

**Global Conference on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics  
Towards a Strategic Framework for Statistics in Support of the Post-2015  
Development Agenda**

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***Session 4: Means of Implementation***

***Means of implementation for the post-2015 development agenda***

***Prepared by Mohamed Taamouti***



# **Global Conference on a Transformative Agenda**

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#### **1. Introduction**

The business of statistics production is undergoing a major transition driven by the conjunction of several developments that raise many challenges but at the same time offer many opportunities. The community of official statisticians is naturally at the core of this transition and is expected to lead it by reconsidering the way statistics are collected, processed and released. The community has started for a while to prepare for this change but the approaching post 2015 Agenda puts it under pressure to accelerate the process. During the last months several working groups have been established under different auspices and many papers and reports have been produced and published.

Seizing the opportunities and facing the new challenges requires a more efficiently functioning national statistical system. The usual way of running business is not appropriate for making transition from the existing to modern national statistical systems that can meet the requirements in terms of producing and reporting data for the post-2015 development agenda and providing information for decision-making.

At the international level, there is a clear need to rethink the current architecture of statistical management, coordination, advocacy and fund raising. It is necessary to articulate an advocacy strategy that maintains the political momentum of high interest in the availability of better data and mobilizes domestic and external resources.

The international statistical community is aware of the magnitude of the task, the urgency to deliver results and the professional responsibility to guarantee success. It is also aware of constantly shrinking financial resources for statistical work at country, regional and international levels. It is therefore important to assure that the preparatory process for the transition is well planned and designed.

Following several meetings, working groups and reports, the Global Conference on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics is a further step in the process. It seeks to formulate an adequate response to the requirements of the transition and more generally propose solutions on how the business of statistics production should be adjusted or redesigned. The agenda of the conference is articulated into four sessions:

- New requirements from policy demands for the global statistical system;

- Modern statistical production processes based on common statistical business architecture;
- Innovations in data collection, data dissemination, data access and data analytics;
- Means of implementation.

The present note is produced to serve as a background material for the 4th session of the Conference dedicated to discuss means of implementation. The main topics to be covered in this session include (i) Resource mobilization for capacity building; (ii) Partnership within statistics and between statistics and others; (iii) Coordination of statistical activities; (iv) taking flagship initiatives further.

The paper's aim is not to provide solutions to the new challenges facing implementation but to prepare the ground for the debate on this crucial dimension of the transition. It builds on insights from past experiences and draws extensively from different reports and papers produced recently. It further raises some questions to guide the debate on the appropriate architecture, and sometimes challenges the already proposed solutions. It does not seek to be comprehensive, the institutions and initiatives cited are either core or important with a wide scope or simply considered as examples for illustration.

The paper is organized in three main sections. The first reviews briefly the evolution of statistical capacity development since the beginning of the millennium. The second presents the main driving factors of the transition and why we should rethink the way of doing business. The third presents some facts and issues on the coordination of statistical activity at the national and international levels; summarizes the main suggested ideas into different reports and papers. It then raises some questions on the criteria that should guide the process of implementing the new way of doing business particularly concerning international coordination.

## **2. Statistical capacity since the new millennium: an important but insufficient progress**

The statistical capacity building has been for many years an important component of development strategies, helping monitor and assess progress. In developing countries, statistical development was a major challenge that many national authorities struggled with despite significant aid from international agencies and donors. Further to being costly and heavily demanding in terms of skills and resources, statistics production suffers from low level of awareness of the benefits of evidence-based decision making, and is hence lagging behind and out of the agenda of priorities in many developing countries.

The launch of the Millennium Development Goals drew attention to the need for strengthening statistical systems to monitor progress and brought statistical capacity building in developing countries on the agenda of the development community. The improvement in the ability of national statistical systems to provide data directly over the past fifteen years has been one of the greatest achievements of MDG agenda, and reflects in fact the tremendous effort of many national and international organizations under the leadership of the United Nations.

Despite this progress the picture is still poor. The Task Team on Lessons Learned from MDG Monitoring of the IAEG-MDG states in its Report that “Although we have seen improvement, the statistical capacity in many countries is still limited. Data availability and data quality still remain a big challenge for the MDG monitoring. In addition, the time lag between data collection and data dissemination is normally 2-3 years for most MDG indicators, which affects accountability and policy making.” The report does not unfortunately shed light on issues of means of implementation for MDGs that would have served as lessons for shaping the post 2015 statistical framework.

