

Report of the Expert Group Meeting on
The indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda

25-26 February 2015
United Nations, New York

1. Introduction

1. The Expert Group Meeting on the indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda (EGM) took place on 25 and 26 February 2015, just prior to the 46th Session of the Statistical Commission and had 110 participants from 22 countries, 28 agencies, funds and programmes, three United Nations Regional Commissions, as well as approximately 40 observers, which included civil society, academia and Permanent Missions to the United Nations.
2. The meeting aimed to discuss the organization of work and the key elements and principles for the development and design of the indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda. The discussion focused on the overall process, rather than on indicator proposals in specific areas. Yet, a few individual indicators were reviewed for illustration purposes, informing the discussion.
3. The conclusions of this meeting were provided to the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission the following week, as a background document under agenda item 3 (a) Data in support of the post-2015 development agenda (i) Broader measures of progress. They are summarized below, under ‘Main points of consensus,’ and further elaborated thereafter.

Main points of consensus from the Expert Group Meeting on the indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda:

- It is necessary to define an architecture for an integrated monitoring framework which would include global indicators and different levels of regional, national and thematic monitoring;
- The global level monitoring framework should be limited to a small number of indicators;
- Such indicators should be selected on the basis of an agreed set of criteria;
- The initial proposal for indicators to be put forth by the Statistical Commission is expected to be further refined and reviewed by the Commission at its sixty-seventh session, to take place in 2016;
- A mechanism such as an Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) should be established.
- It is necessary to ensure national ownership of indicators (including of the estimation process);
- It is necessary to ensure disaggregation of indicators and to include a human rights dimension to the indicator framework (following the “no one left behind” principle);
- It is necessary to further strengthen national statistical capacity, including by mobilizing the necessary resources;
- It is important to draw from existing integrated statistical frameworks;
- It is important to build on the Millennium Development Goals’ experience and lessons learnt.

2. Roadmap for the development and implementation of the indicator framework and architecture of the framework

4. The meeting reviewed and discussed how to develop a system of indicators for different levels of monitoring. For the purpose of global monitoring, the group recognized the enormous challenge of addressing a large number of targets, some of which embed several elements, each one to be monitored separately. While recognizing that everything is measurable and choices should not be made predominantly on the basis of immediate data availability, there was general consensus that in order to serve its purpose, the list of global indicators should be limited in number. Also, the issue of investments and increased capacity necessary to meet the new monitoring requirements was raised.
5. It was pointed out that indicators should be organized in an integrated architecture with various appropriate levels of reporting to meet the requirements of sustainable development. The need to consider the development of a small set of high-level indicators for the full set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the economic, social and environmental pillars, for effective communication of progress was also stressed. This high-level should be universally relevant and effective in detecting changes resulting from policy interventions and explicitly include equity indicators.
6. It was also stressed that, based on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) experience, the monitoring benefitted tremendously by having a small subset of key global indicators. Only a few indicators are generally used to indicate overall progress in each of the goals and those are the ones that are communicated easily and resonate with a wide audience, and that can easily inform the global political discussion.
7. The need to prepare a concise and user-friendly report such as the MDG blue booklet was also emphasized.
8. There was recognition that after a clear mapping between the existing statistical frameworks and the SDG indicator framework, the development of the global indicators could draw from existing integrated statistical frameworks such as, for example the Conference of European Statisticians recommendations for measuring sustainable development, the standards of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians, the System of National Accounts, and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting.

Targets

9. While fully recognizing the independence of the political process and that the statistical community has no intention to enter into the discussion on the targets being agreed by the intergovernmental process, it was stressed that in the current list of goals and targets there are several inter-linkages and overlapping targets and that there could be some common indicators for targets where inter-linkages and overlapping are evident. Also, in some cases, the complexity of the target makes it very difficult to choose only one or two indicators. These issues can be addressed by identifying appropriate (multipurpose) indicators.

Several levels of monitoring

10. There was recognition that in view of the need to develop a comprehensive monitoring framework for the SDGs while, at the same time, limiting the number of global indicators, several levels of monitoring should be clearly defined and agreed upon. These would include regional, national and thematic/sectorial monitoring levels. In this context, it was also pointed out that it is easier to inform effectively with fewer indicators, whilst not preventing programme and project specific indicators from being generated.
11. The importance of the existing monitoring groups that have already conducted significant methodological work and data development in various statistical areas was also stressed. Those groups should continue to carry out their work and feed their results into the overall work for the development of the SDG indicator framework.
12. There was also consensus that a certain level of flexibility should be allowed in the framework of indicators so that new and emerging issues can be integrated at a later stage. There should be some flexibility so that indicators can be refined or adjusted over the 15 year period to adapt the framework to newly emerging policy priorities, as well as to changes in data availability.
13. It was recognized that where MDG indicators were considered to be appropriate measures for specific SDG targets, there was value in integrating them into the new framework. This would allow for some continuity and also for the possibility of building on the extensive methodological and data development already done both at the national and international levels.

