

Distr.: General
6 December 2002

Original: English

Statistical Commission

Thirty-fourth session

4–7 March 2003

Item 6(b) of the provisional agenda *

Activities not classified by field: Harmonization of indicators and reporting on progress towards the UN Millennium Development Goals

Status of Millennium Development Goals Country Reporting

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the status of Millennium Development Goals Country Reporting. The report is transmitted to the Commission in accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-third session.¹ Points for discussion are included in paragraphs 10, 12 and 16.

Notes

¹ *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2002, Supplement No.4 (E/2002/24)*, chap I, sect. A.

Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Background		1-3
II. Millennium Development Goal Country Reports		4-8
III. The Choice of Indicators		9-12
IV. Statistical Capacity Development		13-16
Annex: MDG Country Reporting		

I. Background

1. In 2002, the Secretary-General issued his first annual report on progress in implementing the Millennium Declaration. It provides a global perspective on the status of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), based on internationally agreed indicators and using global and regional databases available within the United Nations system. Global monitoring of the MDGs is important for keeping actors accountable to agreed commitments but it does not necessarily identify development priorities and monitor progress in each individual country. Each country must set and implement its own priorities within the given MDG framework.

2. The MDGs express the political consensus reached during the World Summits and Global Conferences of the 1990s, reaffirmed at the Millennium Summit in 2000. They do not represent equally ambitious or feasible targets for all countries. For the MDGs to be meaningful at the national level, targets need to be tailored to reflect national circumstances and development priorities.

3. For the United Nations to play its role as MDG ‘score-keeper’ and ‘campaign manager’ at the country level, UNDP is promoting and supporting the preparation of MDG reports (MDGRs) by national or sub-national authorities, in very close coordination with the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). The MDG country reports are a vehicle to keep the national focus on agreed development priorities, to keep the public informed on progress, to foster debate and dialogue, and to trigger action to meet the tailored MDG targets in each

country. MDG country reports also provide the platform for improving donor coordination around nationally defined priorities. In October 2001, the UNDG issued a guidance note on 'Reporting on the Millennium Development Goals at the Country Level' (available at www.undg.org).

II. Millennium Development Goal Country Reports

4. So far, 17 MDG country reports have been issued – Albania, Armenia, Bolivia, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nepal, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Tanzania and Viet Nam (available at www.undg.org and www.undp.org). About another 50 are under preparation (Annex). The plan is for every developing and transition country to produce at least one MDG country report by the end of 2004, in time for the Secretary-General's comprehensive review of the MDG progress in 2005.

5. MDG country reports help to benchmark indicators, to identify national achievements and to address challenges and obstacles. They are vehicles for expressing global goals into nationally agreed targets that balance ambition with realism. Over-ambitious targets are not likely to trigger action but rather add to scepticism and negativity; while non-challenging targets are unlikely to help to mobilise resources or foster pro-poor policy reforms. Nationally defined targets that reflect local circumstances are a way to balance ambition with feasibility and to build a grand coalition for action.

6. The preparation of MDGRs should provide the opportunity to build national ownership around well-defined and pertinent targets. The first MDG country reports were prepared and issued by the UN Country Team. More recent ones have been published jointly by the Government and the UN Country Team. The objective is to engage civil society organizations and academia in future MDGRs. The first MDG country reports contained a rather mechanistic reporting on the global targets. More recent ones report on targets that have been tailored to what is relevant and realistic given the local circumstances and considering recent trends.

7. Tailored targets can only be set through an inclusive process of consultation and dialogue within the country. The United Nations can contribute to this process in two ways: by helping to create the space for such political consultations among the main actors, and by providing essential information so that all actors at the table can meaningfully participate in the debate for setting tailored MDG targets.

8. MDGRs should be concise, attractive, easy-to-read and non-technical reports. They should contain clear messages, using simple graphical illustrations and colour maps. They should be issued in the local language(s), and not only in English. MDGRs are not the place for deep analysis and specific policy prescriptions, but to spell out the current level and recent trend for each MDG target. Their main purpose is to inform the wider public about how the country, the provinces and districts, different socio-economic and ethnic or gender groups are doing vis-à-vis agreed targets. If widely publicised and shared within the country, these reports will help build a stronger constituency for these noble targets. They are also likely to foster collective action to narrow the remaining gaps and close disparities within the country.