Considering 55 core MDG indicators and 155 developing countries, the report of Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development (IEAG) shows that over the period 1990-2013, there is no five-year period when the availability of data is more than 70% of what is required. If we consider only data produced at the national level this proportion falls to less than 35%. It also states that “too many countries still have poor data, data arrives too late and too many issues are still barely covered by existing data. For example, in several countries data on employment are notoriously unreliable, data on age and disability are routinely not collected and a great deal of data is difficult to access to citizens or is not available until several years have passed since the time of collection”.

On another hand, UNICEF estimated in 2013, that worldwide about 35% of all live births were not officially registered. The proportion of unregistered births increases in the least developed countries to 62%.

In the “the Road map for a country led data revolution”, the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) indicates that “While there have certainly been major improvements in the capacity of statistical systems in developing countries since the launch of the MDG in 2000, the evidence compiled through this project and from other sources indicates that many problems remain”.

Taking into consideration these facts and the new challenges that are lying ahead (the following section), it is clear that business as usual will not be very helpful and that there is a need to rethink the way the whole system at national, regional and international levels works. This is in particular true for the IDA (developing) countries which risk to be left further behind given their current level of capacities and the immense increase in data demand.

### **3. The driving forces of the transition**

For many years, the need in terms of statistics has been growing and diversifying. The demand was driven by the increasing awareness of the benefits of evidence-based decision making in terms of cost saving and results. During recent years, the statistics production landscape has been marked by significant changes that indicate that we are on the verge of a new era of statistical production. Several developments are making supply and demand explode offering many opportunities but also raising many challenges. These new trends require not only developing new methodologies and techniques for data production, but also require a complete review of the way business is done in terms of organization and

coordination at the national and international levels. The main driving forces of this transition are the quick development of ICT that translates sometimes in huge quantities of data ( Big Data), the many new fields on which statistical production is asked to move, the increasing needs for more data and easier accessibility, etc. However, the major development is obviously the Post 2015 Agenda.

In its report to the Secretary-General on May 30 2013, the High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda recommends that any new goals should be accompanied by an independent and rigorous monitoring system, with regular opportunities to report on progress and shortcomings at a high political level. It called for a data revolution for sustainable development, with a new international initiative to improve the quality of statistics and information available to citizens.

The IEAG established following these recommendations, states in its report that it is quite clear that the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will require substantial additional investment in order to consolidate gains made during the MDG era and to develop reliable, high-quality data on a range of new subjects, such as climate risk mitigation or inequality, ensuring that no groups are excluded, and with an unprecedented level of detail.

In its draft report, the Friends of the Chair Group on broader measures of progress (FOC) states that “overall, it has been concluded in last year’s report by the FOC to the Commission that the monitoring of the post-2015 development agenda as currently manifested in the goals and targets proposed by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) would pose a significant challenge for even the most advanced statistical systems. Statistical systems in many developing countries will have great difficulties to comply with the expected new requirements.”

Moreover, the draft report of the United Nations Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics to the UNSC 2015 indicates that “official statisticians may be asked more frequently to validate information provided by the market. It was emphasized that the statistical community should remain acutely aware of its mission, namely to provide high quality and impartial information on relevant topics to the society at large and to policy makers in particular. Innovation is crucial and the statistical community should embrace it, but the traditional core business will remain and is still needed. For instance, results from Big Data applications will need to be benchmarked, and traditional surveys will be needed to provide those benchmarks” and that “efforts should be made to link the use of Big Data to the Post-2015 development agenda and its sustainable development goals, as these will pose huge demands on the statistical systems for years to come”.

#### **4. Emerging initiatives and proposals for the transition**

In view of the state of statistical capacity in developing countries, and taking into consideration the many ongoing and coming challenges discussed in the previous sections, mainly facing the post 2015 Agenda requirements, it is obvious that the current national and

international architecture and level of resourcing for data collection are not adequate for the task at hand.

At the national level, it is necessary to galvanize policy makers to strengthen the institutional frameworks of the national statistical systems and mobilize additional resources. At the international level, it is important to mobilize regional and international agencies and the donor community, but also to address the coordination of statistical efforts for more efficiency and avoid overlapping initiatives and projects.

#### **4.1 Some issues on the way business is carried out**

##### **4.1.1 At the national level**

In its report on the road to data revolution PARIS 21 states that while many national statistical agencies are able to adopt international standards and follow good practices, they have limited ability to promote the use of these standards by other agencies and to coordinate statistical activities across the national statistical system. The problem with the National Statistical Offices (NSO) is that they do not have the means of their strategies. They know what is good for statistical production and use and have a global view at the national level but for implementing their strategies and ideas, they depend on other components of the national statistical system and most importantly they need to convince to get the necessary resources, in particular from the finance ministries.