Implementation arrangements

14. Based on the experience in countries, it was recognized that the concise, clear and internationally agreed set of MDG goals, targets and indicators was instrumental for advocacy and sensitization, which resulted in budgetary increases to address information gaps. The MDG framework was also useful in bringing line ministries together and improving coordination of the statistical system. Creating and/or strengthening national coordinating mechanisms remain a priority.
15. There was consensus that the mechanism used for the MDGs, with an inter-agency and expert group that met regularly and covered both the methodological developments of the indicators and the coordination of work with countries, had been effective. Based on the roadmap recommended by the Friends of the Chair on Broader Measures of Progress, there was also consensus that a new Inter-agency and Expert Group (IAEG) on SDG indicators would be an appropriate mechanism.
16. The group also emphasized that it was crucial to continue and further strengthen the collaboration between the international and the national statistical systems on the indicators. The importance of engaging national statistical systems in the selection and development of the indicators was stressed, as well as the need to have the support and commitment of national governments for the production of the necessary data.
17. The group commented on the wide range of topics covered by the SDGs and emphasized the importance of involving all sides of the statistical system when developing SDG

indicators.

18. Differences between national and international estimates should be fully and clearly explained. Also, the need for producing estimates would be largely reduced by improving national statistical capacity. In this context, the key role played by regional agencies and mechanisms was stressed. Statistical experts from the international agencies and national authorities should be more closely engaged with the work at the regional level.
19. It was pointed out that there has been a large mobilization of resources for conducting the population and housing census in African countries and the 2020 round will include almost all countries in the region. It was suggested that the same level of commitment should be made for mobilizing resources for the development and improvement of civil registration and vital statistics, a fundamental data source for many of the indicators.

Criteria for indicator selection

20. A few criteria for the selection of indicators were reviewed—including being methodologically sound, measurable, accessible, relevant, timely, internationally comparable, and limited in number. The need for consistency with international laws was also stressed.
21. There was consensus that there should be some degree of flexibility to allow indicators that are not yet fully developed, to still be considered as part of the framework. These would be a special tier of indicators that have yet to be conceptually fully developed and that will require further work for the definition of their metadata and identification of the most appropriate data sources.
22. In the case of targets covering multiple dimensions, the approach of selecting one indicator to focus on a key aspect or desired outcome of the target while linking other dimensions to indicators in other goals was considered viable. An example of such approach was provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).
23. Recognizing the enormous challenge posed by the large number of targets that need to be monitored, the group agreed that it is important to seek inter-linkages across the targets to minimize the number of indicators needed.
24. An approach towards integration was proposed and received support, in particular to allow for the monitoring of tradeoffs where gains in one area may be at the detriment of others, and to benefit from synergies. Many examples of connections across targets and sectors were presented.
25. It was also stressed that at the national level it will be important to look at the institutional arrangements to transform statistical systems and respond to the new monitoring requirements, including in particular integrating geospatial competencies and considering the financial and capacity building requirements.
26. When identifying indicators for global monitoring, it was stressed that, to the extent possible, the required data should come from National Statistical system. The reporting mechanism from the national to the international level should be considered and well defined. This will be particularly important for indicators for which there is no existing

agency mandated for gathering data from national statistical authorities.

27. In cases where estimates or data adjustments for international comparability are necessary, national estimates procedures should be taken into account and international agencies should work closely from the beginning of the process with national statistical systems to define methodologies.
28. It was suggested that an accountability and quality framework would be useful for international organizations engaged in reporting on global monitoring indicators. Such a framework could be developed by the new IAEG-SDGs. This may also be useful for other data providers.

