

Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data

Prepared by the High-level Group for Partnership,
Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics
for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (HLG-PCCB)

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I. Introduction

Quality and timely data are vital for enabling governments, international organisations, civil society, private sector and the general public to make informed decisions and to ensure the accountability of representative bodies. Effective planning, follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires the collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of an unprecedented amount of data and statistics at local, national, regional and global levels and by multiple stakeholders. The 2030 Agenda explicitly calls for enhancing capacity building to support national plans to implement the sustainable development goals.

National statistical systems face the urgent need to adapt and develop in order to meet the widening, increasing and evolving needs of data users, including the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There is a wide range of statistical capacity among countries, with individual countries setting their own national priorities. Some countries are facing steeper challenges than others. Capacity building is important for all countries, even more so for developing countries, particularly African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and middle-income countries and other countries in vulnerable situations. This modernization and strengthening effort will require the full, active, and focused commitment of government policy leaders and the international community to implement the sustainable development agenda.

We call for policy leaders to achieve a global pact or alliance that recognizes the funding of NSO modernization efforts is essential to achievement of Agenda 2030.

This global plan is intended to provide a framework for discussion, planning, and implementation of statistical capacity building necessary to achieve the scope and intent of the 2030 Agenda. The plan acknowledges that this work will be country-led, and occurs at sub-national, national, and regional levels. To leverage and coordinate these many efforts, and those of international organizations and other partnerships, this global plan is proposed.

Regional and national statistical organizations will have the opportunity to develop or adjust their action plans and road maps related to SDG monitoring in line with the Global action plan. Regional and national specificities can thus be addressed, and the production of regional and national indicators facilitated by capacity building and technical assistance targeted to the specific needs of regions and countries.

In order to monitor the implementation of the SDGs at an even more detailed level, action plans to improve the availability and quality of sectoral data and indicators may also be developed with the involvement of relevant international organizations.

II. Background

Recent calls for global data to inform sustainable development policymaking are unparalleled. In the document “*Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*,” Member States underscored the importance of “quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data... to help with the measurement of progress and to ensure no one is left behind.” (Paragraph 48) Furthermore, Member States recognized the crucial role of “increased support for strengthening data collection and capacity building”, and committed to addressing the gap in data collection for the targets of the 2030 Agenda, so as to better inform the measurement of progress. (Paragraph 57).

Further, in the document “*Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*,” the sustainable development goal 17 “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development,” the targets 17.18¹ and 17.19² refer directly to capacity-building linked to data, monitoring and accountability.

The United Nations Statistical Commission was mandated to develop a global indicator framework. The Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDGs) was established to conduct the work necessary to identify the indicators and ensure the full implementation of the related data development programmes. In March 2016, at its the forty-seventh session, the UN Statistical Commission “agreed, as a practical starting point, with the proposed global indicator framework” as developed by the IAEG-SDGs. In June 2016, ECOSOC took note of the report of the report of the UN Statistical Commission and adopted its decisions, including on the global indicator framework. Some of the indicators will require strengthening and on-going capacity building to define standards, develop methodologies and produce the necessary data and statistics for follow up and review.

In the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in July 2015, Member States noted the importance of drawing on new data sources to meet user needs. “National statistical systems have a central role in generating, disseminating and administering data. They should be supplemented with data and analysis from civil society, academia and the private sector” (Paragraph 125).

The global statistical system is called to take decisive actions to transform how data and statistics are produced and disseminated to inform development policy decision, with the vital support of governments and in closer partnership with stakeholders from academia, civil society, the private sector, and the public at large. This will entail the concerted and sustained accounting and coordination of existing efforts and the strategic identification of investment of resources in order to significantly address existing gaps in the technical and institutional capacities of national statistical systems, and thereby improve the coverage, quality and frequency of data and statistics, made available through transparent and public access.

Accordingly, at its forty-sixth session, the United Nations Statistical Commission agreed to establish the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for the 2030 Agenda (HLG-PCCB), comprising Chief Statisticians from 23 national statistical offices representing other countries in their respective regions.³ The HLG-PCCB was tasked to promote national ownership of

¹ By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

² By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity building in developing countries.

³ The Chair of the Statistical Commission is an ex-officio member of the HLG.

the 2030 Agenda monitoring system and fostering statistical capacity building, partnerships and coordination. NSOs must coordinate its implementation at the country level. To further ensure national ownership, HLG-PCCB has prepared this action plan, which will be submitted for endorsement to the UN Statistical Commission at its annual meetings in March 2017.

