformation, and ultimately might contribute to narrowing down data gaps to meet user's needs.

Figure 3. User-producer dialogue might enhance NSS coordination



Institutionalized and inclusive user-producer dialogue processes often result in statistics being used more consistently to make to better decisions and inform policy debates. Thus, there is a growing understanding that a statistician's job does not end when the numbers are released, but rather it is

important to continue connecting with current or future users, to ensure that current data is widely used, and future data collection exercises meet user’s needs.

3. User-producer dialogue: step-by-step

User-producer dialogue is not a new concept. In fact, most countries have systems in place that qualify as user-producer dialogues. These range from national committees (e.g. Statistics Advisory Committee), to groups (e.g. a review of statistical reports group, a databases group, an indicator dissemination group, non-traditional producers groups, citizen-generated data groups, Big data groups, etc.) and ad-hoc mechanisms dialogue (e.g. an ad-hoc advisory committee on a certain special task).

There is no blueprint for the desirable steps needed to conduct a successful user-producer dialogue, as this might depend on the specific actors and the purpose of holding the dialogue, but the following actions are often present in successful dialogues:

Figure 4. Potential steps for a successful user-producer dialogue⁶



3.1 Stakeholder mapping

The responsibility of arranging and carrying out a user-producer dialogue lies with both users and producers. Both sets of stakeholders must be fully engaged and willing to collaborate for the dialogue to be successful. Furthermore, it is important that all relevant stakeholders are part of these dialogues. In practice, many countries have dialogue processes set up between national statisticians and other government officials, but rarely do these dialogues include other types of users such as journalists or

⁶ Jessamyn Encarnacion (UN Women). 2019. Guidance Note on User-Producer dialogue.

academics. As such, prior to organizing a dialogue session, it is important to conduct a comprehensive stakeholder mapping.

From the data production side, it is generally straightforward to identify who should be part of the dialogue (e.g. all those entities producing official statistics); however, identifying potential users might pose more challenges. Producers might vary depending on the topic of the dialogue, but some obvious choices include representatives from the National Statistics Office, representatives from data-producing line ministries (e.g. education, labour, health, etc.), civil registrars, and representatives from national security institutions or other institutions that might manage administrative data repositories.

For data users, stakeholders might include policymakers, parliamentarians and other government representatives that need data to make evidence-based decisions, civil society institutions and labour unions that might use gender data for advocacy purposes, academics, think-tanks and researchers seeking data for educational and research purposes, representatives from international organizations that might either use data to conduct further research or to design development programmes, private-sector entities that use data for business processes or corporate social responsibility purposes, media professionals who wish to utilize data to convey impactful messages, and the general public, which in some cases might use data to make personal decisions such as where to live, where to send children to school, and what kind of jobs offer good pay.

Within each of these organizations, and depending on the nature of the dialogue, it might be desirable that the representatives are people with a degree of decision-making power. This is particularly important when it comes to uptake of the decisions made as a result of the dialogue. Similarly, and to ensure the interests of both men and women are equally considered, it is important to seek balance regarding the sex and other sociodemographic characteristics of the participants.

3. 2 Communication

Different types of data users require data products with different levels of detail (please refer to Module 10 on Communicating Gender Data for details on this). For instance, while researchers and academics may wish to access microdata to conduct their own analysis, or might be interested in reading very technical publications, policymakers might prefer to access simple data tables with short key messages describing the findings of new data collection exercises. Therefore, the first step of a user-producer dialogue is for each stakeholder to set out his or her preferences in terms, not only of thematic topics, but also the type of product desired, the preferred communication channel, and the level of detail required.

Box 2. Key discussion points during a dialogue

User-producer dialogue: What are we trying to discuss?

- Identify data user's needs, from a thematic point of view (e.g. what indicators should be prioritized for data production) and from a technical perspective (e.g. how detailed and how technical should the data product be; in what form it should be produced and disseminated; etc.)

- Identify data producers' capacity and limitations to respond to users' needs.

- Share information about calendars of releases, available data, where to find it, how to interpret it, its caveats, and who to get in touch with should additional questions arise.

- Whether a formal mechanism needs to be either established or improved to ensure dialogue continues consistently over time.

