

Summary of FOC member's comments on the HLP Report

30 October 2013

Introduction

The members of the Friends of the Chair Group on Broader Measures of Progress (FOC Group) were requested in July 2013 to review the report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP Report).¹ The group was asked to analyze the statistical implications of this report and to comment especially on the proposals regarding statistics (pages 23-24) and on the capability of the statistical system to measure the proposed targets (pages 30-56). The following 17 countries and organizations sent their feedback, with many providing a detailed and in-depth analysis: Australia, Botswana, Cameroon, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, Jamaica, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Sweden, United Kingdom, Eurostat, OECD, Paris 21 and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

A Universal post-2015 agenda...

FOC Members welcome the *HLP Report* as a basis for discussion on a post-2015 framework. They agree with the notion that the new framework should aim at both finishing the job of the MDGs (i. e. eradicating extreme poverty) and going beyond the MDGs in the direction of a universal post-2015 agenda. Nevertheless, achieving it will be challenging in the light of the parallel SDG process. In the background of these two processes, different sets of “universal goals” have been put forward by the High Level Panel, the Sustainable Development Solution Network and others, while specific “themes” are being discussed by the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals that is advancing the implementation of the RIO+20 declaration. While there is much in common among goals/themes, there are also some differences. Therefore, the FOC members recommend that these different frameworks converge at an early stage, and ideally before entering discussion of targets and indicators.

...yet reflecting countries specificities

However, the FOC Members note that even if the twelve goals proposed by the *HLP Report* are universal, the associated targets do not fit all countries around the world. Indeed, countries face global challenges that need to be dealt with at a global level. Nevertheless they also have regional, national and local specificities that need to be taken into account. For instance, concerning “End

¹ *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development* (HLP Report), High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, May 2013, available at: <http://www.un.org/sg/management/beyond2015.shtml>.

poverty”, the targets may differ from one country to another according to the level of development. Therefore, the FOC members suggest more flexibility at the national level. Some members of the group propose a two level approach to goal-setting, combining a small set of global goals reflecting universally-agreed outcomes, with more specific targets and indicators, reflecting countries’ specific level of development, context, responsibility and capacity. This would avoid repeating situations in which developed, emerging and developing countries find themselves in opposition because some targets are not relevant to all of them. The FOC Group recommends that the process, which will lead to the establishment of the national targets and indicators, should be transparent and visible to everybody.

A global Partnership on Development data under the auspices of the UN Statistical Commission

The FOC Group very much agrees with the emphasis given by the *HLP Report* to the importance of a data revolution (involving “government statistical offices, international organizations, civil society organizations, foundations and the private sector”) to improve the quality of statistics and information available to citizens and to set up what is called a Global Partnership on Development Data to make this happen. Indeed, since one cannot manage what one cannot measure, high quality statistics are essential to guide public action. Yet a data revolution may mean different things for countries in different stages of statistical development. FOC members also stress that a data revolution should focus on more than just data delivery. It should also include investment in the development of concepts, measurement frameworks, classifications and standards. The FOC members recognize that Open Data, Big Data, geographical information systems are new data mines that could give the opportunity to produce cost-effective statistics. However they recommend closely evaluating the risk these new data represent when they are used as information sources for monitoring the strategy. The FOC Group recommends that new production from new data sources should meet the requirements and quality standards of official statistics. Since the role of official statisticians is crucial in developing a common measurement system based upon statistics produced by each country, the FOC Group proposes that the Global Partnership on Development Data should be led by the official statistical system under the auspices of the UN Statistical Commission. The aim of this Partnership should be to identify and fill critical statistical gaps, expand data accessibility and galvanize international efforts to ensure a baseline of post 2015 targets will be in place in January 2016. The Partnership would need to be properly resourced and provided with an appropriate governance structure to ensure that the desired objectives can be reached. The FOC Group members recommend to make use of the UN’s five regional commissions as part of coordinating mechanisms and of existing partnerships.

Add a target to Goal “Good Governance” relating to the development of official statistics

Due to this critical role of the official statistical system in government accountability, the FOC Group strongly advocates that an effective official statistical system be included as a target in its own right, with an appropriate set of measures to be developed. Such a target should be added to Goal 10 - “Ensure Good Governance and Effective Institutions”. This would hopefully underline the importance of statistics in the minds of policy makers and ensure that financial support will be granted for the achievement of this target.

Consult the official statisticians before agreeing on a set of targets

The FOC Members note that the illustrative goals and targets in the *HLP Report* are extremely ambitious from a measurement perspective and would require significant investment even for the more statistically advanced countries. There is both a need to extend official statistics to new areas, such as governance and to propose indicators according to different relevant social groups (by income, gender, geography, disability, and other categories) to make sure that no group is being left behind. Few countries come close to meet this ambition. While a political demand may help move towards that goal, progress can only be incremental. This practical consideration underscores the importance of consulting the official statisticians before a set of targets is agreed, so as to assess the feasibility of developing indicators pertaining to them. This should be taken into consideration when establishing a common measurement instrument based on comparable definitions and classifications, to monitor the agreed universal goals. From this point of view, the FOC Group welcomes the recommendation of the *HLP Report* to adopt the framework of the UN’s System of Environmental Economic Accounting and the inclusion of the target to publish and use economic, social and environmental accounts under Goal 9 - “Manage Natural Resource Assets Sustainability”.

Take advantage and do not start from scratch

FOC members often mention their experience in measuring progress and sustainability and their willingness to share it. The FOC Group invites the statistical community to take full advantage of the experience gained from the EU2020 target/indicator setting. Among the lessons learned, it was stressed that the universal goals and targets should be translated into national targets and that each country needs to have ownership of their own data. This will require that the National Strategies for Statistical Development and other national and regional initiatives in the statistical areas be aligned to the requirements of the post-2015 development agenda. In the same way, the FOC Group invites the statistical community to take into account the framework to measure sustainable development proposed by a Joint UNECE/OECD/Eurostat Working Group and endorsed by the Conference of

European Statisticians in June 2013. This framework distinguishes the “here and now”, “later” and “elsewhere” dimensions. Some of the FOC group regret particularly that the international dimension of sustainable development (“elsewhere”) is completely lacking in the *HLP Report*, especially when assessing the global problems of climate change and biodiversity losses and the impact a country has on the well-being of the rest of the world. Some members remark that no targets concern subjective well-being, and more generally, people’s self-reporting on their conditions and aspirations, while the *HLP Report* emphasizes that the post-2015 agenda framework should be grounded in the voice of people. Similarly, some of the FOC Group propose that a target on housing conditions should be added to Goal 1 -“End of poverty” and a target on waste management and recycling to the Goal 9 “Manage natural resource assets sustainability”. Demographic changes and international flows of migration seem not sufficiently addressed although being quite relevant for the sustainability issues.