Elements of disaggregation

29. Overall, three conceptual approaches to disaggregation were discussed: the disaggregation of indicators based on several key categories – including sex, age, residence, different levels of geographical unit, etc.; the consideration of elements of discrimination and the definition of indicators from a human rights perspective; and the focus on specific groups – including for instance migrants, refugees, older persons and persons living with disabilities.
30. There was broad consensus that elements of disaggregation are fundamental for the development of the indicators for post-2015 considering the key principle of “no one left behind”. It was also repeatedly highlighted that the experience of MDG monitoring has shown the importance of going beyond national figures in assessing whether progress reaches all groups of the population. In the context of specific groups of population, the importance of using statistics on refugees, which are now more widely available than before, was stressed.
31. Elements of disaggregation should be considered from the start of the process of developing the indicators. This was considered particularly important as the implications for data collection can be a big challenge, including from the point of view of increased costs, and need to be well understood and addressed. From the point of view of data sources, the need to strengthen administrative data was pointed out, as was the need to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics. Consideration of the use of robust statistical methods (e.g., small area estimation) in producing local level estimates was recommended. The importance of creating new partnerships with civil society, private sector and human rights institutions was also stressed — as also recommended by the report of the Independent Expert Advisory Group (IEAG) on the Data Revolution — to ensure that everyone is “visible” and included in SDG measures.
32. The issue of sensitivities in using disaggregated data was also raised—both from the point of view of confidentiality issues when utilizing the data and the difficulties and highly sensitive nature of collecting data on individual characteristics such as religion and ethnicity. Here the framework provided for by the UN fundamental principles for official statistics can be invoked and applied including statistics laws.
33. The group agreed that territorial/spatial disaggregation is fundamental for most of the indicators. In particular, the use of geospatial information for the development of some of the indicators (for instance in the case of cities) was stressed. In this context, the need

to increase the utilization of data at the lowest geographical sub-national level was highlighted – as it was also a recommendation by the IEAG report on the Data Revolution.

34. Also, the importance of disaggregating indicators chosen for global monitoring was widely recognized, as was the need to reflect overall issues of inequalities across all targets at the global level.
35. There was consensus that issues and criteria for disaggregation should be systematically discussed and agreed by the new IAEG on SDG Indicators, as soon as it is established.

The new IAEG on SDG Indicators and the work ahead

36. The proposal by the Friends of the Chair for the establishment of a new Inter-agency and Expert Group (IAEG) on SDG Indicators, and its terms of reference and membership, was reviewed and discussed.
37. While it was recognized that the Statistical Commission will have first to express its views and reach its decision, the group supported the creation of a new IEAG on SDG Indicators. In particular, the group agreed that it should be composed of representatives of national and regional statistical systems and international agencies, and should be tasked with developing, finalizing, and implementing the indicators framework.
38. In relation to its membership, it was pointed out that the criteria should be agreed for the selection of representatives from national statistical systems. Mechanisms for the inclusion of the views of civil society should also be discussed.
39. There was consensus that representation of both national and international statistical systems in the group will promote closer collaboration on the definition, development, and measurement of indicators.
40. There were also suggestions for organizing the work around thematic groups, while maintaining an overall integrated approach. The thematic focus of the groups should be sufficiently broad to allow for integration and for working across goals and targets.
41. The issue of timing was also discussed, especially in relation to the completion of the proposal on the indicator framework. There was consensus that the preliminary proposal from the UN Statistical Commission to the intergovernmental negotiations on post-2015 should be considered as the first step of a process and that the list of indicators to be included in the framework will have to be based on an agreed set of harmonized criteria. This revision process will culminate with the 2016 session of the Statistical Commission, and later with the High Level Political Forum in 2016.
42. It was agreed that as soon as the Commission establishes the new group, efforts will be made to organize its first meeting.

Annex I: Concept note of the Expert Group Meeting on the indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda

Purpose

1. The meeting will discuss the organization of work and the key elements and principles for the development and design of the indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda. While the discussion will focus on the overall process and will not cover indicator proposals in specific areas, a few individual indicators will be reviewed for illustration. The conclusions of this meeting will be provided to the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission the following week (3-6 March 2015).

Context and background

2. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, Member States agreed to launch an intergovernmental process to develop a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs) to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) after 2015. The post-2015 development agenda will be adopted at a High-level Summit in September 2015. Leading up to the summit, between January and July 2015, intergovernmental negotiations are taking place at the UN General Assembly, under the leadership of two Co-facilitators appointed by the President of the General Assembly.

3. On 19 July 2014, the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) released a proposal on sustainable development goals for consideration by the General Assembly, containing 17 goals and 169 targets. On 10 September 2014, the General Assembly welcomed the report (A/68/970) and decided that the OWG proposal “shall be the main basis for integrating sustainable development goals into the post-2015 development agenda, while recognizing that other inputs will also be considered in this intergovernmental negotiation process at the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly¹.”

