

# UNSD-FCDO PROJECT ON SDG MONITORING

Newsletter March 2021



With the project drawing to a close at the end of July 2021, the focus in the remaining few months is to finalize ongoing work, respond to remaining identified needs and look ahead to sustain the momentum of the work.

## Highlights:

- **Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic countries showed a strong, continued commitment to SDG monitoring and made significant advances**
- **Global Network of Data Officers and Statisticians launched**
- **Pioneering SDMX-based pilot reference metadata exchange for SDG indicators successfully completed**
- **Virtual workshops continue to successfully deliver capacity building to countries**



# Country perspective on the sustainability of the project

The 5th Annual meeting with project countries took place on 4 February 2021 and was the first virtual event of the project that brought chief statisticians and country focal points together from a majority of the countries. It was also the last regular annual meeting of the project. As such, an important element of discussion was the sustainability of the work and, linked to that, a stock-taking of the important aspects of the work of the project from the countries' perspectives.

## What countries have appreciated most

Participants expressed that the project was instrumental in raising awareness of SDGs among members of the National Statistical System (NSS) and improving coordination within the NSS through the creation of more formal structures, such as inter-ministerial working groups and focal points within line ministries. This has greatly facilitated data compilation for the SDGs, since it became easier to get in touch and coordinate with data producers, thereby improving the harmonization of work and reducing duplication.

The national reporting platforms were also highlighted as successful and well-received. Some countries, such as Cambodia, are using the same platform for general statistics in addition to SDGs. Others have added COVID-19 information to their national reporting platforms.

Countries also highlighted that the metadata template and associated training on metadata have been very useful for standardization. Ghana even referred to the work on metadata as “groundbreaking”. The NSO is now requiring that all data producers report data accompanying it with metadata, having realized the importance of understanding how data is collected and processed for explaining differences between published figures on apparently similar indicators, where a difference in definition can lead to very different results. For example, ‘access to electricity’ can be understood as possibility to obtain access or as actually having set up the access, which changes the data significantly.

The project's emphasis on user engagement has really made an impact in many countries. Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan and Palestine have ramped up their user outreach activities to reach broader user groups in creative ways. Zambia has incorporated user engagement into its National Strategy for Development

II. Countries noted that Covid-19 has had a large impact on statistical operations, including on engaging users, but it has also presented an opportunity to reach wider audiences. Several countries are conducting impact surveys and disseminating Covid-19 related indicators.

## Discussion of sustainability

Countries expressed a commitment to continue the work of the project, with several stating that internal resources will be allocated to maintain the data reporting platforms. The SDGs have been mainstreamed into national development plans of most of the countries, which will also promote sustainability. The choice of platforms, particularly the Open Data Platform, which will be supported going forward by AfDB, and OpenSDG, supported by ONS, will also ensure that the work carries on. However, many countries also expressed that additional support is needed to continue some activities, particularly around metadata.

Administrative data is another area in which further capacity building is needed, since many of the SDG indicators are based on it. Countries also expressed the hope that the central coordinating role of the NSO is supported when it comes to international support for statistics coming in to the country.



# Looking ahead to the remainder of the project and beyond



Countries have made impressive progress on project implementation despite the challenges of the pandemic and have kept their attention on the SDGs, demonstrating a very high level of ownership of SDG monitoring. This was the consensus at the annual Advisory Group Meeting held virtually in the margins of the 51st session of the Statistical Commission, on 5 February. The focus of the meeting was to review recent achievements and to look toward the remaining six months of the project and beyond.

The coming months will see a joint push by UNSD and project countries to achieve objectives and deliver on the project outcome and output measures, which will be used by FCDO to evaluate the project when it concludes. While there is still work to be done, there has been strong progress over the last year towards meeting these measures, despite the challenges.

