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review: broader measures of progress

Report of the Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2013/235, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress. In the report, the group takes stock of current national, regional and international practices on broader measures of progress. It discusses the prospects for and the way forward towards a technically solid and globally agreed set of measures of progress. Furthermore, the group discusses the issue of measuring and monitoring the goals of the post-2015 development agenda by reviewing existing proposals for a post-2015 development framework, elaborating on the need for an integrated and technically robust measurement approach and identifying critical elements for the implementation of a new monitoring framework. A separate section contains key messages for policymakers, proposals for the further involvement of official statisticians in the ongoing debate and processes towards a post-2015 development agenda and proposals to carry on the work programme on broader measures of progress.

* [E/CN.3/2014/1](#).



Report of the Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress

I. Background

A. Process towards the post-2015 development agenda

1. In the outcome document of the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, held in New York from 20 to 22 September 2010, Heads of State and Government requested the Secretary-General to make recommendations for further steps to advance the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015 (Assembly resolution [65/1](#)). In the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012, Member States initiated an inclusive process to develop a set of sustainable development goals (Assembly resolution [66/288](#), annex). There is broad agreement that the two processes should converge into one global development agenda for the period beyond 2015 with sustainable development at its core (see [A/68/202](#)).

2. In accordance with the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, a 30-member working group was established and instructed to prepare a proposal on sustainable development goals for consideration by the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session (see resolution [66/288](#), annex, para. 248). The Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals was established in January 2013. In accordance with the same outcome document, the sustainable development goals should be limited in number, aspirational and easy to communicate; they should address in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development and be coherent with and integrated into the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015 (*ibid.*, paras. 246-247). The Open Working Group will have held eight sessions by February 2014 and conclude its work by September 2014.

3. A special event of the President of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals was held in New York on 25 September 2013. The event was an occasion to reflect on the broad contours of the development agenda beyond 2015. In the outcome document of the event, Member States agreed to hold a high-level summit in September 2015 to adopt the post-2015 development agenda (see resolution [68/6](#), para. 26). Thus, the final phase of the intergovernmental consultations on such an agenda will culminate during the sixty-ninth session of the Assembly. As an input to the intergovernmental negotiations to be launched at the beginning of the sixty-ninth session, the Secretary-General was called upon to synthesize the full range of inputs then available and to present a synthesis report before the end of 2014 (see resolution [68/6](#), para. 25).

B. Involvement of the statistical community

4. The statistical community has been lending its expertise to the discussions on the sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda from the outset in many ways.

5. The Inter-agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal Indicators, which consists of international agencies, regional organizations and national statistical offices and has been responsible for the global and regional monitoring of progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, issued a report on lessons learned from monitoring the Goals in March 2013.¹ The report highlights the role of the statistical community in the process of selecting the goals, targets and indicators for the new development framework. A joint task force on measuring sustainable development of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Eurostat and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) issued its final report containing recommendations on measuring sustainable development,² which was endorsed by the Conference of European Statisticians in June 2013. With contributions from 50 United Nations entities, a report on statistics and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda was issued in July 2013.³ Together, these last two reports contribute to the development of statistical indicators for monitoring sustainable development.

6. The Statistical Commission 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, as indicated in General Assembly resolution 57/270 B. The Commission has been providing guidance and leadership in monitoring progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals from the outset. The Commission and its working mechanisms will guide and lead the response to the statistical needs arising from the post-2015 development agenda.

II. Establishment of the Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress

A. Mandate and composition

7. At its forty-fourth session, in 2013, the Statistical Commission adopted its decision 44/114, in which it expressed its support for the formation of the Friends of the Chair group. The mandate of the group was to build a work programme to develop broader measures of progress based on a stocktaking exercise of current national, regional and international practices in this field. The group was requested to conduct a technical review of these existing efforts with a view to identifying best practices and to facilitating the sharing of knowledge, especially for the benefit of developing countries. It was also requested to monitor closely the ongoing debate on development frameworks and to keep the Bureau of the Statistical Commission informed, undertaking an active dialogue with United Nations bodies and the policy sphere in order to ensure that a robust statistical measurement approach is incorporated from the outset in preparations for the post-2015 development agenda. It was further requested to report on the preliminary results of its work to the

¹ Available from [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/broaderprogress/pdf/Lesson%20Learned%20from%20MDG%20Monitoring_2013-03-22%20\(IAEG\).pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/broaderprogress/pdf/Lesson%20Learned%20from%20MDG%20Monitoring_2013-03-22%20(IAEG).pdf).

² Available from www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/2013/SD_framework_and_indicators_final.pdf.

³ Available from www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/UNTT_MonitoringReport_WEB.pdf.

Commission at its next session, in 2014, in order to receive guidance for subsequent work.

8. The Friends of the Chair group was launched in May 2013. It is composed of the following 22 countries: Argentina, Australia, Bahamas, Botswana, Brazil, Cameroon, Germany, France, Hungary, India, Italy, Jamaica, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Suriname, Sweden, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania and United States of America. France and India co-chair the group. The following organizations participate as observers: OECD, the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (Paris21), Eurostat and ECE. The Statistics Division acts as the secretariat.

B. Work to date

9. Since May 2013, the Friends of the Chair group has carried out the following activities:

(a) Created a website to provide information about and a platform for the ongoing work of the group, which reflects its commitment to operate in an open, transparent and inclusive manner. The website also contains relevant documents and information about the two work areas of the group: sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda; and broader measures of progress;

(b) Reviewed the report of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda from a statistical point of view;⁴

(c) Contributed to and was instrumental in the drafting of statistical notes annexed to a large set of thematic issue briefs⁵ that have been presented to the thematic sessions of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. The available statistical notes will be provided in a background document;

(d) Cooperated in and contributed to the organization and conduct of an informal session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals on measuring progress held on 17 December 2013;

(e) Provided critical input to the drafting of the present report.

