

On April 30th, 2019, The Spindle, in collaboration with the [Humanity Hub](#), organised Future Session #3 of the year about the Data Journey Methodology. The session was facilitated by not-for-profit [Akvo](#), which supports organisations with data tools and services. The workshop featured an overview of the data process and two interactive exercises. The participants worked on solutions to their data related challenges, with the data journey methodology in mind.

The data process is often extensive and hard for many to grasp. This introductory session zoomed out on the entire data journey and shed light on questions such as: what steps can and should we take to improve the effective use of data to contribute to positive impact in our programmes?

### The data journey methodology

The session started with a presentation outlining the importance of looking at the entire data process, and not just the often over focused phases of capturing and analysing the data. What do we want to measure? What actors do we involve? How are we going to manage the data? And so on, all important questions to focus on. To structure the data process Akvo outlined their data journey methodology, which breaks the entire process down in four core phases – **design, capture, understand, act** – and various sub-steps in each of these phases. This is an iterative process in which each of these phases must be addressed in order to create an efficient data (and information) flow and optimal results. Akvo walked us through these phases, and outlined what to focus on to improve. An in-depth open-source document outlining this methodology can be found on [Akvopedia](#).

### What can we learn from this methodology?

After the presentation the participants worked together and mapped and discussed challenges and potential solutions for their data processes.



### Focusing on your own data problems

In the interactive part of this month’s future session, participants placed their own data and information related problems on various white boards that were marked according to Akvo’s ‘Design, Capture, Understand, Act’ data journey. Most of the perceived problems (the pink post-its) were, rather surprisingly predominantly placed on the ‘design’ and ‘capture’ canvasses. In the design phase participants struggled with questions such as ‘how to account for forms of power exercised by

foreign powers'? 'How to prevent bias'? And 'how do we train people to gather data'? In terms of capturing, the issues raised included: how do we make sure everyone understands the questions correctly? How to include unforeseen results and how do we capture enough data?

After a more detailed presentation of the phases and the corresponding steps in Akvo's Data Journey model, participants mapped solutions to their own problems (the yellow post-its). This resulted in a plenary discussion in which Akvo guided us along some key tips & tricks for an effective data journey. In many cases we discovered the importance of linkages between steps in the four phases.

### **Key learnings**

- Involve important stakeholders early on in a participatory design. This can mitigate risks of people feeling left out and increase the quality of your outcome in the Act phase (i.e. take action based on data).
- Check you assumptions and possible biases.
- Look at legislations for data capturing to know what is possible in terms of data collection.
- Realize that lots of data might be already out there, conduct data research guided by a specific question.
- Agree on definitions so that you know which data you can and cannot use and know what it is you are capturing and using.
- Think backwards, in the Design phase focus on the key success factors in the Act phase.
- Collaborate with others to improve your data process and data quality.
- Data quality is a red thread: e.g. did you design for high quality data, optimise data collection, have skills to be able to deliver high quality data analysis?
- Involve data scientists in the design phase as they will not be able to solve your design flaws later.
- Share your data (but structure it) if at all possible to help others out and save costs.

An in-depth open-source document outlining this methodology can be found on [Akvopedia](#). For more information on Akvo, see [www.akvo.org](http://www.akvo.org).