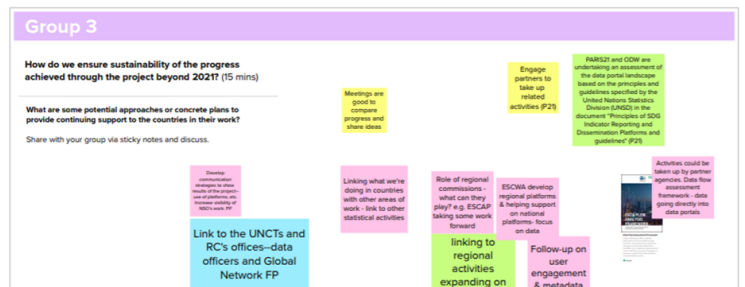
For the remainder of the project, UNSD will continue to respond to national priorities within the framework of the project. Key activities include remote workshops and trainings, support in developing tools and materials, participation in user events, and providing national consultancies to support activities.

With the project drawing to a close, discussions of the continuation and expansion of the work beyond the project are underway. At the Advisory Group Meeting, participants used Mural, an online collaboration platform, to brainstorm ideas for project sustainability. The discussions highlighted the importance of communication and publicity, in particular advocating for increased use of SDG data, as well as reaching out to donors to raise awareness of the project, promote the work and to seek support to further sustain it. The

advisory group also suggested that the project supports NSOs in seeking increased domestic funding for statistics. This could involve increasing visibility of the project within countries, so that line ministries fully appreciate the work that NSOs have delivered.

Sharing the materials developed by the project and raising awareness of these resources for countries and other organizations were also identified as important areas of work. The advisory group proposed that the project could create materials which further guide other countries in how to implement the activities, bringing together the existing resources in a structured way.

In promoting sustainability, the importance of working with UN Country Teams and UN Resident Coordinator Offices was highlighted, as was the potential to make use of the Global Network of Statisticians and Data Officers. The work of the Office of National Statistics of the UK (ONS), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and others in promoting the use of open standards in SDG data dissemination was also identified as important, as was the role of Regional Commissions with regional data platforms and also supporting national ones. Other actors, such as PARIS21 are also making use of the guidance on data platforms produced by UNSD to assess the data portal landscape.

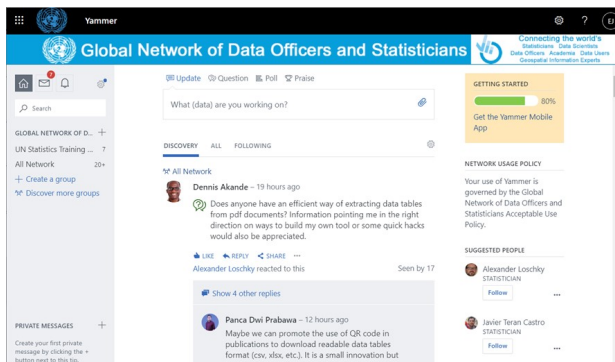


Mural collaboration in action

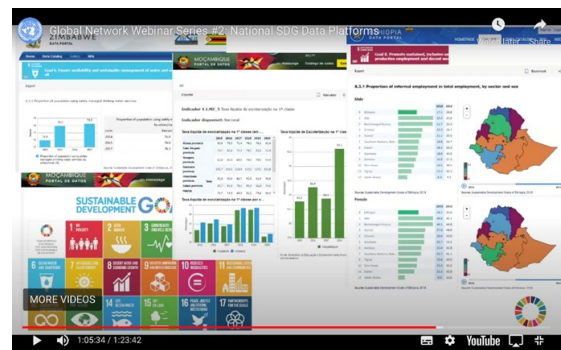


## Project countries share SDG data platform experiences with global statistical community

On World Statistics Day 2020, UNSD Director Stefan Schweinfest launched the Global Network of Data Officers and Statisticians. This network aims to bring together official statisticians, data officers, data scientists, and geospatial information experts from international organizations and national statistical systems to support SDG implementation through collaboration and knowledge sharing. You can join the Global Network here: <https://www.yammer.com/unstats>