III. Review of the work done to develop and implement broader measures of progress and to measure sustainable development

A. Sustainable development and human well-being

10. The seminal United Nations-sponsored report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (1987), articulates sustainable development as a form of distributive justice that makes it possible to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet

⁴ Available from www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf.

⁵ The issue briefs have been prepared by a technical support team under the umbrella of the United Nations task team that supports system-wide preparations for the post-2015 development agenda and consists of over 60 United Nations entities and agencies and international organizations.

their own needs. The report provided a start for the discussion on broader measures of progress. In 1992, participants in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development promoted the concept of sustainable development and advocated for the protection of the environment to be integrated into economic growth strategies, linking both to decent living and working conditions and equitable access to resources.

11. In 2001, the European Union launched its sustainable development strategy, which aimed at the continuous improvement of quality of life for current and future generations; the strategy was renewed in 2006. In 2007, two conferences were held: the first, in Istanbul, was devoted to the OECD project on measuring progress in societies; at the second, entitled “Beyond GDP”, a list of priority actions on quality of life and well-being was recommended. These conferences paved the way for the establishment of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, chaired by Joseph Stiglitz, and the writing of its groundbreaking report, which includes a recommendation on statistics.⁶ Immediately after that report was made available, numerous national and international initiatives were launched to propose alternative indicators that would allow a better assessment of quality of life. Finally, in June 2013, the Conference of European Statisticians endorsed a framework to measure sustainable development proposed by the joint ECE/Eurostat/OECD task force. Therefore, when the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development issued the mandate to develop further measures of progress in its outcome document, entitled “The future we want” (see General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex), a lot of work had already been done or was under way.⁷

Definition of well-being, progress and sustainability

12. The report of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress and the work of the joint ECE/Eurostat/OECD task force contributed to the clarification of the notion of well-being, social progress and sustainable development. In the report, “well-being” is understood as a static (i.e. here and now) set of outcomes for people, “progress” as the changes in those outcomes over a given period of time and “sustainability” as the dynamic requirements for progress to be maintained indefinitely over time. The report’s main message is to focus on measuring current conditions of life (well-being) in their material and non-material aspects (including distribution) and to examine the sustainability of well-being in the future. Similarly, the joint ECE/Eurostat/OECD task force has identified three distinct conceptual dimensions of human well-being: the human well-being of the present generation in one particular country (here and

⁶ Joseph E. Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean-Paul Fitoussi, “Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress”, 14 September 2009. Available from www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/documents/rapport_anglais.pdf.

⁷ The Statistical Commission has, on various occasions during the past years, provided a forum for the exchange of experience and discussion of the means available to measure progress and well-being. Prior to its forty-third session, in 2012, a high-level forum entitled “Measuring the unmeasurable: challenging the limits of official statistics” was organized. At its forty-third session, the Commission discussed the report of France on the measurement of economic performance and social progress (E/CN.3/2011/35). At its forty-fourth session, in 2013, a high-level forum on official statistics was held, devoted to measuring progress.

now); the well-being of future generations (later); and the well-being of people living in other countries (elsewhere).

Measuring well-being and quality of life

13. Well-being is a multidimensional concept that covers material living standards (income, consumption and wealth), health, education, personal activities (including work), political voices and governance, social connections and relationships, environment (present and future) and insecurity (economic and physical).⁸ By measuring material living standards, emphasis is placed on the household perspective. It requires looking beyond the gross domestic product (GDP) at income measures that take into account a range of market and non-market activities, but also at assets and consumption expenditures in the context of the System of National Accounts. Moreover, it includes inequality and accessibility measures on how consumption, income and assets are distributed among individuals, households, population groups and future generations. Measuring quality of life requires subjective and objective multidimensional measures of well-being.

Measuring sustainability

14. Measuring sustainability poses the challenge of determining if the current level of well-being can be maintained for future generations. Sustainability over time can be assessed by looking at the set of key economic, environmental, social and human assets transmitted from current to future generations, and how these assets are affected by today's actions, policies and behaviours. Measuring sustainability is a highly complex task. In order to capture the complex interactions among the economy, society and the environment, such measurement will be supported by efforts to advance existing accounting frameworks with a system approach of stocks and flows.

B. Global, regional and national efforts and practices on the measurement of sustainable development and human well-being

Global efforts

15. Many nations and organizations have been and are currently undertaking substantial work to measure aspects of life they see as important for human well-being and sustainable development.⁹ At the global level, there is the work of the Statistical Commission on monitoring the Millennium Development Goals, the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, as well as the note by the Secretary-General entitled "Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development", of January 2013 (A/67/697). In addition, the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs established a set of indicators of

⁸ One country advocated including culture as a dimension of well-being. However, it can be argued that culture is a question of weighting the different recognized dimensions.

