WHITE PAPER

REIMAGINING DATA TO DRIVE DEVELOPMENT

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DATA FOR ALL

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

In today's data-driven world, leveraging accurate and disaggregated data is essential for driving sustainable development. Countries and organizations require user-friendly, cost-effective tools to track progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national priorities. Community Systems Foundation (CSF) has developed the Data For All (DFA) toolkit to address these needs. These open-source tools are designed for users ranging from field officers to decision-makers and citizens, with no financial burden or steep learning curve.

With tools that specifically track the progress of goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals and priorities like national priorities there will be proper increases in development. Data tools are used by everyone: field officers, analysts, decision makers, and even citizens. To unlock the power of data, tools must be leveraged with a user friendly zero learning curve and no financial burden for usage. The Community Systems Foundation has developed tools under the Data for All (DFA) initiative to respond to these requirements.

However, several challenges remain: data quality issues, fragmented data silos, insufficient data literacy, and limited cross-sector collaboration hinder effective decision-making. To bridge these gaps, the DFA toolkit facilitates comprehensive data collection, disaggregation, dissemination, and monitoring. This white paper highlights the importance of a bottom-up approach, cross-sector dialogue, and capacity-building efforts to ensure that no one is left behind.

Introduction

Data has long been a catalyst for development. Historically, initiatives like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) relied on data to track progress and make informed decisions. However, many developing countries faced significant data access challenges during the MDG era. As the United Nations launched the SDGs, the need for advanced monitoring tools became more urgent, given the expanded set of goals and indicators.

Now, with only five years to 2030, challenges remain, especially in regions with limited digital infrastructure—for example, African countries spend only 1.1% of GDP on internet services compared to significantly higher investments in wealthier nations. Addressing data quality, accessibility, and literacy is essential for meaningful progress toward the SDGs and national priorities.

Unpacking data

How do we define good data?

Good data is data that is accurate, complete, consistent, and timely. Without these qualities, the data disrupts its ability to help development progress. Quality data is essential for progress towards the Global Agenda and national priorities. Incomplete, outdated, and poor quality data lead to poor decision making and deficient tracking of progress. A lack of correct data for decision-making leads to less progress. With the presence of large amounts of data, decision makers can become overwhelmed or confused making them not utilize the data. Even though the needed data may be there, it has become lost. It complicates the decision-making process as there is no high quality data.

Importance of Disaggregated Data

To ensure no one is left behind - a core principle of the Sustainable Development Goals - data must be disaggregated by key factors such as sex, age, race, ethnicity, income, and geography. Disaggregated data allows for the identification of inequalities and ensures marginalized groups are included in decision-making. Without this, the needs of minority populations may be overlooked, leading to incomplete, ineffective or biased policies.

Challenges in collecting quality data

Several barriers hinder the collection of high-quality data:

Fragmented Reporting: Development projects often have bespoke reporting requirements, causing inefficiencies.

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Data Silos: Data stored separately by different organizations limits accessibility and collaboration. Data systems do not talk to each other.

Technological Risks: Data collection technologies may pose privacy and security risks.