ensuring SDG data are available to help support evidence-based policy and inform public debate. The webinar drew on the experiences of several project countries, including Kyrgyzstan, Zimbabwe and Bangladesh, relating to the development and use of their national platforms. The different approaches implemented by countries were highlighted, whether existing national platforms were extended to cover the SDGs or new ones developed, according to national circumstances and priorities. A number of different platform solution providers contributed to the discussion, including OECD (.Stat), Statistics Sweden (PxWeb), Esri (ArcGIS), AfDB (OpenData Platform) and ONS (OpenSDG). The recording is available on the [project website](#).



As part of the network, UNSD organized a webinar to highlight the value of National SDG data and metadata platforms in supporting the coordination, compilation and communication and dissemination activities of NSOs,

## Achievements by project countries showcased at Statistical Commission



In February, UNSD organized a UN Statistical Commission side event on *Continued efforts to provide evidence on SDG achievement in the COVID era*. This event highlighted how the UNSD-FCDO project countries have exceeded expectations by showing a strong, continued commitment to provide data and metadata on the SDGs

despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Presentations from Rwanda, Myanmar and Zimbabwe provided examples of how project countries have continued to implement national SDG monitoring, and to prepare for their VNRs. A panel involving the NSOs of Palestine, Liberia, Nepal and Ethiopia discussed the importance of maintaining a focus on SDG monitoring during the pandemic, as well as highlighting both the challenges the countries have faced in doing so, and the lessons and new ways of working that they are able to take forward into a post-COVID world. The recording is available on the [Statistical Commission website](#).

Project countries were also active in other side events, including a presentation from BBS and the UNRCO in Bangladesh on building partnerships for better SDG data, and remarks from the Director Generals of the NSOs in Ghana and Palestine on how the statistical community has responded to new data needs during COVID-19.



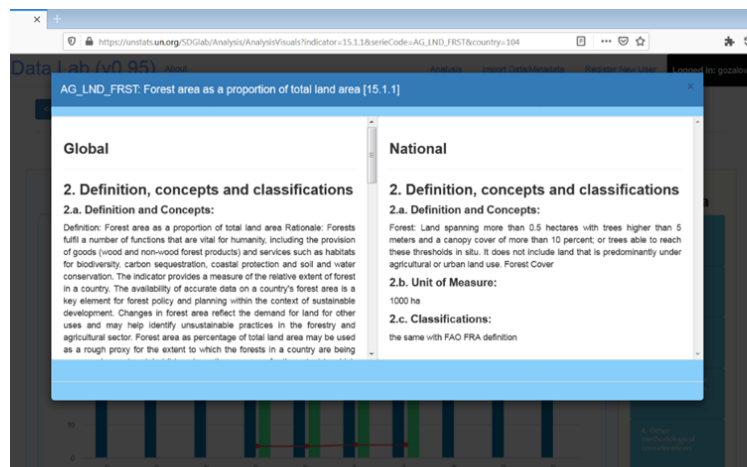
## Ongoing developments in SDG metadata compilation and dissemination

A pioneering SDMX-based pilot reference metadata exchange for SDG indicators was successfully completed in November 2020. As part of the pilot, two custodian agencies and five countries (including two project countries) posted their metadata at the SDG Global Platform. The metadata facilitates understanding country indicators and identifying causes of differences between global and country indicators.

Drawing on the results of the pilot, the Metadata Authoring Tool Template was further refined and enhanced under the direction of the SDMX-SDGs Working Group. Version 3.3 of the template builds on the previous version by adding functionality to allow the user to associate a metadata file with more than one series, thereby eliminating the need for duplication when the metadata for different series is identical. While the SDG metadata concepts are expected to remain the same going forward, functionality enhancements such as this one may periodically be made to the template to improve ease of use. An SDMX Application Programming Interface (API) for SDG reference metadata was also developed and launched as part of the pilot and UNSD is publishing both global and national metadata at the SDMX API, with a view to moving to expanded production SDMX-based reference metadata exchange in the second half of 2021.