⁹ A detailed description of various initiatives will be provided in a background paper. Owing to the large number of initiatives, not all are mentioned.

sustainable development to measure progress at the national level.¹⁰ And, as already mentioned above, in 2013 the Conference of European Statisticians endorsed a conceptual framework for measuring sustainable development.²

Efforts of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

16. OECD has been addressing the question of how to measure well-being and societal progress for more than a decade. Its efforts have resulted in the launch of the OECD Better Life Initiative in 2011, which comprises a regularly updated set of well-being indicators, published in the biannual report *How's Life? Measuring Well-Being*.¹¹ The conceptual framework used by OECD to define and measure well-being draws on the report of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress and distinguishes between current and future well-being. Current well-being is measured for two broad domains: material living conditions (income and wealth, jobs and earnings, housing conditions) and quality of life (health status, work-life balance, education and skills, social connections, civic engagement and governance, environmental quality, personal security and life satisfaction). Future well-being (or sustainability of well-being) is assessed through indicators of different types of “capital” that drive well-being over time, following the approach recommended by the joint ECE/Eurostat/OECD task force on measuring sustainable development.¹²

Efforts of the European Statistical System

17. In 2006, the European Union Sustainable Development Strategy was renewed. A system of sustainable development indicators was established in order to monitor the progress made towards achieving the objectives and targets of the strategy. The indicator framework is based on 10 themes, reflecting the key challenges, key objectives and guiding principles of the strategy. In August 2009, the European Commission published its communication COM (2009) 433, entitled “GDP and beyond: measuring progress in a changing world”, which aimed to improve indicators with a view to better reflect policy and societal concerns. In 2011, the European Statistical System Committee adopted a report by the so-called “sponsorship group”, co-chaired by Eurostat and the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies of France, entitled “Measuring progress, well-being and sustainable development”, which translated the recommendations of the report of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress

¹⁰ *Indicators of Sustainable Development: Guidelines and Methodologies*, 3rd ed. (United Nations, New York, October 2007). Available from www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/indicators/guidelines.pdf.

¹¹ See www.oecd.org/statistics/betterlifeinitiativemeasuringwell-beingandprogress.htm and www.oecd.org/statistics/howslife.htm.

¹² The well-being measurement framework developed under the OECD Better Life Initiative described above can be considered as universal, i.e. as possibly relevant to all countries. It is clear, however, that the relative importance of the different dimensions included in the OECD framework will vary throughout countries and the selection of indicators used to monitor achievements in these dimensions may also differ to reflect specific country conditions, history and challenges. OECD and its Development Centre are currently preparing a joint report on the development of an adjusted framework to better address the specificities of developing countries.

into a set of concrete actions for the European Statistical System.¹³ The European Statistical System is currently carrying out the 50 specific actions proposed by the sponsorship group on the following priority pillars: household perspective and distributional aspects of income; consumption and wealth; multidimensional measurement of the quality of life; and environmental sustainability. In the context of Europe's growth strategy ahead of 2020 (Europe 2020), Eurostat has also gained experience in providing technical expertise in the process of defining targets, indicators and monitoring process.^{14,15}

National efforts

18. Many Member States have undertaken substantial work in terms of producing and compiling broader measures of progress (a background document describing national initiatives and experiences is being prepared).¹⁶ The release in 2009 of the seminal report of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress provided a new impetus to these efforts and as a result several important initiatives have been launched in various countries to improve existing metrics of progress, well-being and sustainable development. These initiatives range from nation-wide consultations (such as the one launched by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron, and the ones launched in Australia, Canada and Italy), to parliamentary commissions (such as the ones established in Finland and Germany), expert round tables tasked with proposing indicator sets based on existing statistics (in Italy, Japan and Spain, for example) and initiatives to develop new statistics (such as the new surveys launched in France, Japan, Mexico and Morocco). Many countries (Australia, Bhutan, Netherlands and New Zealand) stress the importance of providing policymakers with ideas and tools on how to use new measures in their policies. Several countries involve citizens in discussions on what matters most in their lives. Often new metrics are developed.

¹³ Available from http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/pgp_ess/0_DOCS/estat/SpG_Final_report_Progress_wellbeing_and_sustainable_deve.pdf.

¹⁴ For instance, to measure progress in meeting the Europe 2020 goals, five headline targets have been agreed for the whole of the European Union. This limited set of European Union-level targets is translated into national targets, reflecting different situations and circumstances and measured on an annual basis so that each Member State can check its own progress towards these goals. In addition, thematic summaries have been developed to facilitate a comparison between Member States and to put the economic challenges they face into a broader context.

¹⁵ The following two communications of the European Commission highlight the role of Europe 2020, which builds on the integrative approach initiated by the European Union sustainable development strategy by contributing to greater coherence, mainstreaming and integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in European Union policies at large: communication COM (2013) 92, entitled "A decent life for all: ending poverty and giving the world a sustainable future", and communication COM (2013) 531, entitled "Beyond 2015: towards a comprehensive and integrated approach to financing poverty eradication and sustainable development".

¹⁶ In 2002, for example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics became the first national statistical agency to produce a measuring tool with a broad focus for assessing national progress, developing what was then known as "Measuring Australia's progress" and is now known as "Measures of Australia's Progress". Similarly, in 2003, the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, together with other governmental departments of Switzerland, produced "Monitoring sustainable development in Switzerland" to assess whether the country was on the road to sustainable development.

C. Prospects for and the way forward towards a technically solid and globally agreed set of measures of progress

Establishment of the conceptual basis

19. Over the past years, much has happened throughout the world in the field of measuring progress and sustainability. Even if priorities of countries and regions are not the same, a universal conceptual understanding of well-being with a common core set of well-being dimensions seems to have emerged in many countries. Sustainable development can be defined, in short, as improved well-being for everyone now and in the future. Furthermore, the framework proposed by the joint ECE/Eurostat/OECD task force links the three conceptual aspects defined in *Our Common Future* (here and now, later and elsewhere) to policy-relevant themes or universal well-being dimensions. Twenty themes that cover environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable development are distinguished. These include: subjective well-being, consumption and income, nutrition, health, labour, education, housing, leisure, physical safety, land and ecosystems, water, air quality, climate, energy resources, non-energy resources, trust, institutions, physical capital, knowledge capital, and financial capital.