III. Guiding Principles

Since 2004, when the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics⁴ was developed, strategic planning has been recognised to be a powerful tool for guiding the development of national statistics development programs, increasing political and financial support for statistics and ensuring that countries are able to produce the data and statistics needed for monitoring and evaluating their development outcomes.

At its third meeting held in New York in January 2016, HLG-PCCB members agreed to develop a proposal for a Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data (as a successor of the Busan Action Plan for Statistics from 2011),⁵ with the aim to outline the necessary actions to generate quality and timely data on a routine basis to inform sustainable development at the requested level of disaggregation and population coverage, including the more vulnerable and hard-to-reach. The plan is also intended to fully account, communicate, and coordinate existing efforts, as well as to identify new and strategic ways to efficiently mobilize resources and thereby address the recommendations of the Secretary-General's Independent Expert and Advisory Group on Data Revolution for Sustainable Development as well as the priorities identified in the "Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics."⁶

Key principles underlying the Plan are:

- *Completeness of scope.* The Plan shall address all aspects of coordination, production and use of data for sustainable development. The plan shall describe necessary steps to modernize and strengthen statistical systems. The plan shall address short, middle and long-term actions, with particular focus on building the infrastructure and the capacity needed to support local, national, regional and global statistical requirements. The plan is to be perceived as a living document, open to potential adjustments at a later stage to account for future developments.
- *Accountability.* The modern production of statistics requires comprehensive interaction among data providers, producers and users. Therefore, trust among data providers, producers and users of statistics is key for the effective functioning of the national, regional, and global statistical systems in full adherence with the *UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics*. Accordingly, the plan identifies national statistical systems, under the leadership of National Statistical Offices as the necessary and appropriate leaders of this effort.

⁴ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/data/statistical-capacity-building/marrakech-action-plan-for-statistics>

⁵ http://www.paris21.org/sites/default/files/Busanactionplan_nov2011.pdf

⁶ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/47th-session/documents/2016-4-Transformative-agenda-for-official-statistics-E.pdf>

- *Cooperation.* The Plan recognizes the crucial role of cooperation among countries, regional organizations, and other international organizations and stakeholders in supporting countries' plans and efforts in capacity building. The Plan recognizes the expertise and abilities of these key stakeholders as essential resources for progress and modernization. Indeed, they have a crucial role in capacity building exercises and in carrying out statistical capacity building efforts in their areas of work. Nonetheless, the role of international organizations and regional entities to the development of methodologies and data in their respective programmes must be conducted in full consultation and coordination with National Statistical Offices. Coordination and streamlining of these activities are necessary to avoid duplication of efforts and channel effort to furthering the Agenda.

The Global Action Plan is intended to provide a framework for discussion, planning, implementation, and evaluation of statistical capacity building needs. Accordingly, the Plan describes areas to address key statistical capacity building needs. Key actions are proposed in each area. In this way, the Plan complements the more specific guidance anticipated to be developed by member countries and their regions, each reflecting the unique needs and priorities of their constituencies while also sharing the common vision and goals described here.

IV. Overview of Strategic Plan

The Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data proposes specific strategic objectives, each associated with several implementation actions. These objectives are presented in six strategic areas.⁷

Strategic Area 1: Coordination and strategic leadership on data for sustainable development

Objective 1.1: Strengthen national statistical systems and the coordination role of national statistical offices.

Key Actions:

- *Conduct a needs assessment of national statistical capacities and an assessment of available resources to address those needs, including those related to technical cooperation, training, and sharing of best practices offered by countries.*
- *Integrate the acquisition of data production and dissemination of statistics for sustainable development into 1) the established work programmes of national statistical systems; 2) existing national strategies for the development of statistics (NSDS); and 3) national and sector development plans and priorities.*

⁷ A series of detailed descriptions, best suited for technical audiences, are underway.

Objective 1.2: Strengthen coordination among national statistical systems and regional and international organizations active in the production of data and statistics for sustainable development.

Key Actions:

- *Establish and/or improve the coordination mechanism for collecting, sharing, and communicating sustainable development statistics among national statistical systems, and among national, regional and international statistical systems.*
- *Review the effectiveness of the coordination mechanism for collecting, sharing, and communicating sustainable development statistics among national statistical systems, and among national, regional and international statistical systems.*
- *Strengthen coordination between national statistical system and regional and international statistical systems through mechanisms such as the Regional Strategies for the Development of Statistics (RSDS), especially in regions where fewer resources are available.*

Strategic Area 2: Innovation and modernization of national statistical systems

Objective 2.1: Modernize governance and institutional frameworks to allow national statistical systems to meet the demands and opportunities of constantly evolving data ecosystems.