UNSD continues to provide follow-up support to countries as they progress in compiling their metadata. In some cases, this is a short follow-up training for the NSO, focusing on the latest version of the metadata template. In other countries, such as Tanzania, UNSD is supporting the NSO in delivering their own metadata

training to their staff and line ministries. This is facilitated by an updated metadata eLearning developed by UNSD and available on the UNSD eLearning platform: <https://elearning-cms.unstats.un.org/course/detail/24>



Additionally, UNSD has recently recruited two international consultants who will support a number of countries in completing their metadata compilation, providing feedback and additional guidance. They will also provide support to those countries who compiled their metadata prior to the development of the Metadata Authoring Tool Template and are working to convert their metadata into this format, to facilitate sharing with the SDG Lab and others. A third international consultant has also been hired to support activities related to data and metadata modelling and exchange with selected countries of the project and the presentation of data and metadata in the SDG Lab.

## SDMX-SDGs Working Group activities

The Annual Meeting of the SDMX-SDGs Working Group took place online on 9 and 10 December 2021. The Working Group welcomed new members, including Kyrgyzstan and the United Kingdom. The Annual Meeting took stock of progress made in 2020, including updates to the SDG Data Structure Definition following new indicator and disaggregation availability, as well as revision of the SDG Global Indicator Framework, and successful completion of the pilot metadata exchange. Data exchange of SDG indicators has substantially expanded in

2020; data exchange has now been established with 29 countries including 14 project countries. Capacity development in SDMX has continued despite the pandemic, with numerous national and regional virtual events taking place. The Working Group agreed on a draft Working Plan, to be submitted to the IAEG-SDGs for approval, which will see further expansion of capacity building and data exchange, as well as the launch of official metadata exchange, among other activities.



## 10th SDMX Expert Group Meeting

The [10th Expert Group Meeting on Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange](#) took place on 25-28 Jan 2021, hosted virtually by the International Monetary Fund. The SDMX Expert Group meeting – which is a bi-annual event organized by the SDMX Sponsor agencies – has been designed to help SDMX experts and practitioners focus on how to improve the SDMX standard. Taking advantage of the virtual format, this meeting was open to anyone who is interested in learning about the technical discussions around the development of SDMX. The four-day meeting attracted 580 participants from 84 countries, including representatives from international organizations, national statistics agencies, central banks, the private sector and



other regional and national institutions. About 30 participants from 15 project countries attended the event. The SDGs featured prominently in the discussions, with about 6 presentations made by countries and international agencies. Presentations and video recordings are available at the [event web site](#), and a report will be issued shortly.

## Progress on national SDG reporting platforms

During the past several months, there has been a significant push in getting countries to decide their platform of choice, where this had not already happened, with follow-up meetings and additional clarifications provided on the details of the platforms where necessary. By the end of 2020 year, all project countries confirmed their choice of national dissemination platform.

As of March 2021, 14 of the 20 project countries have brought their platforms fully online. At least three to four additional countries are expected to be able to launch their national SDG reporting platforms before the end of the project in July. Full details of the platforms and their implementation are available on the country pages at the [project website](#).



Myanmar OpenSDG platform

## SDG Lab update

Work has been ongoing to publish more nationally reported data and metadata on the SDG Lab to be visualized and compared with global data. The work has focused on:

- Reviewing existing national SDG platforms and creating workflows to obtain data in an automated manner using SDMX or other established channels
- Providing guidance to countries in the use of the metadata authoring tool to convert their existing metadata into SDMX following the draft MSD
- Following up with countries and partners in providing additional guidance to support the customization of national DSD's for the SDG data



## Good progress on user engagement despite ongoing pandemic challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic has made many policymakers and other users realize more than ever the importance of good quality data to inform decision making.

However, the pandemic has also brought many challenges in implementing user engagement activities.