Further to funding, the role of the international community in this regard is important. As PARIS 21 has been doing for the last 15 years it can help develop advocacy strategies. This has yielded important results but more is still needed. In fact international institutions can help directly but also indirectly. The example of the Regional Multilateral Banks is interesting. They provide loans and grants to national line ministries and in particular to Finance ministries. They can also advocate for statistics and can even require that a fraction of their funding goes to data. This is an important channel that provides a great needed support to NSO at the national level. Another example is given by the European Commission in its relationships with its southern neighbors. It requires to include the statistical systems in the process of institutional convergence and dedicates a fraction of its grants to statistical capacity building and institutional frameworks strengthening.

##### **4.1.2. At the international and regional level**

At the international level, there is a large number of stakeholders, sometimes with apparently overlapping missions and an unknown number of global and regional initiatives, projects and partnerships. It is difficult to establish a comprehensive who's who list in the field of coordination and management of statistical activity.

Some efforts are devoted to “coordinate the coordinators” and the question of the cost of coordination should be raised. This is something that the proposed High Level Group on Statistical Capacity Development could take up (see below in section 4.3).

Despite the efforts of PARIS 21, it is difficult to know how much money is raised. Statistics that serve for evidence-based policy are in fact unable to measure themselves; even its capacity development lacks a clear yardstick despite the efforts devoted by the World Bank in this regard. This is may be the Paradox of statistics.

The UN system is of course at the core of the system with at the center UNSC and UNSD but also with 5 regional commissions; 8 programs and funds; and 10 specialized agencies and related organizations. The Statistical Commission, with the UNSD as its secretariat is the leading entity of the global statistical system and the intergovernmental focal point for the elaboration and review of the indicators used in the United Nations system. The Commission and its working mechanisms will obviously guide and lead the response to the statistical needs arising from the post-2015 development agenda.

Another major stakeholder is the World Bank with several programs and initiatives including International comparison program but also as an important donor. The Bank also maintains since many years now a Bulletin Board on Statistical Capacity which provides information on various aspects of national statistical systems of developing countries, including a country-level statistical capacity indicator. IMF is also a key component of the landscape with its data dissemination standards and its technical work developing methodologies for the monetary and financial statistics.

At the regional level many institutions are working in the domain for capacity building and data production. In Africa for example, the African Development Bank contribution to Statistical Capacity Building includes (i) Coordination of the Implementation of the Reference Regional Strategic Framework for Statistical Capacity Building in Africa (RRSF); (ii) Implementing the International Comparison Program (iii) support to Statistical Training Centers in Africa, etc.

Besides, there are many initiatives and partnerships; one of the most important of which is PARIS 21. It was set up in 1999, to help monitor several high-profile initiatives, in particular improving statistical capacity in developing countries to monitor the MDG. It was conceived as a partnership to bring together statisticians, analysts, policy-makers, and both bilateral and multilateral donors to discuss how to tackle the multiple obstacles to better data and statistics. In 2004, it launched the guidelines for National Strategies for the Development of Statistics, strategic frameworks for medium- to long-term planning in statistical activities. It took on two satellite programs jointly managed with the World Bank – the International Household Survey Network in 2004 and the Accelerated Data Program in 2006. PARIS21 has also a mandate as the Secretariat for Busan Action Plan for Statistics (BAPS). More recently its focus turned to a project on “Informing a Data Revolution” to develop a road map that will make the case for a data revolution in developing countries.

In terms of initiatives and frameworks a large number has been launched at both the global and regional levels and with sectoral or general scope. After the 2004 Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics (MAPS), PARIS21, the World Bank and other partners proposed the BAPS. This Plan updates the priorities and work of the MAPS, and places special emphasis on (i) integrating national statistical activities with national planning and development; (ii)



supporting greater transparency and openness, and (iii) promoting the use of new methods and technologies. It is organized around five actions that support those three objectives:

- strengthen and refocus national and regional statistical strategies with particular emphasis on improving statistical systems that address country-level development priorities;
- implement standards for data preservation, documentation, and dissemination that permit full, open public access to statistics;
- develop programs to increase the knowledge and skills needed to use statistics effectively for planning, analysis, monitoring and evaluation;
- build and maintain results monitoring instruments to track outcomes of all global summits and high level forums; and
- ensure financing for statistical information is robust and that funding instruments and approaches reflect the new modalities and actors in development finance.

## **4.2 Main emerging proposals**

As the deadline for the MDG agenda and the establishment of the Post 2015 framework approaches, the development and statistics communities are ebullient preparing this important transition. In the domain of statistical production and management, a large number of proposals and initiatives have been proposed by different stakeholders and at different levels (national, regional and global). It is very difficult to enumerate all these initiatives and it is not the purpose of this paper. Hereafter we underscore some of those with the largest scope initiated at the global level.