Overall, this dialogue should result in better alignment of data users and producers' priorities and support the establishment of connections and communication flows.

In some countries, the practice of sending a questionnaire for users in advance of the dialogue has been identified as a good practice. Alternatively, online participatory survey methods can be used in real time during the dialogue to capture the opinions of the participants. The questions posed can vary substantially depending on the topic of the dialogue. For instance, refer to Box 3 to see an example of a dialogue held in the Maldives in 2019. As you can see, some of the issues discussed pertain to the thematic areas of interest of potential data users, while others had to do with enhancing communication channels, tailoring the technicality of products to user's needs and identifying solutions to reduce data waste and enhance data use.

User-producer dialogue is also an opportunity for data users to clarify any constraints associated with data production or the quality of the estimates. This might include conversations about data quality, confidentiality, cost, etc⁷. It is important that these limitations are discussed not only for data producers within the National Statistics Office, but also for all other producers within the National Statistical System. This will enable users to tailor their expectations in terms of data releases and interpretation according to quality.

As shown in Box 3, a dialogue does not have to be a stand-alone event. It can be organized along with conferences and workshops, or be institutionalized in the form of a technical committee or focus groups.

⁷ See: https://circabc.europa.eu/sd/a/9dab4cbb-4539-4b35-87a2-68dc5efd6b11/EN_Regional%20Guidelines%20for%20Users-Producers%20Dialogue_HD.pdf

Box 3. Example of user-producer dialogue held in the Maldives

During a user-producer dialogue held in the Maldives in 2019 – which was attended by 55 representatives from the National Statistics Office, various ministries, civil society organizations and media representatives – a discussion was held around the need to prioritize the production of gender data to monitor the SDG indicators. As the Maldives does not yet have a list of national priority SDG indicators, users were asked to complete an online survey and select from a list of gender indicators those that would be most useful for their professional activities. In addition, for each indicator, users were asked to rate whether the data exists in their country and, if so, whether they already use it. The findings from this exercise revealed that:

- Users tend to be widely aware of the existence of data for the more ‘traditional’ indicators, such as poverty rates and women’s representation in government. Thus, some of these indicators were also the most widely used.*
- There is a clear appetite for data on environmental issues from a gender perspective, such as those pertaining to natural disasters and agricultural employment, as well as data on informal employment, access to justice and access to specific health-care services; but the data does not yet exist.*
- There is a degree of misinformation, as many users were under the impression that gender statistics were available for indicators such as the proportion of women living in slums, and the proportion of victims of intimate partner violence in the last 12 months, which were indeed unavailable at the time of the dialogue.*

After this realization, users and producers discussed possible solutions to fill data gaps, address data waste and tackle misinformation. As a result of the dialogue, some solutions were identified as a way forward, including:

- The need to centralize all gender data into a single repository and to enact the National Statistics Law*
 - The need to institutionalize user-producer dialogues so they take place before and after future data production exercises and so the coordination between different data producers is also enhanced*
 - The importance of putting in place better data communication strategies to make the data easily understandable and target different types of users through different formats and platforms*
 - The urgency of localizing the SDG indicators to prioritize gender data production exercises*
 - The importance of organizing data user training periodically, to ensure users know where to find and how to interpret data*
-

3.3 Collaborative agreements

Dialogues of this kind are particularly useful if collaborative agreements are put in place as a result, to resolve some of the issues identified and ensure the dialogues continue taking place periodically. For instance, as a result of a dialogue, a country might decide to create a Gender Data Coordination Group, tasked with examining gender data needs and related changes over time, and assessing related gaps to guide gender data production. One key limitation to the creation of coordination groups are financial constraints to pay for meeting rooms, etc. While this can be partially addressed by holding online discussions to the extent possible, but the allocation of resources to maintain user-producer conversations is recommended. These might not necessarily be financial, but for instance a person or entity might be tasked with organizing the meetings, sending invitations, sharing agendas, taking notes and taking care of other logistics. All of these details can and should be discussed during user-producer dialogues to ensure the continuity and impact of these conversations.