For example, many of the mechanisms traditionally used for engaging with data users may not be practicable due to public health measures. For this reason, the project has continued to provide tailored support to countries to adjust their approach as necessary and reengage with users of SDG data under the new circumstances. This includes support in conducting launch events/webinars for the SDG data platforms, holding virtual focus groups/round tables with key users, developing engagement via social media with the general public, developing user surveys, holding training in statistical literacy for policy

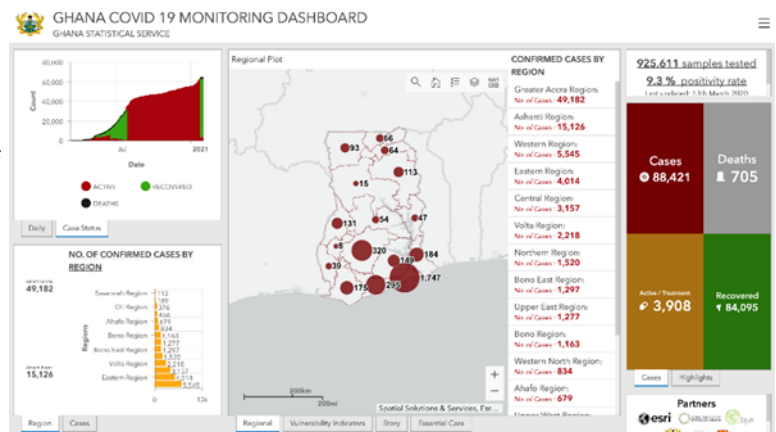
makers related to the SDGs, and developing new SDG outputs/brochures utilizing engaging data visualizations/infographics.

This support has contributed to an increase in user engagement activities in many project countries in recent months, with Burundi, Liberia and Tajikistan having implemented their user engagement strategies, and several other countries also making good progress. To further support the project countries over the coming months, the project has brought in a communications specialist, Ms. Brigitte Perrin, who will work with UN SD project staff to assist countries in developing and implementing their plans for COVID-friendly engagement, as well as supporting the development of new learning resources.

## Range of support for national COVID-19 data responses further expanded

Since the start of the pandemic, the scope of the UN SD-FCDO project has been expanded to support countries with their national data responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, with some project resources redirected towards these efforts. During 2020, one of the key focuses was supporting project countries in establishing COVID-19 datahubs that bring together data resources in four thematic areas (Virus tracking, Health Infrastructure, Economy and Population) to help inform national responses to the pandemic. Through this work, training was provided to a number of countries to set up COVID-19 data hubs.

In late 2020, it was agreed with FCDO that the project's COVID-19-related output would be revised to reflect broader coverage of activities which support national responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the effective production and dissemination of key official statistics in the face of disruption to operations. This will ensure that project support in this area will be able to reflect differing national priorities due to factors such as the role of the NSO in the overall COVID-19 response, support provided by other international actors, and the evolution of the pandemic within the country, including



the relative number of cases.

Subsequent to this, UN SD has been working with project countries to identify their priorities and put in place activities to support them. As a result, UN SD is providing support in a wide range of areas including COVID-19 impact surveys (questionnaire design and dissemination), the use of administrative and other alternative data sources, and the use of SDG data platforms to highlight COVID-19 related SDG indicators and other related data.



## Africa Information Highway Live Exchange session on SDG indicator dissemination for anglophone countries

UNSD once again joined the African Development Bank in showcasing the Open Data Platform for SDG indicator dissemination and in leading a discussion of the challenges related to the collection and dissemination of SDGs as part of the Africa Information Highway Live Exchange monthly webinar series. This fourth session, held on 9 December and focusing on anglophone Africa, included presentations by Ethiopia and Cabo Verde of their respective experiences and an interactive discussion, in breakout rooms, of challenges encountered in SDG monitoring. These challenges could be grouped into three

areas: governance (challenges with coordination across ministries, insufficient power granted to the NSO, lack of a statistical law that outlines responsibilities and rights, etc.), data (timeliness of data, data availability and gaps, different formats and structures of data, privacy) and resources (technical staff retention, need for more exposure to tools that can be used in data collection, validation and dissemination). The breakout room discussions also proposed solutions to the identified challenges, which were assembled and shared with all participants.