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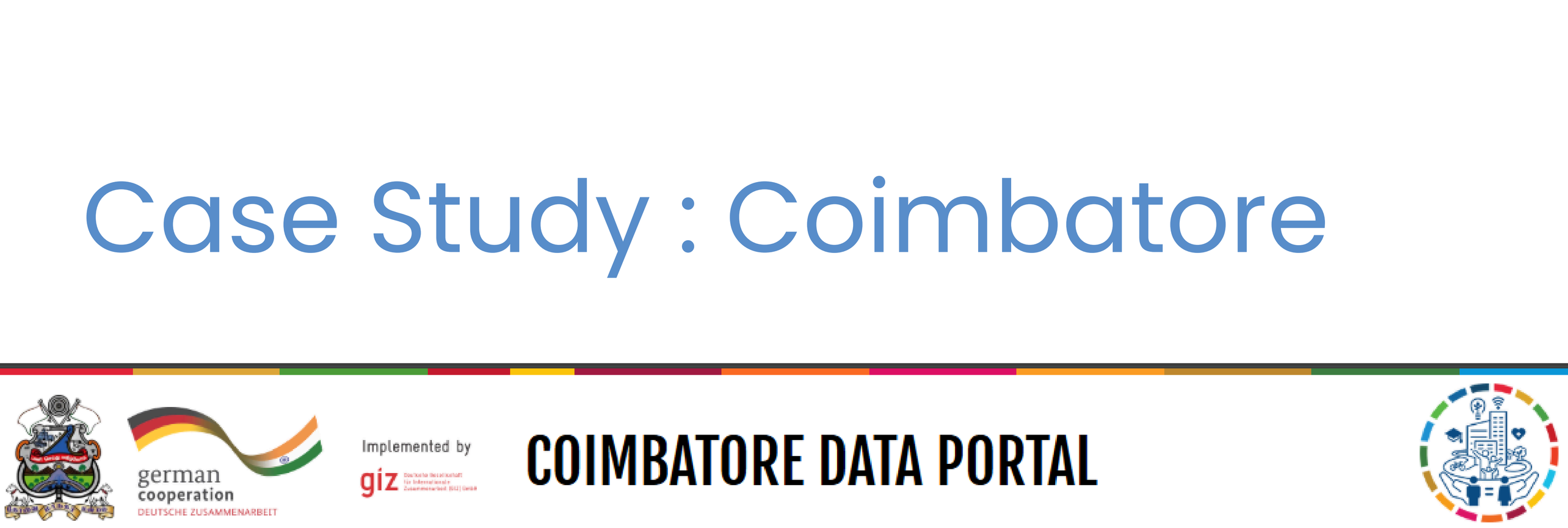
A bottom to top approach

A bottom-up data collection approach ensures that local-level data informs national and global priorities. By analyzing relationships at the local level, stakeholders can uncover hidden trends and understand the full picture. Tools that support unlimited disaggregation over various timeframes and sectors allow for nuanced insights into development progress

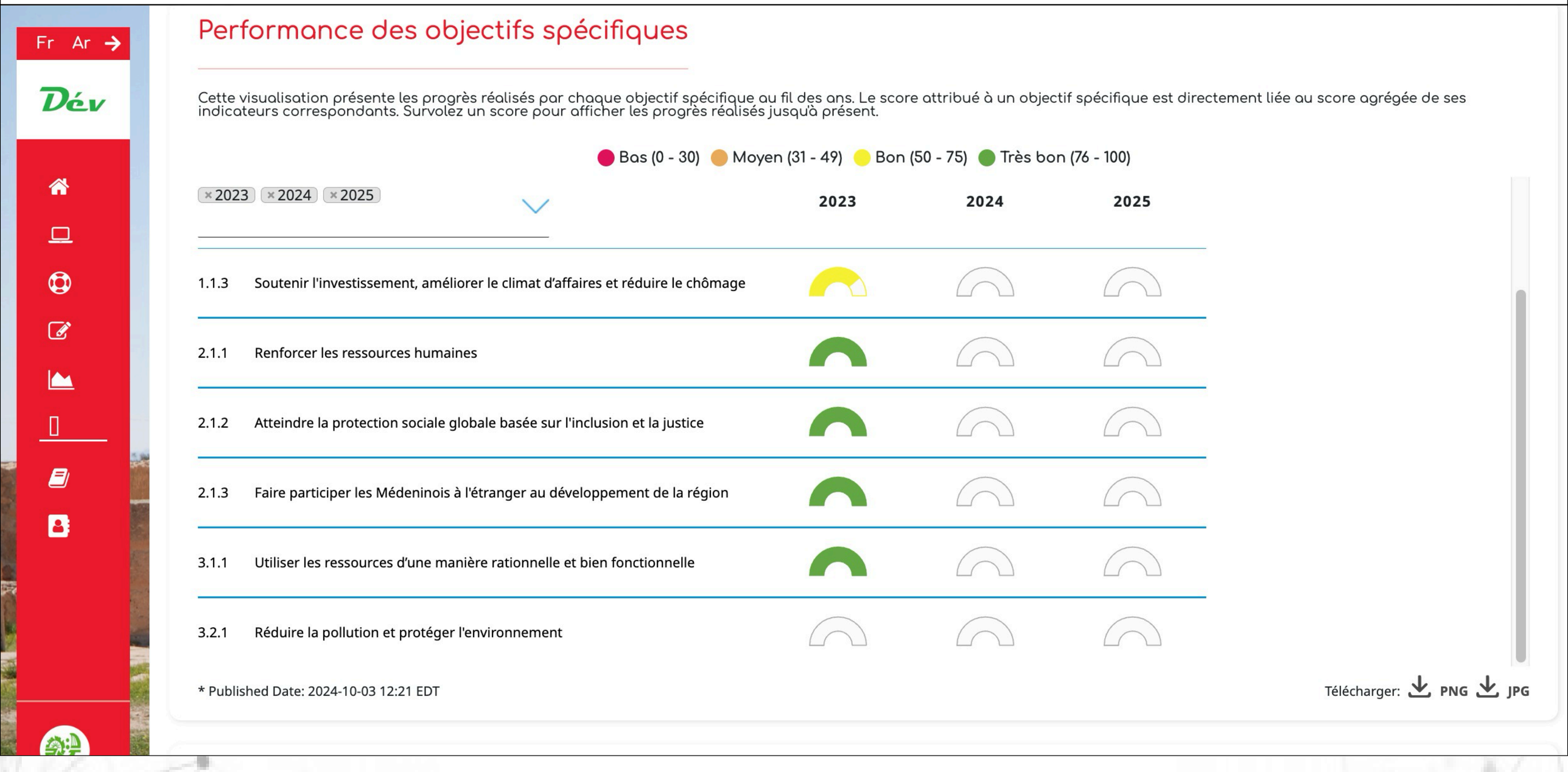
We are showcasing two impactful examples of how the Data For All initiative has strengthened local development efforts across the globe. In India, through a GIZ-supported project in the city of Coimbatore, CSF partnered with the Municipal Corporation to establish an Open SDG Data Portal, enabling better access to local development data. Across the globe in Tunisia, CSF collaborated with the Office de Développement du Sud to design and develop a localized data platform — Développement Sud Tunisie — aimed at advancing evidence-based planning and decision-making at the governorate level.