Key Actions:

- *Promote the revision of statistical laws and regulatory frameworks, where necessary, consistent with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, to: (1) enhance the status, independence and coordination role of national statistics offices; (2) strengthen their access to data, including enhanced data sharing across the national statistical system, and thereby their ability to more efficiently respond to emerging data and statistical needs; (3) develop a mechanism for the use of data from alternative and innovative sources within official statistics; (4) improve transparency of, and public access to, official statistics; and (5) strengthen the availability of sustainable funding for national statistical systems.*
- *Explore ways of revising the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics to include relevant and appropriate aspects of open data initiatives.*
- *Clarify and support the role of the national statistical systems in open data initiatives, consistent with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.*
- *Encourage national statistical offices to embrace the open data initiative and ensure stakeholders of the national statistical system as part of part of the process.*
- *Update the Handbook of Statistical Organizations with the aim to provide guidance and best practices to achieve a modern, more integrated and coordinated national statistical system.*
- *Encourage statistical organizations to share and apply generic models of statistical production and architecture.*

Objective 2.2: Modernize statistical standards, particularly those aimed to facilitate data integration and automation of data exchange across different stages of the statistical production process.

Key Actions:

- *Define and implement standardized structures for the exchange and integration of data and metadata on the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development and at all levels (global, regional, national and sub-national), following the SDMX and related standards.*
 - *Promote interoperability of these systems to facilitate such integration.*
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Objective 2.3: Facilitate the application of new technologies and new data sources into mainstream statistical activities.

Key Actions:

- *Identify specifications for interoperable, open source technologies to incorporate the flexibility in information systems needed to allow the strategic use of new and emerging technologies for official data collection, processing, dissemination and analysis.*
- *Identify and remove barriers to the use of new data sources, including registries and administrative data and other data from new and innovative sources, and coordinate efforts to incorporate them into mainstream statistical programmes through, inter alia, confidence- and trust-building measures, legal reforms, better funding and capacity building.*
- *Develop guidelines on the use of new and innovative data generated outside the official statistical system, into official statistics (that is, principles on using big data for official statistics).*
- *Promote the development of integrated database systems to support the efficient and effective review and follow up of the implementation process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, building, where possible, on existing MDG database platforms.*

Strategic Area 3: Strengthening of basic statistical activities and programmes, with particular focus on addressing the monitoring needs of the 2030 Agenda.

Objective 3.1: Strengthen and expand household survey programmes, business and other economic survey programmes, population and housing census programmes, civil and vital statistics programmes and the International Comparison Programme taking into account the needs posed by the 2030 Agenda.

Key Actions:

- *Increase harmonization and ensure country ownership of internationally sponsored household surveys programmes (such as DHS, MICS, LSMS, Child Labour Survey, WHS, CWIQ, etc.) by strengthening the existing Household Survey (HHS) Network and the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys.*
- *Increase harmonization and ensure country ownership of internationally sponsored economic surveys by creating an Economic Survey Network.*
- *Encourage developing countries to develop an economic statistical capacity programme focussing on improving and strengthening economic statistics with a view to rebasing GDP, CPI and other economic indicators.*
- *Support the implementation of the 2020 Population Census Round, recognizing such contributions as an integral part of integrated social survey systems.*
- *Support developing countries in implementing CRVS programmes.*
- *Support for preparation and development of national, integrated household and business statistics programmes, with a particular focus on enabling the compilation of disaggregated data on SDGs indicators.*
- *Conduct the International Comparison Programme regularly.*
- *Increase the integration of data from different sources: surveys, administrative data and new sources.*

Objective 3.2: Improve the quality of national statistical registers and expand the use of administrative records integrating them with data from surveys and other new data sources, for the compilation of integrated social, economic and environmental statistics and in relation to follow up on the 2030 Agenda.