## Virtual Workshop on the Use of SDMX for SDG Data Reporting for Nepal

As part of the UNSD-FCDO project, UNSD and the Central Bureau Statistics of Nepal (CBS) conducted a joint virtual workshop on the use of SDMX for the reporting of SDG indicators. The four-day workshop was held from 12 – 15 January 2021 in Dhulikhel, Nepal, with about 20

modeling, the SDMX Information Model and the global SDG Data Structure Definition (DSD) were presented along with an introduction to tools that can be used in SDG data reporting and customizing the global structures for national use. A series of hands-on exercises enabled the participants to familiarize themselves with the data modeling process and the use of SDMX tools for SDG reporting. Participants also worked with their own data, including the latest Nepal Multiple Indicator Child Survey (NMICS), where over 40 disaggregated SDG indicator series have been collected. The resulting SDMX outputs produced by the participants were submitted to UNSD's SDG Lab, which allows countries to compare their national data and metadata with the global data submitted by custodian agencies. The SDMX outputs will also be used as inputs to Nepal's new SDG data dissemination platform, which is currently being developed through support from the project, with an initial version expected to be available in the coming month.

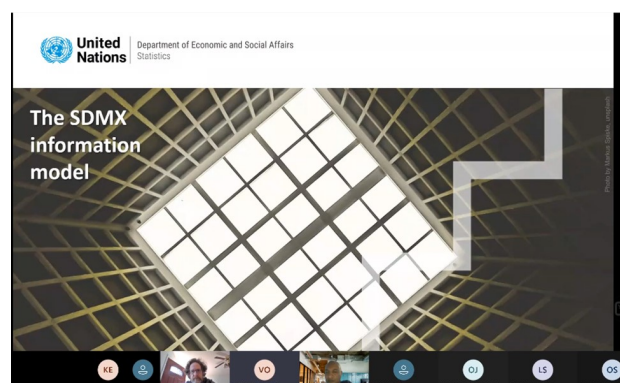


statisticians and IT experts from both CBS and a range of other line ministries participating. The basics of the data

## Virtual training on Data modelling and SDMX for Ghana

In March 2021, UNSD conducted a series of webinars on Data Modelling and SDMX for the core team members of the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) working on the national SDG platform. The team was trained in customization of the global DSD in order to capture data at the sub-national level and allow additional disaggregation currently not available at the global level. The staff is now able to map Ghana's available national SDG indicators to a customized national SDG DSD and convert them into SDMX format. GSS staff will publish the SDMX dataset to their national platform. The project, in collaboration with the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS), will also support the upgrade of OpenSDG to

the latest version that supports the publishing of nationally customized SDG data from the SDMX format.





## Strong progress across multiple areas in Viet Nam

Since the start of 2021, the General Statistics Office (GSO) in Viet Nam has initiated multiple activities to further develop their SDG data, metadata, dissemination capacity and user engagement. Viet Nam has developed a set of 158 sustainable development statistical indicators (VSDGIs) through a process of wide-ranging user consultation. GSO is now working to increase the availability of this data, including disaggregations, with the project supporting them in compiling a database and undertaking SDMX data modelling. Viet Nam has decided to use PxWeb for their SDG data platform as this is already in use for other data in the country, and UNSD is working together with Istat to support this.