Case Study : Coimbatore



Coimbatore, localization of SDGs at city level : In Coimbatore, a major city in Tamil Nadu, a comprehensive SDG dashboard has been developed to capture progress on key urban indicators. This dashboard, supported by GIZ, is integrated with a continuously updated data warehouse, serves as an open data portal for the city. Stakeholder collaboration and sectoral coordination have been critical to SDG localization.
Link: https://www.localsdg.in/dashboard/SDGCoimbatore#/

Case Study : Tunisia



Local development Monitoring in a state of Tunisia : In Tunisia's Medenine governorate, DFA tools were implemented with the support of UNDP to monitor local development plans. CSF supported the Southern Development Office (ODS), a public institution that is under the Ministry of Development and International Cooperation of Tunisia. The pilot project demonstrated the potential for scaling across all governorates, helping users visualize indicators and drive local development.

A cross-sector dialogue

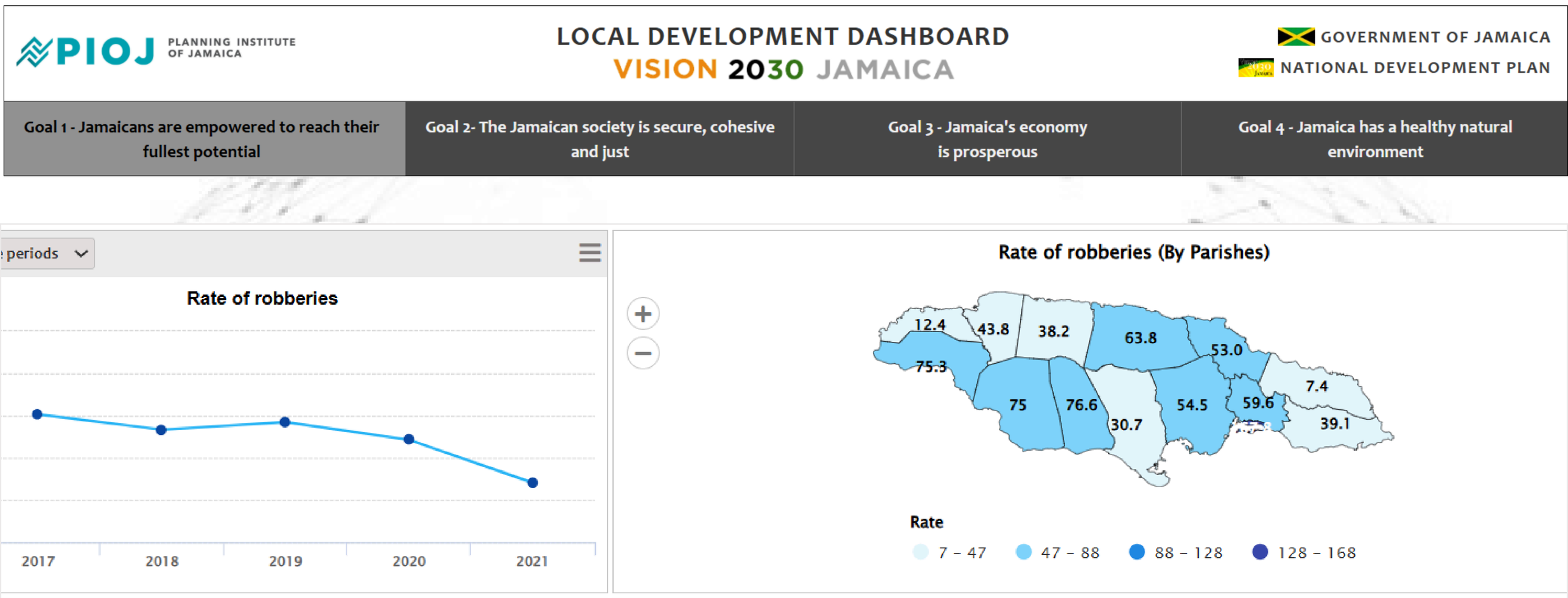
Breaking data silos

Data silos hinder collaboration, creating inconsistencies and reducing data quality. Centralizing data through repositories like data warehouses or data lakes can enhance accessibility and foster collaboration. Cross-sector dialogue helps stakeholders share insights, learn from successes and failures, and align efforts for better development outcomes. Centralized data warehouses break data silos and allow cross-sector data insights, critical to inform the development agenda of a country.

Importance of data portals

Data portals provide centralized access to tools such as visualizers, dashboards, resource libraries and metadata hubs. By customizing portals to reflect specific national or organizational priorities, decision-makers can focus on actionable insights. DFA tools like Dashboard builders allow country teams to design data driven stories for decision makers to understand at a glance key development topics. Mobile applications can further democratize data access, engaging communities and fostering a culture of data-driven decision-making.

Case Study : Jamaica



Jamaica striving to improve user experience: Jamaica's Planning Institute (PIOJ) leveraged DFA tools to monitor Vision 2030, the country's long-term national development plan. An integrated database, Jam Data, allows users to track progress across various sectors. Since 2019, Jamaica's PIOJ team has actively enhanced user experiences and dissemination practices. Users can not only see an impactful collection of thematic dashboards, but also a comprehensive Metadata hub that clearly explains and defines each indicator of the data warehouse. DFA Monitoring is being used to monitor Vision 2030 and the monitoring dashboard is a powerful tool that allows users to see progress aligned to outcomes, SDGs and other key parameters.

Link : https://data4development.gov.jm/

Is data enough to drive development?