Besides institutionalizing the dialogue process, other forms of collaborative agreements can be set up. For instance, these might have to do with the production or the use of gender data. Namely:

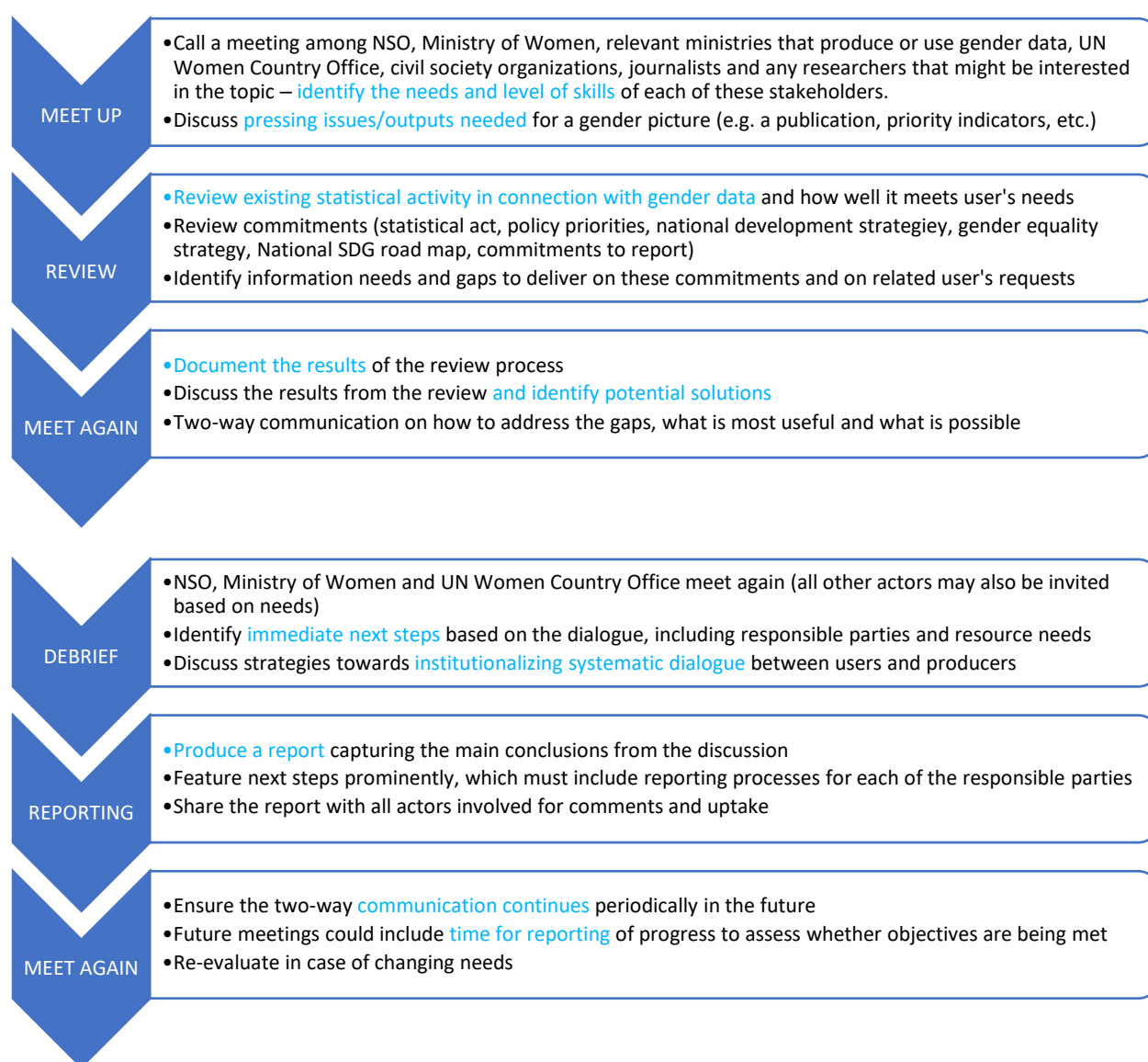
- Gender data production: During the dialogue, it is important to assess if the existing data production processes and institutions are yielding the desirable data and results. Therefore, it would be important to assess the adequacy of the Statistical Act and effectiveness of gender data production processes, while establishing mechanisms to carry out revisions, where needed⁸. In order to accomplish this, it is important to:
 - Document the results of the dialogue and the decisions made in terms of the way forward
 - Identify key actors in charge of implementing different parts of the plan
 - Set up reporting mechanisms to assess progress over time
- Gender data analysis, dissemination and use: One of the key results of a user-producer dialogue is enhanced communication between users and producers. Dialogues might reveal the need for better data communication strategies and statistical products that are better targeted to different audience groups (see Module 10 on Communicating Gender Data for more details on this). Thus, besides identifying what data should be disseminated, the target audience, and their level of skills and needs, it is also important that training emerges as a result of the dialogue. After identifying challenges and limitations on the part of the producers to communicate data effectively, and on the part of the users to interpret and use data successfully, it is important that users and producers establish joint training initiatives. For instance, data producers might organize periodic training for journalists and researchers on where to find and how to interpret and analyse data; while journalists might organize periodic trainings for statisticians on effective ways to communicate data messages.