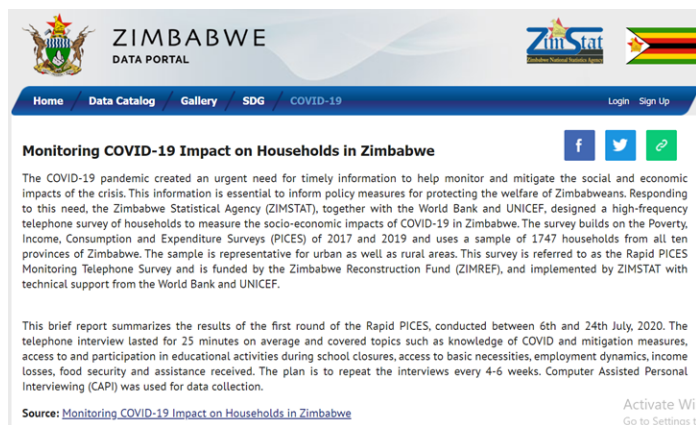
Recognizing the importance of national metadata, GSO has already compiled metadata for many of their indicators, including those available on the ASEAN platform. The project is supporting GSO in developing this metadata further, including using the latest metadata reporting template. GSO is also developing their user engagement further by developing infographics and videographics in order to share information on SDG progress with a broader range of users. The project is also supporting GSO in responding to COVID-19, including by providing guidance and best practices on the use of alternative data sources.

## Zimbabwe making tremendous progress towards SDG monitoring

ZIMSTAT has initiated work to compile the metadata with a team of technical staff representing various departments. Once developed, the draft will be shared with SDG cluster committees for review and modification. The office plans to engage a consultant for technical guidance to finalize the metadata handbook.

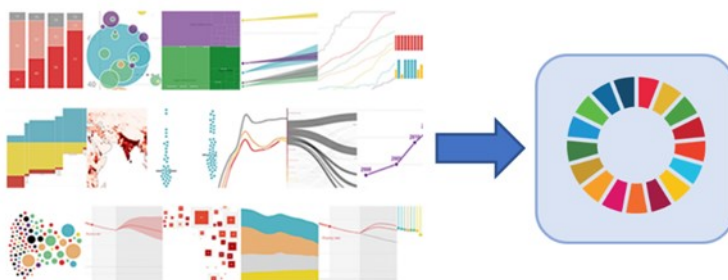
Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, ZIMSTAT continued the implementation of the user engagement strategy by disseminating results of surveys and other information through Twitter, and creating an instant messaging group where users can interact with ZIMSTAT's technical staff to discuss issues related to the production of statistics. ZIMSTAT has also put in place the data sharing agreement based on the template developed by UNSD, and will pilot the agreement with three institutions.

In December 2020, ZIMSTAT uploaded the results of the "Monitoring COVID-19 Impact on Households in Zimbabwe" survey on Zimbabwe's SDG dissemination portal developed with support from AfDB and UNSD.



## Jordan set on developing SDG indicators mobile application

The Department of Statistics (DoS) Jordan began the development of a mobile application for SDG indicators as part of its wider efforts to enhance dissemination and user engagement. The mobile app will be based on the existing and popular DoS SDG data portal. The app will provide easy access to SDG indicators and trends to a wider user base including the country's app-savvy youth. The application is planned for development over the next quarter



and is scheduled to be released in the second half of this 2021.

In addition, DOS is under discussions to further upgrade the existing SDG data portal to add more geographic visuals or "mappings". Such geovisualizations are becoming increasingly popular and in-demand among users, partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby data presented on a map gained visibility for its use in gauging the spread of infections.

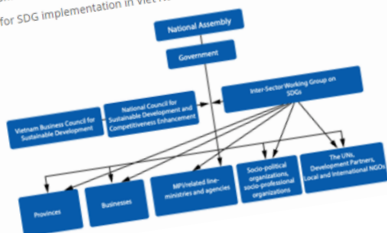


## Interested in the work of each project country?

Many have followed the work in countries with interest and asked us for more information. To respond to this demand and also have a better chance of highlighting the work each of the project countries do on SDG monitoring, we have now created specific country pages on our project website. If you go to the main page: <https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/UNSD-FCDO/> and select 'Countries' in the top menu, you can select the country of your interest.