MDG country reports should be based on existing data and analyses, contained in documents such as national development plans, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), National Human Development Reports (NHDRs), and the Common Country Assessments (CCAs). MDGRs should not establish a parallel process for data gathering and analyses.

III. The Choice of Indicators

9. Achieving the MDGs will depend on the adoption of national policies consistent with agreed targets within the aspirations of the Millennium Declaration. Global reporting on the MDGs is based on 48 internationally agreed indicators that represent the best use of data sources validated by specialised international organisations. The choice of some progress indicators at the national level might in some cases need to be supplemented and/or adapted to reflect national priorities and data availability. Monitoring the education goal, for instance, can include indicators on the quality of education and the percentage of children who complete primary school; besides the agreed MDG indicators of the net enrolment ratio and the proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5.

10. Nationally agreed targets should be expressed in the choice of nationally relevant indicators to monitor progress and those indicators should be consistent with national development policies. For countries that have formulated a PRSP, the choice of MDG indicators must be consistent with indicators used to monitor PRSP goals and targets and PRSP targets in turn should provide the intermediate means to monitor MDG progress.

The United Nations Statistical Commission may want to consider the need to keep some degree of flexibility to reflect national priorities and specific circumstances vis-à-vis the need to harmonise the use of indicators for global MDG monitoring.

11. The MDG country reports primarily address a national audience, with a clear focus on progress at the sub-national level. In a sense, they help bring the MDGs 'home'. For too long, global goals and targets have remained at the global and inter-governmental level; in too many instances they did not make a difference in terms of policy making, resources allocations and institutional changes at the national and sub-national levels. In an effort to spur progress, MDG work needs to focus at the national and sub-national levels, more than at the regional and global levels. Therefore, MDG country reports focus on disaggregated data to highlight trends and disparities within the country. Disaggregation from the national level down is more important for a MDGR than the concern with aggregation of national data to the regional and global levels. Global and regional databases exist independent from the MDGRs; and follow separate processes for updating and maintenance. The role of the MDG country reports is not to service these global and regional databases. MDGRs are primarily for advocacy and communications, not for enhancing statistical rigour and accuracy.

12. In particular, the United Nations Statistical Commission may want to consider the following two issues:

- The indicator to monitor the first global target of halving income-poverty between 1990 and 2015 is based on the international poverty line of one dollar a day expressed in purchasing power parity of 1985. This methodology provides a mechanism to make poverty comparisons across regions and to estimate global poverty levels and trends. They do not necessarily reflect conditions in specific countries. The relevance of \$1/day as a poverty indicator for middle-income countries has also been questioned. In order to assess the incidence of income-poverty in individual countries, allowance must be made to define a nationally relevant poverty line that reflects country-specific conditions and the level of resources needed to provide minimum acceptable living standards to its citizens, in line with the country's level of development. The United Nations Statistical Commission may want to consider specific guidance on the use of the national poverty line for monitoring the first MDG target. It may also want to examine ways for improving the reliability of PPP conversion rates and their relevance for poverty monitoring.
- The indicators to monitor goal 8 (develop a global partnership for development) represents another challenge at the country level. Although the emphasis of MDGRs is to monitor goals 1–7, achievement of these MDGs is contingent on the international conditions in the areas of aid, trade, debt relief and access to technology. The United Nations Statistical Commission may want to consider the need for specific guidance to adapt the internationally agreed indicators to monitor goal 8 into indicators that can be monitored and reported nationally as a way to assess progress towards the MDGs as a 'global deal', and to monitor the international efforts and opportunities faced by

individual countries. Tracking the indicators under goal 8 at the national level would also help countries to develop better development partnership and coordination of donor resources.