Sustainable development goals and post-2015 goals and targets and broader measures of progress

20. The development and implementation of a post-2015 development agenda will benefit from the work done to develop broader measures of progress, as such an agenda is expected to have sustainable development at its core, which is the basis for the broader measures of progress that have been developed. However, the discussion on the post-2015 development agenda will also test the relevance and applicability of existing and proposed measures at the global level. For example, some of the suggested new goals and targets are not well covered in existing official statistics, and measurement concepts and indicators are still missing. Also, many of the efforts to develop broader measures of progress take place in developed countries, mostly reflecting their particular situation. Based on the results of the sustainable development goals and post-2015 development agenda discussion, existing measures of progress might need to be revised or amended in order to converge into a technically solid and globally agreed set of broader measures of progress. Hence, the adoption of globally agreed broader measures of progress should take place only after the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda.

IV. Measuring and monitoring the goals of the post-2015 development agenda

A. Review of the proposals made by the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda

21. The members of the Friends of the Chair group were requested in July 2013 to review the report of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.⁴ The group was asked to analyse the statistical implications of the report and to comment on the proposals regarding statistics and on the capability of statistical systems to measure the proposed targets. The following

17 countries and organizations provided feedback, with many providing a detailed and in-depth analysis: Australia, Botswana, Cameroon, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, Jamaica, Netherlands, Philippines, Sweden, United Kingdom, Eurostat, OECD, Paris21 and ECE.

Different frameworks and agendas should converge

22. The Friends of the Chair group welcomed the use of the report of the High-level Panel as a basis for discussion on a framework for post-2015 goals and targets. It agreed with the notion that the new framework should aim both at finishing the job of the Millennium Development Goals and at going beyond the Goals in the direction of a universal post-2015 agenda. Different sets of universal goals have been put forward by the High-level Panel, the Sustainable Development Solution Network initiative¹⁷ and others. While there is much in common among the goals and themes, there are also some differences. Therefore, the Friends of the Chair group recommended that these different frameworks and proposals for sustainable development goals and post-2015 development goals and targets converge at an early stage, ideally before the discussion on targets and indicators begins.

Need to make targets fit all countries

23. The Friends of the Chair group notes that although the 12 illustrative goals proposed in the report of the High-level Panel are universal, the associated targets do not fit all countries. While it is true that countries face global challenges that need to be dealt with at the global level, it is also true that they have regional, national and local specificities that need to be taken into account. The targets might differ from one country to another depending on the level of development. Therefore, the group suggested more flexibility at the national level. It proposed a multi-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.

Global partnership for development data

24. The Friends of the Chair group agreed with the emphasis placed by the High-level Panel on 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 a global partnership on development data to make this happen. Meeting an increased demand for data and information will require increased funding, capacity and coordination of statistical activities. Yet, a data revolution may mean different things for countries at different stages of statistical development. The group stressed 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. Strengthening the links between data, statistics and decision-making that underpin accountability must also be a central aspect of the data revolution. The group recognized that open data,

¹⁷ See *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development: Report for the United Nations Secretary-General* (23 October 2013). Available from <http://unsdsn.org/files/2013/11/An-Action-Agenda-for-Sustainable-Development.pdf>.

big data, geospatial information and geographical information systems are new data mines that could lead to the cost-effective production of statistics. However, the group recommended carefully evaluating the opportunities and challenges that these new data sources represent when they are used as information sources for monitoring. The group also recommended that data produced from new 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 group proposed that the global partnership on development data be led by the official statistical system under the auspices of the 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 that baseline data for post-2015 targets and indicators will be in place within the appropriate and feasible time. The partnership would need to be properly resourced and have an appropriate governance structure to ensure that the desired objectives could be reached. The group recommended making use of existing partnerships and of including the United Nations regional commissions in the coordinating mechanism.

An effective official statistical system as a target

25. Owing to the critical role of the official statistical system in government accountability, the Friends of the Chair group advocated that the inclusion of an effective official statistical system be a target in its own right, and that an appropriate set of measures be developed. Such a target could be added to the goal No. 10 in the report of the High-level Panel: to ensure good governance and effective institutions. This would hopefully underline the importance of statistics in the minds of policymakers and ensure financial support for the achievement of this target.¹⁸

Analysis of global goals and targets

26. The Friends of the Chair group notes that the illustrative goals and targets contained in the report of the High-level Panel are extremely ambitious from a measurement perspective, especially at a time when resources for statistics have been declining in many countries. Significant investment would be required even for the more statistically advanced countries. There is a need both 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 left behind. Few countries come close to meeting this ambitious goal. While a political demand may help move towards that goal, progress can only be incremental. This practical consideration underscores the importance of consulting with official statisticians before agreeing to a set of targets, so as to assess the feasibility of developing indicators pertaining to them.

27. The monitoring of the post-2015 development goals and targets should be based on comparable definitions, methods and classifications. From this point of view, the Friends of the Chair group welcomed the recommendation of the High-level Panel that the framework of the System of Environmental-Economic

¹⁸ The target of having an effective statistical system would aim at obtaining the resources for producing the data that users need and entail a review of priorities and a search for possible innovations.

Accounting be adopted and the inclusion of the target to publish and use economic, social and environmental accounts under goal No. 9, to manage natural resource assets sustainably.

