

Sub-Saharan Africa: Graduate students using DevInfo for their on-field research (03 October 2012)

While summer is often synonymous with relaxation, millions of graduate students pack their bags each year and travel to developing nations in order to conduct field research projects. These trips offer rich opportunities for future development actors to get better acquainted with their area of interest and to add a human dimension to topics discussed earlier in their classrooms.

Safety and homesickness are the usual challenges, but organizing the extensive amount of information necessary to successfully complete their development projects can also be quite daunting for many students. A tool like [DevInfo](#), which manages and visualizes socioeconomic data from more than 130 countries and regions, is ideal for this task.

DevInfo not only provides an opportunity to find socio-economic data on specific countries, but it also enables the creation of a database that helps store and visualize that information. The DevInfo Support Group spoke with two students about their respective projects and provided them with some advice on the tools available to help in their research.

1. Guillaume Kroll, M.S. Student, New York University



"This summer, I headed to Malawi to participate in a global research on informal savings practices in developing countries. In order to draw reliable information from the sampling I am working on, it is very important that I gain a thorough understanding of the nature and the components of the Malawian society. Statistics such as population repartition by age group, marital status, literacy rate, and area of living are of a valuable assistance to structure my research and disclose differences between the various groups' savings practices (Old vs Young, Married vs Single, Literate vs Illiterate, Rural vs Urban, etc...)"

Since Guillaume's research focuses on a singular country, it was important for him to access sub-national level information in order to gauge geographical discrepancies between Malawi's three regions (and 28 districts).

Prior to his trip, he found [Malawi CensusInfo](#), a database released in 2012 that contains 56 indicators, including "Population by urban/rural," "Annual Growth Rate," and "Mean Age at First Marriage." When Guillaume wanted to create a map to display which districts have the highest and lowest "Literacy Rate for both sexes," he could do so in under a minute:



Guillaume spent two and a half months researching savings and lending practices in rural Malawi. Acknowledging the risks of drawing conclusions for the entire country when most of his research took place in the central region, he used statistics from DevInfo - such as urban/rural repartition, literacy rates, or age groups - to make some assumptions and recommendations on whether his findings could be extended to other regions of the country.

He can now create a [DevInfo Admin](#) database and enter the information he collected. He can determine if he wants to organize that information by sector (e.g. education, type of lending practice...) and associate each data point with a specific area. Once the database is created, he can access it through [DevInfo User](#) and create customizable graphs/maps to insert in his thesis report.