⁸ See: https://circabc.europa.eu/sd/a/9dab4cbb-4539-4b35-87a2-68dc5efd6b11/EN_Regional%20Guidelines%20for%20Users-Producers%20Dialogue_HD.pdf

4. Organizing a gender-statistics user-producer dialogue: an example

The following steps illustrate the entire process of organizing a gender statistics user-producer dialogue. They have been put together with the purpose of showcasing with a practical example the different steps recommended for such dialogues, and thus the topic for this dialogue is: “How to improve the production and use of gender data?”. In practice, however, the topics selected for user-producer dialogues are often a lot more concrete (e.g. selecting national priority SDG indicators, enhancing the use of disaster statistics, etc.), which makes it easier to identify stakeholders, challenges and solutions.

Figure 5. Example of steps for organizing a user-producer dialogue to enhance the production and use of gender statistics



5. Potential drawbacks of user-producer dialogue

Although user-producer dialogues often result in reinforced communication channels, enhanced data production and use, and better alignment of users and producers' needs, there might be some drawbacks associated with conducting these dialogues, and it is important to raise awareness about these. Notably:

- The timetable for data production, analysis, releases and communications might be lengthened as a result of any adjustments that might be needed for the data product to meet user's needs.
- Conflicting opinions might exist, not only between users and producers, but also between different groups of users that might have different priorities.
- Conducting dialogue with varied groups of users (e.g. beyond government) is extremely relevant to enhance data use. However, it might also yield competing demands.
- User-producer dialogue might raise unrealistic expectations if the limitations (on the producer side) in terms of capacity and what is realistic are not fully explained during the conversation.
- User-producer dialogue might also raise unrealistic expectations if the limitations (on the user side) in terms of user's capacity to find, interpret and use data, if a sincere conversation is not enabled during the dialogue. In other words, it is very important that both users and producers continue engaged through the duration of the dialogue and are empowered to speak openly.
- Dialogue might lead to disappointment when expectations are not met, either on the side of users or producers.

6. KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Users and producers should both be active players in an effective dialogue.*
- *To start a user-producer dialogue, a topic should be selected, all potential stakeholders should be identified and invited, and a preliminary assessment of needs and limitations should be carried out.*
- *Consultations can begin in advance (online or via email) to assess the needs and demands of each of the stakeholders.*
- *Conversations should revolve around identifying solutions for such needs and challenges, although it is important to keep expectations realistic and pace the discussions.*
- *It is important that the results of the user-producer dialogue are recorded and arrangements are made to ensure continuity of the dialogue and resolution of challenges in the long term.*
- *Ensure financial and human resources are allocated as needed for continuity of the conversations and implementation of the results.*
- *Collaborative agreements should be put in place to ensure (1) the continuity of the dialogue, (2) enhanced and better targeted data production, and (3) improved data dissemination strategies.*
- *Training should be one of the key outcomes of the dialogue. While statisticians might consider organizing trainings on how to find, analyse and interpret gender data, they will also want to train statisticians on how to communicate gender data more effectively.*