28. Some members of the Friends of the Chair group expressed the view that the international dimension of sustainable development (elsewhere) is lacking in the report of the High-level Panel, especially when assessing the global problems of climate change and biodiversity losses and the impact that a country has on the well-being of the rest of the world. Some members noted that no targets concern subjective well-being and, more generally, people's self-reporting on their conditions and aspirations, even while the High-level Panel emphasizes that the post-2015 agenda should be grounded in the voice of people. Some members of the group proposed that a target on housing conditions be added to goal No. 1, to end poverty, and that a target on waste management and recycling be added to goal No. 9. Demographic changes and international migration flows seemed not to have been sufficiently addressed despite being relevant to sustainability.

29. The members of the Friends of the Chair group often mentioned their experience in measuring progress and sustainability and were willing to share it. The group invites the statistical community to take full advantage of the experience gained in countries and regions. In this context, it could encourage a greater role for regional organizations in order to facilitate the input of countries to the design of the sustainable development goals and post-2015 development goals and targets and in the implementation of the monitoring framework. In the same way, the group invites the statistical community to take into account the aforementioned framework for measuring sustainable development proposed by the joint ECE/Eurostat/OECD task force and endorsed by the Conference of European Statisticians in June 2013.¹⁹ Among the lessons learned, it was stressed that the universal goals and targets should be translated into national targets and that each country should have ownership of their own data. This will require the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics²⁰ and other national and regional initiatives in statistical areas to be aligned with the requirements of the post-2015 development agenda.

B. Need for an integrated and technically robust measurement approach

Data for decision-making: lessons learned from monitoring the Millennium Development Goals

30. The framework for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals translated an inspirational vision into a set of concrete and time-bound goals and targets that could be monitored through the use of statistically robust indicators. Since they were adopted in 2000, the Goals have made a huge difference, helping to set global and national priorities and fuel action on the ground. The concept of monitoring concrete goals with statistically robust indicators is a clear strength of the framework from the policy and the statistical perspectives. The framework reinforced the importance of robust and reliable statistics for development

¹⁹ The task force, in its report, provides a flexible measurement system with a number of alternative indicator sets that cater to the various perspectives in sustainable development. There is also flexibility in the indicators so that both developed and developing countries can use the system.

²⁰ See <http://paris21.org/NSDS>.

policymaking. In many cases, the Millennium Development Goals have been instrumental in strengthening statistical systems and improving statistical methodologies and in the compilation and use of quality data.

31. The following weaknesses of the Millennium Development Goals framework have been pointed out and should be considered during the design and implementation of the post-2015 monitoring framework:²¹ it was unclear how to tailor global targets to national realities and regional dynamics; targets and indicators were perceived as having been developed using a top-down approach, without proper consultation; global and regional trends tended to be dominated by a few countries; the monitoring system appeared to fail to account for the considerable progress made by countries with low initial conditions; the monitoring of national aggregates could lead to the neglect of vulnerable groups; there were inconsistencies between goals, targets and indicators, with some goals not adequately addressed by indicators; some targets were imprecise or poorly specified while others were too ambitious; population dynamics were not accounted for; the interdependence and synergies between achieving different goals and targets were not considered; and some targets were formulated in terms of access to services, neglecting aspects of quality. Furthermore, data availability, data quality and the different capacities of national statistical systems were not properly considered, resulting in large parts of national data being derived by estimates of international organizations.

Setting targets and selecting indicators: need for the early involvement of statisticians

32. A post-2015 development agenda that aims to monitor the achievement of development goals and targets and to hold actors at the various levels accountable requires that measurement aspects be adequately taken into account. Goals and targets that cannot be measured cannot be monitored. As already evident from the existing Millennium Development Goals monitoring framework, finding a monitoring system for a comprehensive set of global goals and targets that can be applied across (and within) all countries is a difficult task, in particular when considering national differences in data availability and statistical capacity. Therefore, statisticians should be consulted in the discussion of different proposals for goals and targets, early on and as appropriate, in order to provide their neutral evaluation from a statistical perspective. Statisticians should engage with the politicians at the global level (as the Friends of the Chair group and the Statistical Commission are doing) but also at the national level early on during the discussion on goals and targets.

33. The Inter-agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal Indicators has identified criteria for setting targets and selecting indicators. During the process of elaborating the sustainable development goals and post-2015 development agenda, statisticians should provide ongoing technical support for setting targets and identify appropriate indicators in consultation with countries at

²¹ United Nations Task Team on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda, *Realizing the future we want for all: report to the Secretary-General* (New York, June 2012). See also the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal Indicators report on lessons learned from monitoring the Goals in March 2013 (see footnote 1).

different development stages. Examining and testing the feasibility of targets and indicators will be an important task.

Need for an integrated approach and the role of statistical measurement frameworks

34. The merits of following an integrated approach to the development of economic statistics are well established (see Statistical Commission decision [39/105](#)). Similarly, for the post-2015 monitoring framework, an integrated approach to the economic, social and environmental domains should be followed, where appropriate and feasible. At the statistical level, important dimensions of integration are data collection, data processing, concepts and definitions, and institutional arrangements. The main area where efforts may be integrated across statistical domains (horizontal integration) in the post-2015 monitoring framework is data collection, in particular in the area of use of administrative sources, household and business surveys. On the policy level, the sustainable development agenda aims to integrate all policy domains (economic, social, environmental) and governance aspects into a coherent set of goals that also facilitates the adoption of an integrated approach to monitoring.