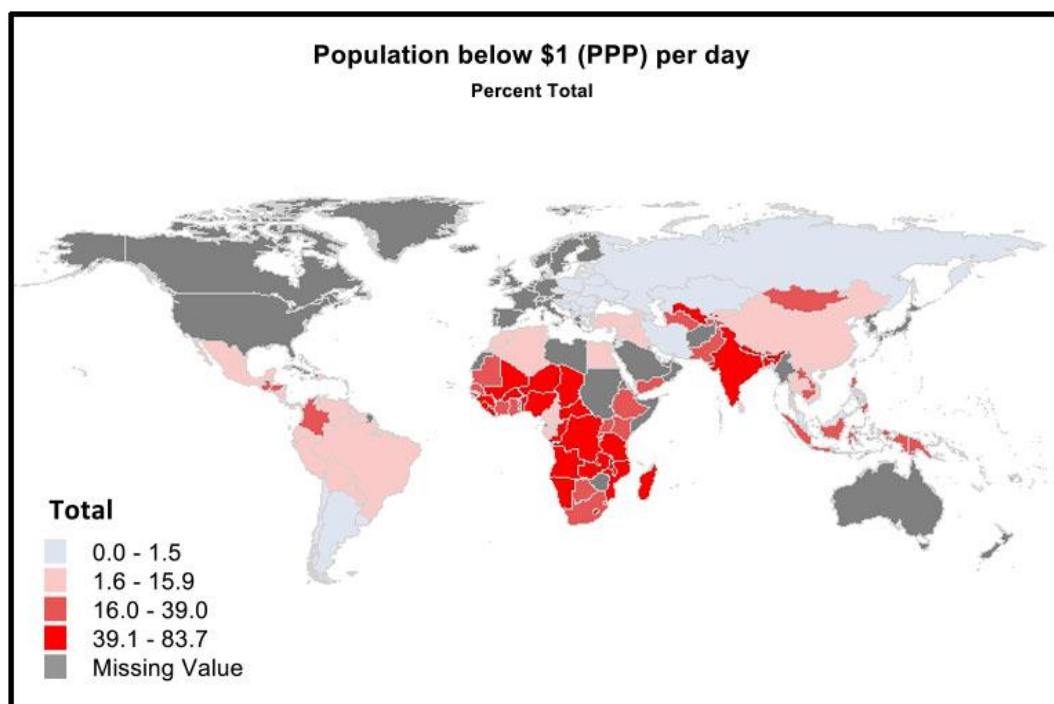


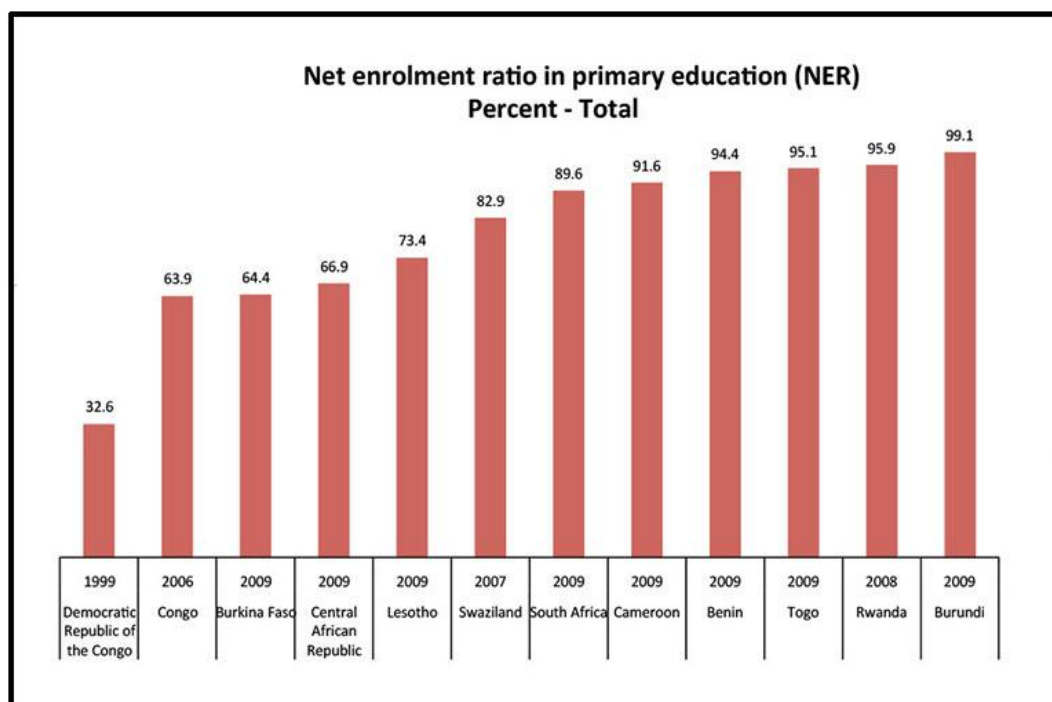
2. Katrin Wittig, PhD Student, Université de Montréal



"I am conducting research on conflict resolution as well as the promotion of democracy and development in post-conflict countries. Finding data, in general, and comparable data, in particular, is a big challenge. In my dissertation, I intend to compare several African countries. In the long-term, it would be especially interesting to get time series data across many years to see how conflict and governance, for example, impact human development indicators, such as poverty (e.g. number of people living below the \$1 per day), education (e.g. net enrolment in primary education) or unemployment (e.g. youth unemployment)."

Katrin is primarily interested in comparing nations. To that end, she accessed the global DevInfo databases – [Millennium Development Goals 2011](#) and the [State of the World's Children 2012](#) – to browse for relevant indicators.





Katrin now has human development indicators readily available to easily compare them across countries and create tables to visualize that comparison.

When she goes in the field for her research, she will be able to determine her indicators (either ones that already exist or ones that she can create) and to build a database to observe their evolution throughout time based on specific countries and subregions.

The DevInfo Support Group team wishes Guillaume and Katrin the best of luck in their respective research projects.

For more information, contact the DevInfo Support Group at support@devinfo.info.