For each country you will then be able to find information about their national SDG organizational set-up including national strategies, implementation plans and indicator sets and a link to their Voluntary National Reviews. There is also information about their SDG platforms, coordination work on SDG monitoring, data and metadata availability and user engagement activities. The pages will be updated at regular intervals until the end of the project.

**National SDG organizational set up**  
The arrangements and responsibilities for the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda were set out in a National Action Plan (NAP), published in 2017 (Decision No. 622/QB-TTg). The National Council on Sustainable Development and Competitiveness Enhancement, issued by the Prime Minister under Decision No. 419 / QD-TTg in 2018, is an advisory organization for the Government. Prime Minister on issues related to Sustainable development and competitiveness. The Ministry of Planning and investment (MPI) is the lead agency for implementing the 2030 Agenda and the NAP. The Planning, Finance Departments of other ministries and related agencies and provincial Departments of Planning and Investment (DPI) are focal agencies to implement the 2030 Agenda. Some ministries, related agencies and provinces have also established steering committees, sustainable development offices or/and supporting units on sustainable development. The institutional arrangements for SDG implementation in Viet Nam are summarised in the diagram below:

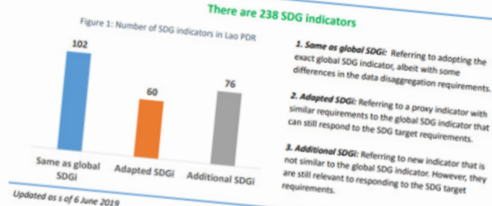


### National set of SDG indicators

Lao PDR was among the earliest countries to localize the SDGs and integrate them into its national planning framework. To this end, the Eighth National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) 2016-2020 has the SDGs embedded into its three outcomes, each of which relates to one of the three dimensions of the 2030 Agenda: economic, social, and environmental. Nearly 60 percent of the Eighth NSEDP indicators are linked to SDG indicators. The Government endorsed 238 SDG indicators during the National SDG Steering Committee Meeting held on 11



### SDG Indicators of Lao PDR



### II. SDG platform

#### Link to platform

<https://burundi.opendataforafrica.org/addin/sdg>

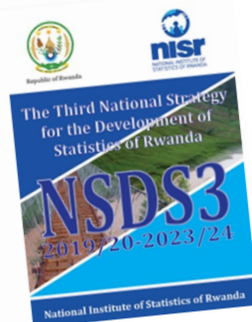
#### About the platform

Burundi has selected the Open Data Platform (ODP) developed and supported by the African Development Bank as its national SDG reporting platform. A capacity building workshop was conducted by the African Development Bank and UNSD in February 2020 to train ISTEUBU and NSS staff on how to upload and modify data sets on the platform, how to create dashboards and visualizations, and how to administer data sharing via the platform. Currently, 123 national indicators have been uploaded with data and metadata to the Open Data Platform.



### III. Coordination of SDG data

National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS3) sets the agenda for development in Rwanda from FY2019/20 to FY2023/24. Since its inception in 2005, the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISIR) has published a wide range of data products in social, demographic and economic statistics. NSDS3 capitalises on this momentum, expanding external links with the National Statistical System (NSS) to strengthen Rwanda's data supply, mobilise resources and strengthen the NSS. NSDS3 is Rwanda's first national strategy for alignment with the SDG agenda, leveraging the global mandate to supply, mobilise resources and strengthen the NSS. An extensive consultative process under NSDS2 to develop an official list of localised SDG indicators. During NSDS3 implementation, the NSS aims to implement a national approach to measure, NSDS3 aims to operationalise the 6 strategic areas outlined in the Town Global Action Plan in the Rwandan context.



## Project website

For general project information, please visit

<https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/unsd-fcdo>

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This project is implemented by the UN Statistics Division and funded with UK aid from the British people.



UN Statistics Division



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