35. In its report entitled *Measuring Sustainable Development*, the joint ECE/Eurostat/OECD Working Group on Statistics on Sustainable Development agreed that it is necessary to have a tight, analytically sound framework from which to proceed to practical decisions.²² Otherwise, everything might be subject to ad hoc considerations and the influence of special interests. With this in mind, the Working Group developed a broad conceptual framework for the measurement of sustainable development with the concept of capital at its centre.²³

36. A starting point for designing a measurement framework for capital-based indicators of sustainable development is the System of National Accounts, which is the source for measures of financial and produced capital stocks. The System of Environmental-Economic Accounting is a measurement framework for natural capital that is consistent with the System of National Accounts. Nevertheless, the capital approach (which was suggested as a way of assessing the future dimension of sustainability) has no ambition to provide a framework for the full set of issues of the post-2015 agenda, many of which will deal with current well-being. Even if one accepts the capital approach for assessing sustainability, the assessment requires not just measuring the total stocks of different types of capital but also knowing where the drivers of changes in these stocks are (such as investment, depreciation and efficiency of use).¹¹ Moreover, the capital approach is very far from being a universally accepted framework for the discussion of social, health and governance issues, which are likely to constitute the core of the post-2015 agenda.

²² Joint ECE/Eurostat/OECD Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development, *Measuring Sustainable Development* (Geneva, 2009), p. 23, quoted from Partha Dasgupta, *Human Well-being and the Natural Environment* (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 178.

²³ A measurement framework is a set of methodologies and organizational rules for turning basic data into useful information coherent with an underlying conceptual framework (Joint ECE/Eurostat/OECD Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development, *Measuring Sustainable Development* (Geneva, 2009), p. 13).

37. The use of an integrated approach and of a statistical measurement framework can facilitate the analysis of the interlinkages that exist among many issues and that concern policymakers involved in the design of a post-2015 development agenda.²⁴

C. Implementing a new monitoring framework

Role of the Statistical Commission in setting up a monitoring system

38. Based on its role as the leading entity of the global statistical system and its mandate as the intergovernmental focal point for the elaboration and review of indicators used in the United Nations system, the Statistical Commission and its working mechanisms (friends of the chair groups, inter-agency groups, expert groups and the like) will guide and lead the response to the statistical needs arising from the post-2015 development agenda.²⁵ The following tasks have to be addressed:

(a) March 2014-September 2015: contributing to the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and General Assembly process towards the sustainable development goals and post-2015 goals and targets (evaluation of targets);

(b) March 2014-September 2015: finding, developing and testing possible indicators;

(c) March 2014-December 2016: developing and establishing a monitoring framework, which includes establishing an expert group and its detailed workplan, preparing for the collection of baseline data and setting up a reporting system.

Busan Action Plan for Statistics and a strengthened partnership for statistical development and capacity-building

39. Statistical capacity-building has long been recognized as a keystone of global development goals. Recognizing the diverse institutional and technical capacities of countries, the global community has been working together to improve statistical development since the Millennium Development Goals were launched. In 1999, this cooperation was formalized in Paris21, which is dedicated to encouraging improvements in the production and use of statistics in developing countries by providing: support for strengthening the national statistical systems of developing countries, including through coordination efforts between data users, data producers, policymakers and providers of development cooperation; assistance to countries in designing, implementing and monitoring their national strategies for the development of statistics; and knowledge through data archiving and documentation.

40. In 2011, the global community renewed its commitment to these efforts with the Busan Action Plan for Statistics, which establishes three goals: (a) to fully

²⁴ For example, for the topic of agriculture, food security and nutrition, looking at interlinkages could mean examining the impact of production and consumption chains on health, the economy, the environment and education.

²⁵ The goals and targets are established within the purview of policymaking bodies. The Commission will provide advice on how the goals and targets might best be specified and measured.

integrate statistics in decision-making by, among other things, engaging statisticians in planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluating processes and refocusing national statistical strategies to produce data that support country-level development priorities; (b) to promote open access to and use of data, e.g. by increasing the knowledge and skills needed to use statistics; and (c) to increase resources for statistical systems, e.g. by ensuring that outcomes of global summits and high-level forums specifically recognize the need for statistical capacity development and by ensuring that financing for statistical information is robust. Existing partnerships such as Paris21 and the Busan Action Plan for Statistics need to be strengthened and additional partnerships might be needed in order to ensure the coordination and scaling up of the capacity-building efforts that will be required for monitoring the sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda.

National priorities and mainstreaming of new requirements

41. At the policy level, countries are expected to adopt sustainable development goals and post-2015 goals and targets in accordance with their priorities and circumstances. Statistics should follow this approach and the post-2015 monitoring and associated technical assistance and capacity-building activities should be aligned with national priorities. At the same time, any new requirement resulting from sustainable development goals and post-2015 monitoring should be integrated into the regular statistical work programme and the existing institutional arrangements and structures in countries. The mainstreaming of the new requirements aims at increasing effectiveness and efficiency and at improving the sustainability of existing and new data collections. For example, additional surveys outside and uncoordinated with the existing survey system and the existing institutional structures of the national statistical systems should be avoided.

Development and implementation of new methodologies, data sources and methods of data capture, integration and dissemination

42. Monitoring the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda might require the development and adoption of new concepts, measurement frameworks, data sources, methods and technologies. For example, in the area of governance there is considerable work to be done by the statistical community to develop concepts and measurement tools and to put in place statistical programmes to meet information needs. Also, the implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting will be important. However, filling some very large data gaps in developing but also in many developed countries will be achieved mainly by implementing or strengthening existing tools and statistics, such as civil registration, household survey and environmental statistics.