The UN Secretary-General Post-2015 Agenda report sets the scene with the following general recommendations and commitments:

Under the auspices of the UNSC, a comprehensive program of action on data should be established. This includes the building of a global consensus, applicable principles and standards for data, a web of data innovation networks to advance innovation and analysis, a new innovative financing stream to support national data capacities, and a global data partnership to promote leadership and governance.

catalyze a multi-stakeholder Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, to mobilize and coordinate the actions required to make the data revolution serve sustainable development, promoting initiatives such as the holding of inclusive ‘World Fora on Sustainable Development Data’.

Following this general recommendation, many proposals emerged among which the IEAG proposal to establish a UN-led “Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data” to mobilize and coordinate the actions and institutions. Taking into account these recommendations, the draft Report of the FOC recommends more explicitly:

- to create an Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDG) tasked to develop an indicator framework for the monitoring of the goals and targets of the post-

- 2015 development agenda within a very short timeframe, to guide its implementation and to report on progress towards these goals and targets on global and regional level.
- to create a High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity Building for post-2015 (HLG for post-2015 monitoring) monitoring to discuss strategies and activities for statistical capacity building, in particular for post-2015 monitoring and their possible coordination and to address the issue of funding for statistics.
  - to establish under the umbrella of the UNSC a biennial “World Forum on Sustainable Development Data” with possible regional and country level events to bring together public and private data producers and users to discuss the latest data innovations and their potential use in post-2015 monitoring.

To take advantage from the already existing mechanism, the FOC recommends that the IAEG-SDG and HLG for post-2015 monitoring actively seek input from the various groups working on the modernization of statistics which are expected to continue their important work. The FOC proposes the following ToR for the HLG for post-2015 monitoring:

- Discuss strategies and activities for statistical capacity building;
- Develop proposals and advocate for resource mobilization and their management and monitoring;
- Review and make recommendations, on the issue of cross-country data infrastructures to exploit the possibilities of new technologies;
- Mobilize institutions inside and outside the statistical community, and if required, coordinate their actions to serve sustainable development as deemed appropriate, hereby further extending the partnership

It is proposed that the Group bring together existing joint initiatives for statistical capacity and technical assistance such as the ones taking place under PARIS 21, the Memorandum of Understanding of the Development Banks with the United Nations on the Cooperation on statistical activities and other coordination and cooperation agreements.

The Group will include representatives of international agencies and regional development banks that have a stake in statistical capacity building in countries, major donors, civil society and representatives from national statistical systems, including adequate representation from developing countries. The Statistics Division will be the secretariat of the group, which will elect two Co-Chairs, one from the international community and one from a national statistical system.

In addition, on April 19 2013, United Nations signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Multilateral Development Banks for improving cooperation in statistical activities to support post-2015 development agenda. The Memorandum of understanding recognizes the importance of strong statistical systems for the monitoring of accelerated achievement of the MDGs and the benchmarking of post-2015 development agenda. The main areas of collaboration are:

Actions to influence the political discourse on global partnerships and strategies to improve data to ensure their collective voice is heard in the formation of any new partnership mechanisms to support statistics and data.

Addressing a select number of difficult gaps in data production and accessibility such as supporting standardized measures of Household Well-being; Sustainability: mainly the areas of Environmental Accounting; System of national accounts and Administrative data systems for statistical use.

Strengthening knowledge sharing on innovative approaches to data production and improving data accessibility.

Supporting the Global Poverty Statistics Board established recently to provide guidance to the World Bank team charged with producing global estimates of poverty and the well-being of the poorest segments of the population.

Likewise, to seize efficiently the opportunity offered by Big data and to frame this emerging process, the UNSC at its 45th session of the Statistical Commission in 2014 supported the proposal to create a global working group (GWG) on Big Data for Official Statistics with the following mandate:

- Provide strategic vision, direction and coordination of a global program on Big Data for official statistics, including for indicators of the post-2015 development agenda;
- Promote practical use of of Big Data sources, including cross-border data, while building on the existing precedents and finding solutions for the many challenge
- Promote capacity building, training and sharing of experience;
- Foster communication and advocacy of use of Big Data for policy applications, especially for monitoring of the post-2015 development agenda; and build public trust in the use of Big Data for official statistics.