IV. Statistical Capacity Development

13. The MDGs provide a long-term development framework to keep the eyes of the world focused on a consistent set of goals, targets and indicators to monitor progress around numerical and time-bound targets that collectively address the many dimensions of human development. Monitoring the MDGs over the next thirteen years will require sustained efforts to respond to the growing demand for data to inform the general public and policy makers, as well as the development community.

14. MDG monitoring provides an opportunity to develop statistical capacity within countries to improve the production and use of consistent and internationally validated data to assess results. The MDG country reports include a table entitled 'Capacity at a Glance'. For each of the targets, it indicates the existing capacity for different aspects of the monitoring process, including data gathering, data quality, data analysis, and the use of statistics in policy-making. The science behind the selection of one of the three levels of capacity (strong, fair or weak) is not perfect but it helps national authorities and interested donor agencies to focus on relative capacity levels and to prioritise operational support.

15. Too many countries remain trapped in a vicious cycle of low demand for data, lack of resources and national efforts to produce quality data and thus lack of good data sources to design and monitor pro-poor policy reforms. The MDGs provide an opportunity to break that cycle by creating a consistent, long-term demand of good quality, timely and relevant data to make policy decisions, to coordinate the use of available resources, to identify financial and institutional constraints to achieve results, and to use statistics for keeping the general public informed and interested.

16. Greater efforts to coordinate capacity development for MDG monitoring and analysis will be required to improve the quality and timeliness of statistical data sources according to internationally approved guidelines and recommendations. Harmonisation in the use of national and international indicators will require strong leadership and longer-term investment in the development of sound statistical systems and capacities. The UN Statistical Commission may want to consider the following issue:

- Practical ways are needed to improve the investment of national authorities and donor agencies in statistical capacity development. One critically important element will be to enhance the operational collaboration and coordination among the many actors and agencies in this field. The challenge is to establish specific mechanisms that will reduce fragmentation in support of nationally owned and locally driven efforts, without imposing rigid and bureaucratically heavy structures that stifle innovation and creativity.

Annex: MDG Country Reporting

(available at www.undg.org and www.undp.org)

Published – as of end November 20002
Albania (English)
Armenia (English)
Bolivia (English & Spanish)
Cambodia (Khmer & English)
Cameroon (French & English)
Chad (French)
Guatemala (Spanish)
Kazakhstan (Russian & English)
Madagascar (French)
Mauritius (English)
Mozambique (English)
Nepal (Nepali & English)
Poland (Polish & English)
Saudi Arabia (English & Arabic)
Sénégal (French)
Tanzania (English)
Viet Nam (English)

Country	Expected by		Country	Expected by
Algeria	Jan-03		Moldova	End 2002
Argentina	May 2003		Mongolia	Nov 2002
Azerbaijan	Mid- 2003		Morocco	Early 2003
Bahrain	Mar-03		Nicaragua	January 2003
Barbados	2003		Pakistan	Second half of 2002
Bhutan	Late 2002		Paraguay	Late 2002
Bulgaria	End 2002		Philippines	Late 2002
CAR	Late 2002		Romania	Nov-02
China	Late 2002		Russia	Nov-03
Chile	March 2003		Somalia	Early 2003
Djibouti	Apr-03		South Africa	End 2002
Egypt	End 2002		Sudan	End 2003
Georgia	Early 2004		Syria	End 2002
Guyana	End of 2002		Togo	Mid-2003
Jamaica	2003		Trinidad and Tobago	2003
Jordan	Mar-03		Tunisia	Jun-03
Kazakhstan	Nov-02		Turkmenistan	Late 2002
Kuwait	Mid 2003		Tajikistan	Early 2003
Kyrgyzstan	End 2002		Turkey	Early 2004
Lao PDR	Early 2003		UAE	Jun-03
Latvia	Jul-03		Ukraine	End 2002
Lebanon	Dec-02		Uruguay	Early 2003
Lesotho	Nov. 2002		Uzbekistan	Early 2003
Libya	Early 2003		Yemen	Nov-02
Lithuania	Early 2003		Yugoslavia, FR	Early 2003
Macedonia FYR	End 2003			