4. On 4 December 2014, the Secretary-General submitted to the General Assembly a report (A/69/700) entitled "The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet", which synthesizes the full range of inputs available on the post-2015 development agenda as a contribution to the intergovernmental negotiations in the lead up to the Summit in September 2015. In particular, the synthesis report proposes a framework to monitor and review implementation, based on enhanced statistical capacities and tapping into the potential of new and non-traditional data sources.

5. The Statistical Commission, as the intergovernmental focal point for the elaboration and review of the indicators used in the United Nations system, as indicated in General Assembly resolution 57/270 B, will lead the work on the preparation of the indicator framework. Specifically, the Commission is the technical forum for the development and implementation of the indicator and monitoring framework and reporting mechanisms for the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda. The basis for this indicator

¹ A/RES/68/309

framework are the goals and targets proposed by the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) and the outcome of the General Assembly (GA) process on the post-2015 development agenda.

6. At its forty-sixth session (3-6 March 2015), the Commission will consider the report of the Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress (E/CN.3/2014/2), which presents a roadmap for the development and implementation of an indicator and monitoring framework for the post-2015 development agenda and suggests the establishment of an Interagency 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 (see the suggested terms of reference of the group in Annex 1 of the report).

7. In December 2014, the Co-facilitators of the intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda sent a letter to the Acting Chair of the Statistical Commission requesting the Commission to prepare an initial proposal for an effective indicator framework that is measurable to be provided in advance of the intergovernmental meeting of 23-27 March 2015. In her response, the Acting Chair, on behalf of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC), indicated that the work plan at this point foresees that a final proposal will be provided towards the end of 2015, once the development agenda has been agreed. However, a preliminary proposal could potentially be provided earlier, assuming that it allows for required technical adjustments and completion later.

Participants

8. Representatives of Member States and specialized agencies and UN entities with expertise in development indicators and monitoring are invited to attend and contribute to this meeting. Statistical experts from civil society, academia and the private sector may attend as observers.

Substantive issues

Developing a framework of global indicators

9. The MDGs have demonstrated that an inspirational global vision, transformed into a set of simple and concrete goals and targets, monitored by statistical robust indicators, can contribute to bring global attention to the most pressing development challenges of our time and help galvanize development efforts. The simplicity of the MDG indicator and monitoring framework is one of the main reasons why the monitoring exercise was effective and also helped bring increased attention to statistics and statistical development. It is important that in developing a global indicator framework, these key features be maintained. At the same time, the new development agenda is universal and covers a much wider range of policy areas than the MDGs did, requiring a larger number of indicators. It will be important that all relevant stakeholders participate in the discussion and preparation of the indicator framework.

10. The global indicator framework will inform policy makers and the general public on progress achieved towards a set of concrete universal SDG goals and targets and help focus the debate at the international/global level. The main objectives of the global indicator framework will be to facilitate monitoring and inform policy making at the

international level and provide the basis for communication and advocacy to bring global attention to the priority areas of sustainable development. At the same time, the post-2015 indicator framework will need to promote a collaborative environment and offer incentives for all stakeholders and build upon and bring together evidence from various accountability mechanisms at the national, regional and global levels.

11. The list of global indicators will be proposed as a common basis to compare across countries and regions. It will also be used as the basis to develop lists of national and supplementary indicators to be used at the national and sub-national levels and for monitoring in the various sectors.

The multi-stage process of developing an indicator framework

12. The roadmap that will be presented to the Statistical Commission at its forty-sixth session (3-6 March 2015) by the Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress envisions a multi-stage process for the development (and implementation) of an indicator and monitoring framework for the post-2015 development agenda under broad participation of Member States, agencies and other stakeholders. The roadmap suggests providing a final proposal of an indicator framework by end of 2015, and an initial proposal earlier, depending on the requirements of the intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda.

13. As indicated above, the Co-Facilitators of the intergovernmental negotiations requested that a provisional proposal be provided in advance of the intergovernmental meeting on 23-27 March 2015. On 16 January, the United Nations Statistics Division invited international agencies to submit for each goal their proposals for a set of indicators for global monitoring in their respective areas of work, with a deadline of 6 February². As indicated in the request, the purpose of this list of indicators is strictly for global monitoring and for that reason the list should include a limited number of indicators. Considering the capacity concerns expressed by the UN Statistical Commission, the aim would be to produce a list with a maximum of 120 global indicators overall. If more than one indicator is suggested per target, the priority should be indicated.