Key Actions:

- *Develop, standardize and improve the coverage of registers of persons, property and businesses for statistical purposes.*
- *Establish the preconditions for greater use of and better access to administrative data and develop the necessary infrastructure and skills of statistical and other relevant technical staff to link administrative records with statistical registers.*
- *Develop guidelines and best practices on optimal use of administrative data for official statistics, including statistical standards, harmonisation tools and development of metadata.*
- *Support countries as they develop national plans to achieve improved use of administrative records in the production of official statistics, in cooperation with the national partners.*

Objective 3.3: Strengthen and expand System of National Accounts and the System of Environmental Economic Accounts

Key Actions:

- *Support the implementation of the System of National Accounts and the System of Environmental Economic Accounts, taking into account country experiences to date and current capacity needs to improve implementation.*

Objective 3.4: Integrate geospatial data into statistical production programmes at all levels.

Key Actions:

- *Promote the integration modern geospatial information management systems within mainstream statistical production programmes by highlighting synergies between the two systems.*
- *Promote the integration of geospatial and statistical metadata.*
- *Encourage the use and adoption of technologies that promote integration of geospatial and statistical information.*
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Objective 3.5: Strengthen and expand data on domains that are currently not well developed within the scope of official statistics.

Key Actions:

- *Develop, standardize and improve coverage and quality of data that today are beyond the scope of official statistics.*
- *Implement the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistical (FDES 2013).*
- *Advance the construction of concepts and methodologies to obtain indicators that are more difficult to measure.*
- *Develop an approach to ensure data quality to be adopted by data producers, including for new data sources.*

Strategic Area 4: Dissemination and use of sustainable development data

Objective 4.1: Develop and promote innovative strategies to ensure proper dissemination and use of data for sustainable development.

Key Actions:

- *Promote the development of technological infrastructure for better data dissemination.*
- *Leverage the experience of the MDGs in using and expanding upon the SDMX for dissemination of SDG statistics.*
- *Develop effective communication and data dissemination strategies and guidelines for public and private dialogue oriented to policy-makers, legislators, the media, the general public, the economy, etc.*
- *Leverage the use of e-learning platforms to share knowledge between producers and users of statistics.*
- *Develop and implement educational programmes to increase data literacy and empower institutions and individuals to use statistics effectively in their own decisions.*

Strategic Area 5: Multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development data

Objective 5.1: Develop and strengthen partnerships of national and international statistical systems with governments, academia, civil society, private sector and other stakeholders involved in the production and use of data for sustainable development.

Key Actions:

- *Improve the transparency and access of official statistics to the public.*
- *Create frequent and periodic opportunities to consult with all stakeholders on the production and use of statistics for sustainable development by (i) organising a UN World Forum on Sustainable Development Data every second year; (ii) establishing similar venues for on-going consultations and cooperation at regional and national levels.*
- *Develop the institutional arrangements, and governance schemes that are needed for public-private cooperation in accordance with the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.*

Strategic Area 6: Mobilize resources and coordinate efforts for statistical capacity building

Objective 6.1: Ensure that resources are available to implement the necessary programmes and actions as outlined in this global action plan (both domestic and from international cooperation)

Key Actions:

- *Provide an overview of capacity needs and consider appropriate matches between types of support and types of needs.*
- *Identify and coordinate existing resources to strategically address these needs, and identify resource gaps.*
- *Develop a programme for statistical capacity building on the basis of capacity needs.*
- *Mobilize donor support towards the priorities agreed in national and regional statistical strategies and promote reporting on financing for statistics.*
- *Create opportunities for participation of non-state actors in funding statistical activities through innovative financing mechanisms using means consistent with the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.*
- *Promote nationally and/or regionally-owned coordination mechanisms of capacity building initiatives*
- *Engage in communication and advocacy activities at the policy-making level to raise awareness and understanding of implementation aspects of the SDG indicator framework.*
- *Develop criteria and mechanism to set priorities for the mobilisation of resources.*
- *Promote the sharing of relevant implementation experiences between countries.*

Conclusion

The implementation of this Plan shall address gaps in national statistics and statistical coordination identified in response to the 2030 Agenda. It is essential that such gaps be addressed so as to better enable the use of country-generated statistics in the calculation of global SDG indicators. However, the guidance described in the Plan shall not be restricted to capacity building for SDG indicators alone. Rather, the goal shall be to strengthen the national statistical systems so that they can be most responsive to statistical needs to achieve the 2030 Agenda and beyond.

Periodically, the HLG-PCCB shall review and, if necessary, update this Plan to maintain its effectiveness. Additionally, the group shall develop an annual implementation programme featuring milestones as a means to measure the Plan's progress. The HLG-PCC shall report its progress assessment regularly to the UN Statistical Commission, and, as appropriate, to other relevant bodies, such as the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the UN World Data Forum.