43. Open data, big data, geospatial information systems, Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange, the Internet and mobile technologies have created potential new data sources, tools and approaches for data collection, integration, dissemination and use that could lead to the new, rapid and cost-effective production of statistics. In this context, sources of official statistics should seek a dialogue and synergies with non-official sources of statistics. However, the process of producing data, regardless of the source, should consider the requirements and quality standards of official statistics. It is recommended that the risk that these new data represent be carefully evaluated when they are used as information sources for monitoring the post-2015 development agenda.

Rethinking existing mechanisms: possibilities for a data revolution

44. Although it is unquestionable that there have been advances since the Millennium Development Goals were launched,²⁶ critical gaps in the capacity of most developing countries to produce and use statistics in key areas like poverty, health and education persist.²⁷ Against this background, the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda proposed a data revolution that would draw on existing and new sources of data to fully integrate statistics into decision-making, promote open access to and use of data and ensure increased support for statistical systems.⁴ A further element of the proposed data revolution would be a global partnership on development data.

45. Firstly, based on the discussions on sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda, Governments and decision makers appear to recognize the importance of statistics for meeting the global challenges. Secondly, sustainable development goals and post-2015 monitoring will significantly increase the data requirements for many countries. Thirdly, advances in information technology have created new tools and approaches for data collection, storage, dissemination and use. These three elements, supported by appropriate partnerships, could indeed foster a data revolution which would fill the existing gaps and provide the newly required data.

46. National statistical systems must have appropriate mandates and adequate resources if they are to further develop their institutional arrangements, production processes and approaches, in particular if new statistical areas (such as governance or subjective well-being) are to be covered and if more disaggregated data for specific areas or societal groups with special needs are to be produced. An integrated and well thought out set of targets and indicators, an equally integrated and well considered approach to monitoring and the innovative use of new sources and tools for data collection can lead to a more effective and efficient statistical system. However, significant additional resources for statistics will be needed to achieve the desired data revolution.

V. Main messages and proposed work programme of the Friends of the Chair group

A. Key messages for policymakers

47. *A universal post-2015 development agenda.* The post-2015 development agenda aims to both finish the job of the Millennium Development Goals and complement those Goals with sustainable development goals that address the social,

²⁶ For example, the percentage of countries in developing regions that produced sufficient data to provide trend analysis for 16-22 Millennium Development Goal indicators rose from 2 per cent in July 2003 to 83 per cent in July 2012. Coordination has also improved: 94 per cent of developing countries have adopted the national strategies for the development of statistics approach.

²⁷ The situation is often worse in statistical areas that were not in the Millennium Development Goal framework. In many developing countries, basic data are missing on births and deaths; on the number and quality of jobs; and on agricultural productivity. Less than 10 per cent of sub-Saharan African countries had a complete civil registration system in 2012. Only 11 per cent of developing countries produce data for Goal No. 5, on maternal mortality. In fact, all of the data available for northern Africa, southern Asia and Oceania are estimates by United Nations agencies.

economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced and synergistic way, capturing interlinkages and cross-cutting issues. The sets of goals should merge in order to give birth to a single encompassing development agenda. Despite differences, the various proposals have common themes and goals. These universal dimensions should be agreed upon early on in the process, ideally before the discussion on targets and indicators begins. This would facilitate the statistical discussion on targets and indicators.

48. *Considering the dimensions of well-being.* This post-2015 development agenda should reflect the three-dimensional nature of well-being: the well-being of the present generation in one particular country (here and now), the well-being of future generations (later) and the well-being of people living in other countries (elsewhere). This is the framework that was proposed by the joint ECE/Eurostat/OECD task force on measuring sustainable development and was endorsed by the Conference of European Statisticians in June 2013. The task force framework also includes 20 themes that could easily be linked to the proposals for goals and targets.

49. *Early and continued close involvement of the statistical community.* One cannot manage what one cannot measure. Therefore, the post-2015 development agenda should incorporate clear goals that have measurable targets and indicators to ensure that the desired outcomes are achieved and that progress towards achieving these outcomes can be monitored. Early and continued close engagement of the national and international official statistical community is necessary in the process of formulating the targets and indicators to ensure that the monitoring is firmly grounded on established principles and sound statistical practices of official statistics, statistical capacity and data availability. Therefore, it will be important to bring in the expertise and experience of statisticians of a diverse set of countries, as well as statisticians working at the regional and international level. The Statistical Commission, as the leading entity of the global statistical system, should steer this process.

50. *Building on the lessons learned.* During the development of the sustainable development goals and post-2015 goals and targets, but also when deciding on indicators and the implementation of a monitoring framework, the lessons learned from the monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the experiences gained during other monitoring efforts, such as the monitoring and assessment of sustainable development indicators in Europe, should be taken into consideration.

51. *Open access to data.* Open access to and use of data should be promoted. Data should be made widely available to allow evidence-based decision-making and policymaking, assess government effectiveness and enhance accountability of actions in the public and the private sectors. The data should not only become easily accessible but also be provided in formats that allow the general user to interpret and understand the data. These formats extend to data visualizations, demonstrate evidence-based decision-making and educate the general public, the analyst and the media in the use and interrelationships of various statistics.

52. *Taking account of national and regional specificities.* Goals such as eradicating poverty are universal, but associated targets do not fit all countries or regions around the world. While countries face global challenges that need to be dealt with at a global level, regional, national and local specificities need to be taken

into account. Therefore, a multilevel approach to goal- and target-setting is recommended, one that combines a small set of global goals reflecting universally agreed outcomes with more specific targets and indicators reflecting and accommodating different levels of development, different policy priorities, different levels of responsibility and different statistical capacities. For instance, in the Millennium Development Goals monitoring, the regional dimensions of development and regional responses have emerged as essential building blocks that have provided the critical link between the global agenda and national-level Goal implementation. Finally, more prominence should be given to the inequalities and interdependencies of different goals and targets within countries.