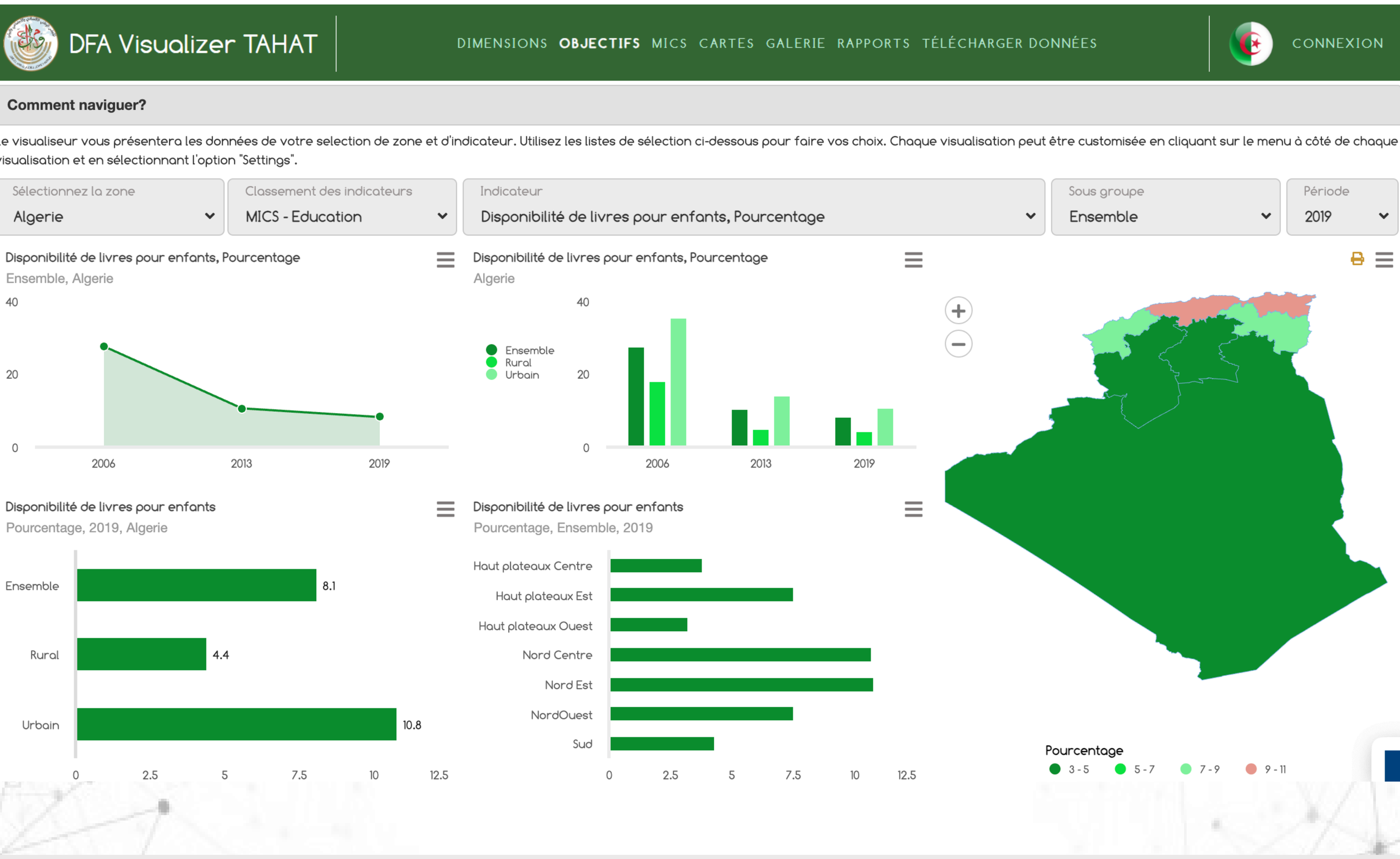
Data Literacy and Capacity Building

Data portals provide centralized access to tools such as visualizers, dashboards, resource libraries and metadata hubs. By customizing portals to reflect specific national or organizational priorities, decision-makers can focus on actionable insights. DFA tools like Dashboard builders allow country teams to design data driven stories for decision makers to understand at a glance key development topics. Mobile applications can further democratize data access, engaging communities and fostering a culture of data-driven decision-making.

Strengthening capacity

Capacity building is at the heart of the Data For All initiative. Technology is a small component of our implementation approach. What matters the most is how well the country team can drive the data initiative through the data portal, and also how comfortable they are to manage their system and use the tools to generate data stories that will empower decision-making. But most importantly, it is also how strong the data dissemination strategy really is so that the data platform is made popular among the data community.

Case Study : Algeria



Strengthening Data Capacity in Algeria: In Algeria, the TAHAT data portal is being actively managed by the National Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CNESE) team, supported by UNICEF. Successful DFA training sessions improved data literacy, dissemination and data management capabilities. CSF customized training modules based on participants' goals, ensuring that users could effectively use tools, to create data stories, and synthesize insights. Today the database has grown to almost 300,000 data points. The team has successfully designed and developed dashboards based on their needs.

Link : https://tahat.cnese.dz/

Conclusions & Recommendations

To drive meaningful development outcomes, stakeholders must:

Practice Data Transparency : End data silos and foster cross-sector collaboration.

Promote Open-Source Solutions: Encourage the adoption of open-source tools for sustainability and cost-efficiency.

Focus on Data Literacy: Build capacity through training programs to empower local stakeholders.

Enhance Data Portals: Centralize data access and improve user experience with customizable portals.

Adopt Bottom-Up Approaches: Utilize localized data to inform national priorities and SDG progress.

By adopting these strategies, countries and organizations can unlock the full potential of data for sustainable development. The DFA initiative stands ready to support this transformation.

Contact us to learn more about how DFA tools can drive data-driven decisions in your country or organization.

You can access the entire toolkit on our portal : https://dataforall.org