

Briefing by the Chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission, Mr. John Pullinger, on the process for the development of a proposal on global indicators for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

January 28, 2016, 10:00 AM

Speech of the Chair of the Statistical Commission, Mr. John Pullinger

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Colleagues,

It is my honour to present to you today once again an update on the work of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) to support the follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Let me express my thanks to His Excellency Ambassador Lykketoft, President of the General Assembly, for providing this opportunity to update you on the status and way forward in this important process. These briefings serve as a means for the technical and political communities to come together and strengthen their dialogue.

Today Mr. Enrique Ordez, co-Chair of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, will provide a more in-depth technical overview of the development of the global indicators for the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

Distinguished delegates,

Statistics are at the heart of the follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda. Member States have recognized the need for quality, timely and reliable disaggregated data to monitor the progress of sustainable development and ensure that no one is left behind.

To ensure the technical integrity of the indicators and the availability of the necessary statistics to follow up and review the Agenda, Member States tasked the Statistical Commission with overseeing the development and implementation of the global indicators for the SDGs.

As you know, the Statistical Commission at its forty-sixth session endorsed the formation of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators to develop the global indicator framework.

Over the past year, the IAEG-SDG members have worked very intensively, addressing a large number of thematic areas, consulting with the many parts of their national statistical systems and providing opportunities for all interested stakeholders to share their views and provide inputs.

The group has faced many challenges, especially in dealing with topics where measurement tools and standards do not exist, but have made every effort to preserve the political balance and ambition of the agenda. Every single target has been reviewed in-depth and indicators were identified to cover every target and every aspect embedded in each target, including addressing specific groups of the population.

Distinguished delegates,

It is evident that populating with the necessary data the long list of indicators necessary to address the many important elements contained in the goals and targets of the new agenda, will be a significant challenge for national statistical systems. For the review process on the SDGs to be based on data of high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated, as requested by the 2030 agenda in paragraph 74.g, efforts to strengthen national statistical capacities will need to be substantially expanded, in particular in developing and least developed countries.

The High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for post-2015 monitoring was tasked by the Statistical Commission, at its 46th session, with promoting national ownership of the post-2015 monitoring system and fostering statistical capacity building, partnership and coordination. This group will provide strategic guidance and identify data gaps and priorities to enhance statistical capacity building in countries. It will also serve as an advisory group to the Statistical Commission on how to operationalize the recommendations in the report on the data revolution prepared at the request of the Secretary-General by a group of independent experts: “A World that counts: Mobilizing the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development”. Like the IAEG-SDGs, the High-level group is composed of representatives of national statistical offices, in most cases, the head of the office, with each member representing their respective region or subregion, so that the view of all countries may be taken into account in the deliberations.

The High-level group held its first in-person meeting two weeks ago here in New York. I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank His Excellency Ambassador Lykketoff for taking time out of his busy schedule to take part in the meeting and deliver opening remarks, a sign once again of the important connection between the global political process and the work of the statistical community.

At that meeting, the group agreed to establish a global action plan for data for the follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda. The Members also discussed their work programme for the coming year, including the organization of the UN World Forum for Sustainable Development Data.

Distinguished delegates,

Colleagues,

In the 2030 Agenda, Member States refer to “the global indicator framework, to be developed by the Inter-agency and expert group on sustainable development goal indicators” to “be agreed by the Statistical Commission by March 2016 and adopted thereafter by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, in line with existing mandates”.

In only a few weeks, at the 47th session of the Statistical Commission, heads of National Statistical Offices will have before them the proposal for the global indicator set. I am pleased to report to you that the Commission will have a solid and technically sound proposal to review.

The indicator set has been developed based on a careful assessment of proposals and inputs provided by experts from a large number of countries, regional and international organizations, and civil society. The work has been carried out in strict adherence to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, which were adopted by this Assembly in 2014.

I expect the commission to agree on this proposal, as the indicators have already been extensively reviewed and discussed by the members of the IAEG who conveyed the views of countries in their respective regions as emerged from the many regional consultations. However, should there be any questions on a specific indicator, I would encourage you to approach me or the Secretariat before the meeting of the Commission to allow time to clarify and address any existing concerns.

I am confident that the list being put in front of the Commission is the result of a highly technical and thorough work and is the best that the statistical community could produce given the large scope of the agenda and the obvious methodological and data availability constraints. I also of course recognize that refinements and improvements will be needed over the years, as knowledge improves and new tools and data sources become available.

This global indicator framework will be the basis for the annual progress report on the Sustainable Development Goals that will be prepared by the Secretary-General in cooperation with the United Nations system and made available to Member States to inform their deliberations at the High-level Political Forum.

Distinguished delegates,

The 229 SDG indicators will require an unprecedented amount of data to be produced and analysed. For many of the indicators, the data required are already produced by national statistical systems. This is essentially the case for the legacy indicators that were also part of the MDG framework, among others. But, given the breathe of the 2030 Agenda, there are many other indicators for which data are not yet available. In some cases, work on the statistical standards and methodologies need to be undertaken before we can have the necessary data. In

other cases, data production needs to be increased or reporting mechanisms improved. The statistical community is well aware of the intense work ahead.

Strategic planning and increased resources will be required to ensure that all countries have adequate data to follow up and review the SDGs and that no one individual, country, or region is left behind.

Thank you.