14. The various proposals will be compiled and shared ahead of this Expert Group Meeting with all participants. Since the Co-Facilitators requested the UN Statistical Commission to provide a proposal for global indicators, a consultation will be conducted with national experts for them to finalize such a preliminary proposal.

The development of an architecture for the indicator framework

15. The Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress, in their recommendations on the preparation of the indicator framework, also suggested the following principles:

² This request was sent to members of the inter-agency technical support team (TST) that has been established to support the OWG, the agencies' respective Chief statisticians represented in the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) and indicator experts within organizations that have already been involved in monitoring the MDGs.

- a) Existing and agreed indicators sets and proposals for new sets of indicators (be it from existing monitoring initiatives, international agreements, conceptual frameworks, thematic consultations or other efforts) as well as their conceptual bases should be taken into account in the design of the indicator framework as appropriate.
- b) The five conceptual issues identified in the Compendium of Statistical Notes under Conceptual Issues, should be considered, namely: (i) universality, (ii) inclusiveness, (iii) scope of the development agenda, (iv) inter-linkages and crosscutting issues, and (v) means vs. ends and focus on meaningful outcomes.
- c) The conceptual basis for the indicator framework should be discussed and elaborated as appropriate. The CES Recommendations on Measuring Sustainable Development, having been reviewed and agreed upon by an inter-governmental process, are a useful starting point for the statistical community. The Rio+20 outcome document “The future we want” and the OWG Outcome Document represent the conceptual basis from a political/policy perspective, which the indicator framework will need to reflect and respond to. It is suggested that as a first step the OWG targets should be mapped against each other and analyzed with respect to the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) and the CES recommendations in order to identify inter-linkages, overlaps and gaps.

16. Furthermore, the design of the indicator framework should take into account the very significant mismatch between the capabilities of national statistical systems in particular in developing countries, and the ambition to report on a much broader set of indicators, at a much greater level of disaggregation, compared with the MDGs. Therefore, the indicator framework is expected to contain a limited number of universal and global indicators but may also allow for elements of flexibility such as additional tiers of indicators, depending on the overall requirements.

Criteria for indicator selection and setting quantitative targets

17. As indicated by the Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress criteria for the selection of individual indicators have been already discussed in different fora. These criteria should be reviewed and taken into consideration as appropriate. When inviting agencies to provide their indicator proposals, it was suggested to consider some important criteria, including those of relevance, methodological soundness, measurability and ease to understand and communicate. It is also crucial that countries should have the capacity to measure the proposed indicators with reasonable effort and costs.

18. The Co-facilitators have also asked the UN Statistical Commission to provide some technical inputs in relation to the measurability of targets. Agencies were invited to comment on targets for which no indicators were identified and on targets that are to be considered of an aspirational nature. Also, they were asked to indicate numerical targets that appear different or less ambitious than targets already set by other international instruments and agreements.

Outcome

19. The meeting is expected to agree on suggestions for the organization of work on the indicator framework, criteria for indicator selection and comments on numerical target setting. Those will be provided as an input for the discussion at the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission for the preparation of its proposals to the intergovernmental process on post-2015.

20. The discussions on the various issues identified above will be informed by dedicated sections on lessons learned from the MDG monitoring, and by examples of proposed indicators in different SDG areas.

Background documents:

- Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals (A/68/970), available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>.
- Report of the Friends of the Chair report on broader measures of progress to the forty-sixth session of the UNSC (E/CN.3/2014/2), available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/sc2015.htm>.
- Background document to the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission containing the results of the survey on the availability of indicators to measure the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and associated 107 substantive targets agreed upon by the OWG, forthcoming, available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/sc2015.htm>.
- Compendium of Statistical Notes for the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG), March 2014, available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/broaderprogress/work.html>.
- Lessons Learned from MDG Monitoring From A Statistical Perspective, Report of the Task Team on Lessons Learned from MDG Monitoring of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IAEG) on MDG Indicators (IAEG-MDG), March 2013, available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/broaderprogress/development.html>.
- United Nations Task Team Report on statistics and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda, July 2013, available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/broaderprogress/development.html>.
- Conference of European Statisticians recommendations on measuring sustainable development, December 2013, available at http://www.unecce.org/publications/ces_sust_development.html.
- Indicators and a monitoring framework for Sustainable Development Goals, Launching a data revolution for the SDGs, A report by the Leadership Council of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (Revised working draft), January 2015, available at: <http://unsdsn.org/resources/publications/indicators/>.

Annex II : List of Participants

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