

## Annex I

### Terms of reference and mandate of the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics

The statistical community has the obligation of exploring the use of new data sources to meet the expectation of the society for enhanced products and for improved and more efficient ways of working. The terms of reference and mandate of the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics are based on this principle, but should certainly also be understood within the context of fulfilling the new data demands posed by the monitoring and reporting requirements under the post-2015 development agenda.

The main deficiency of the indicators for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals was lack of timeliness (or availability). To improve on that situation for the goals of the post-2015 development agenda, the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, in its report of 30 May 2013 (“A new global partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development”), called for a data revolution, which would draw on existing and new sources of data in order to fully integrate statistics into decision-making, promote open access to, and use of, data and ensure increased support for statistical systems.

The present terms of reference also refer to the report of the Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, which emphasized that statistical offices will need to change, and continue to adapt, abandoning expensive and cumbersome production processes, incorporating new data sources, including administrative data from other government departments, and focusing on providing data that are human- and machine-readable, compatible with geo-spatial information systems and available quickly enough to ensure that the data cycle matches the decision cycle.<sup>a</sup>

Within this context, big data sources are recognized as constituting an important part of the data revolution needed to support the monitoring of the post-2015 development goals. Big data could contribute to improving some aspects of the quality of statistics, such as timeliness and relevance, without compromising their impartiality and methodological soundness.

Also, the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics<sup>b</sup> encourage the use of new data sources such as big data, as they state that:

- Official statistics that meet the test of practical utility are to be compiled and made available on an impartial basis by official statistical agencies to honour citizens’ entitlement to public information (principle 1)
- Data for statistical purposes may be drawn from all types of sources, be they statistical surveys or administrative records. Statistical agencies are to choose the source with regard to quality, timeliness, costs and the burden on respondents. (principle 5)

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<sup>a</sup> IAEG, “A world that counts: mobilising the data revolution for sustainable development”, p. 9.

<sup>b</sup> See General Assembly resolution 68/261.

- Individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether they refer to natural or legal persons, are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes. (principle 6)

Guided by these strategic considerations within the context of the Fundamental Principles, the post-2015 development agenda and the data revolution as a basis, and with reference to Statistical Commission decision 45/110, the mandate of the Global Working Group is formulated as follows:

(a) To provide a strategic vision, direction and coordination for a global programme on big data for official statistics, including for indicators of the post-2015 development agenda;

(b) To promote practical use of big data sources, including cross-border data, while building on existing precedents and finding solutions for the many existing challenges, including:

- Methodological issues, covering quality concerns and data analytics
- Legal and other issues in respect of access to data sources
- Privacy issues, in particular those relevant to the use and reuse of data, data linking and re-identification
- Security, information technology issues and management of data, including advanced means of data dissemination, assessment of cloud computing and storage, and cost-benefit analysis

(c) To also promote capacity-building, training and sharing of experience;

(d) To foster communication and advocacy of the use of big data for policy applications, especially for the monitoring of the post-2015 development agenda;

(e) To build public trust in the use of big data for official statistics.