On the same issue, PARIS 21 is leading a project of Informing a Data Revolution (IDR), financed by a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Its overall objective is to improve the production, accessibility and use of data to support and strengthen evidence-based decision-making, identify ways in which the data needed to monitor progress on international goals and targets can be made available, and support the design and implementation of policies, programs and projects. The main output will be a Road Map for a data revolution, supporting the Post-2015 development process. This document will make the case for a data revolution in developing countries, identifying what will need to be done, how it might be implemented, and how much it might cost. The Road Map will be supported by a number of other outputs, including a review of the situation of statistical systems in developing countries and a limited number of case studies of important innovations in statistics.

Another important project that can be mentioned is the Global Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Scaling Up Investment Plan. It is developed by the World Bank and the World Health Organization with input from several agencies and countries. It covers activities

over a 10 year period from 2015 to 2024, with the goal of universal civil registration of births, deaths, marriages, and other vital events by 2030.

Many other flagship initiatives in various statistical domains at regional and global levels have been launched including environment statistics, national, international and environmental-economic accounting and statistics of cross-cutting issues such as governance, security, or climate change.

### **4.3 Some questions and points for discussion**

In light of the state of statistical development and coordination, of what is ongoing, and taking into account the main proposals in terms of means of implementation some questions should be raised about the criteria underlying the different proposals:

- The first natural question that comes to mind is, will these new proposed entities and/or initiatives contribute (also) to solving some of the identified existing problems in co-ordination, capacity development and financing?
- Secondly, how will the new institutions be linked to existing ones? There is a great risk of possible overlap in mandates, and consequently, many countries (developing countries in particular) and organizations may find it difficult to understand the functioning and to engage in all of these new initiatives.
- Finally, taking into consideration the already large number of stakeholders in statistical activity and coordination at the international level, should we prioritize the creation of new entities or should we first exploit, with the necessary adjustments and adaptations, the already existing ones?

These questions are important and should be addressed in the coming weeks ahead. Below are some initial considerations.

The creation of a new interagency group on SDG's seems straightforward, not adding any additional transactions costs and would be a logical continuation of the interagency group on MDG's. When it comes however to the mandate proposed for the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity Building for post-2015 monitoring the situation is different. Many of its missions are already fulfilled by existing entities; many of them accumulated a deep knowledge of the ground. The modalities of interaction should hence be clearly defined to avoid overlapping missions.

It appears that the proposed High-level Group could indeed add value if it takes up the role of a light-touch coordinating body to strengthen and align international support to statistics, coordinate in country financing, development and implementation for statistical development, monitor partners' support for developing countries' programs and reduce duplication of efforts.. It seems natural to bring together existing joint initiatives for statistical capacity and technical assistance such as UNSD, PARIS21, the World Bank, Regional Development Banks (on a rotating basis), and geographical representation of developing countries (also on a rotating basis), the private sector and civil society.

The World Forum on Sustainable Development Data could address some of the existing needs and weaknesses when it comes to bringing together practitioners, in particular users and producers of data to exchange on latest developments in data production, dissemination, use and innovation. It would be important to closely link this Forum to the official statistical community while giving it enough space to develop new ideas, promote innovations and share knowledge.

The usual approaches for advocacy need to be adjusted. Several advocacy meetings bring together statisticians who do not need to be convinced of the necessity of investment in statistical development and the benefits of evidence-based policy while for users and policy makers, meetings on statistics are not a priority. Involving regional and international donors or funding institutions to convince the stakeholders at the national level may add support to tasks that entities like PARIS 21 are doing on the ground. The Memorandum of Understanding signed by the UN and the Multilateral Development Banks can be an effective channel in this regard. Fund raising should be rethought too, a heavy reliance on traditional donors will not be sufficient. The experience of PARIS 21 with the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundations is promising in this way.

Access to data should not be forgotten. The difficulties in accessing data are usually the reason of lack of interest and weak demand and consequently low regard for statistical offices and underfunding. It is important to create a virtuous cycle of good and easily accessible data and more demand and better funding for statistics.

In this regard, the data deluge underway and the opportunities it offers to official statistics particularly in developing countries will raise in a more acute manner the issue of privacy. This is a dimension that should be given more consideration in this new era of statistics.

Global general events like the World Statistics Day are particularly important in terms of impact as was the case of the first experience in October 2010. The next one scheduled on October 2015 under the theme “Statistics for better decision-making — statistics for better development” is an important opportunity to communicate about the changes in the international, regional and national architecture and on new initiatives and projects.

As is stated in the “the Road map for a country led data revolution” of PARIS 21, the data revolution will require national statistical agencies to work with many different partners, including those that they have not previously interacted with much. It will be essential, therefore, to ensure that there is capacity for co-ordination and leadership from the beginning and that capacity strengthening takes place across all agencies. Developing Business models and sharing experiences in this regard will be very helpful for statistical offices.