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Business leads data revolution

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WHILE the private sector has been the driving force behind the data revolution, now is the time for governments and public institutions and national official statistics systems must get involved.

This was the view expressed by Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Alicia Barcena prior to the start of the Cartagena Data Festival in Colombia.

The festival began yesterday and ends tomorrow. In a statement, Barcena observed, "Up to now the private sector has led the data revolution thanks to its investment in infrastructure and, especially, due to its ability to innovate and generate, store and process large amounts of new data."

However she observed, "On a social level, there is an urgent need to give more opportunities to empowered citizens — who demand reliable and open information in real time — so they can keep contributing to the creation of innovative solutions to social problems."

Against this background, Barcena said, "Governments, public institutions and national official statistics systems must get involved, adapting their capacities promptly." She added, "This is an opportunity to obtain new tools to facilitate decision-making and guide an inclusive and sustainable development agenda." Barcena observed that in addition to the traditional sources of data and indicators — such as censuses and polls by national official statistics systems — "other sources have emerged, boosted by information and communications technologies (ICT), the massive use of mobile devices, the Internet of Things and the digital economy."

Stating these factors have given rise to "Big Data," Barcena said, "Big Data goes beyond computer systems that store sizeable volumes and new types of information." She further stated, "It is part of a new digital ecosystem. Its use, through analytical tools for structured and unstructured data, allows for improved decision-making in critical areas of development, such as health care, employment, productivity, crime-fighting, security and natural disaster management."

Saying the main challenge for any society is to convert the data revolution into a powerful catalyst for a new State-market-society equation, with new alliances between governments, the private sector, academia and civil society organisations, Barcena said, "It is also fundamental that innovative initiatives are promoted in the framework of the new digital ecosystem and the sustainable development agenda for the common good."

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