53. *Including a target related to an effective official statistical system.* The official statistical systems are critical for informing government decision-making. Increasing use of data in public policy monitoring makes the quality assurance that can be provided by official statistics essential. Official statistics can also ensure the quality of statistics produced by other (private) sources, whose increased use might be part of the desired data revolution. A target guaranteeing the effectiveness of the official statistical system should be included under a possible goal on “good governance”, and an appropriate set of measures should be developed. Although statisticians in developing countries make efforts to improve their statistical systems and to make it more cost-effective, improving statistical capacities in a number of developing countries remains crucial. Many Asia-Pacific and African countries, for example, are still not able to conduct household surveys without external financial and technical support and derive most of their data on the Millennium Development Goals from internationally sponsored household survey programmes, such as those for the multiple indicator cluster survey and the demographic and health survey. Furthermore, improvements in the availability of survey data have often not been accompanied by a strengthening of administrative data recording systems, such as civil registrations or systems for the provision of social services, though they are critical for a continuous monitoring of vital aspects of population trends and the availability of basic services. An effective statistical system is required not only to ensure data quality and the sustainability of statistics but also to ensure full country ownership of the data.

54. *Need for statistical capacity development.* Measuring the post-2015 development goals proposed in the report of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda places increased demands on national statistical systems, for example for the development of new areas of statistics and the disaggregation of existing data. The global community should continue to invest in statistical capacity development and support countries’ efforts to meet this growing demand. Statistical capacity-building should focus on the establishment of permanent (and sustainable) capabilities. Doing so will not only make it easier to track progress regarding the new goals but also, crucially, support evidence-based decision-making, transparency and accountability within countries.

B. Proposals for further involvement in the ongoing debate and processes towards a post-2015 development agenda

55. *Bring in the expertise and experience from around the world.* The task of official statistics is to ensure that a robust measurement approach based on the fundamental principles of official statistics is incorporated in the sustainable

development goals and the post-2015 development agenda. The experience and expertise gained in monitoring the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development should be taken into account to ensure that the best options in terms of indicators, related data sources and data compilation are considered. Conceptual developments, such as the establishment of the ECE/Eurostat/OECD framework to measure sustainable development based on internationally agreed normative standards should be taken into account. Early, continuous and close involvement of experts of international, regional and national statistical systems will facilitate the establishment of the required political, statistical and institutional foundation for aligned monitoring and reporting of national, regional and international data systems.

56. *Ongoing dialogue and involvement.* From now until September 2015, the Statistical Commission and the Friends of the Chair group will focus on supporting the political processes towards the sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda, in order to ensure dialogue between the political and statistical communities. It is expected that the statistical community will be consulted for the statistical evaluation of proposals for goals and targets throughout the discussion process. The Commission and the group will have to put in place appropriate procedures to cope with this requirement in an effective way.

57. *Methodological advice.* The preparation of the statistical notes that focus on measurement aspects and accompany the issue briefs on the various topics that have been discussed by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals are an important first step towards bringing in the expertise and experience of official statisticians. Furthermore, statisticians will need to provide support for specifying attainable targets in respect of the desired goals. When the targets have been determined, indicators to measure them will have to be selected, which is a core competency of statistical offices. Indeed, statisticians can provide support by answering the following questions:

- (a) What indicators are best suited to assess whether a target is being met?
- (b) Are official or other data readily or potentially available for all countries?
- (c) How reliable, precise and current are the indicators available within (and outside) the official statistical system? Is the quality assured in accordance with international standards?
- (d) Are the indicators internationally comparable and robust?
- (e) What improvements in data compilation can be made in the short, medium and long term?

C. Proposals for carrying on the work programme on broader measures of progress

58. It is suggested that the Friends of the Chair group do the following:

- (a) Continue to provide and facilitate statistical support in the design of the sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda, in order to ensure that statistical considerations are appropriately taken into account;

(b) Develop and pursue a workplan for the development and implementation of a monitoring framework for the post-2015 development agenda;

(c) Address the need for the development of new data sources, methods and methodologies resulting from the data requirements of the sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda;

(d) Make a proposal for how a target related to an effective official statistical system could be formulated and supported by indicators.

59. The discussion on and development of sustainable development goals and a post-2015 development agenda is expected to have a strong influence on what will be considered globally accepted measures of progress. It might be possible for a universally agreed statistical concept for broader measures of progress to be built on the outcome of the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda. Hence, it is suggested that the Friends of the Chair group advise the Statistical Commission on the prospects for a solid and globally agreed set of measures of progress, once the post-2015 development agenda has been adopted.

VI. Points for discussion

60. **The Commission is requested:**

(a) **To express its views on the review of the work done to develop and implement further measures of progress and to measure sustainable development and on the prospects for a technically solid and globally agreed set of measures of progress;**

(b) **To express its views regarding the review of the existing proposals for a post-2015 development framework, the need for a technically robust measurement approach and the implementation of a new monitoring framework;**

(c) **To express its views on the key messages for policymakers;**

(d) **To express its views regarding the work done by the Friends of the Chair group, including its contribution to the preparation of statistical notes for the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals;**

(e) **To express its views on and endorse the proposed work programme of the Friends of the Chair group, including its further involvement in the ongoing debate and processes towards a post-2015 development agenda.**