

Measuring the New Sustainable Development Goals: Opportunities and Challenges for Human Rights

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The new development agenda about to be adopted by the United Nations provides for an unprecedented set of ambitious goals and targets to achieve sustainable development for all by 2030. While reiterating their commitment to freeing humanity from poverty and hunger and achieving the unfinished work of the Millennium Development goals (MDGs), States have agreed on the need to broaden the agenda and include further social, economic, environmental, equality and governance objectives. States also reaffirm the need for the post-2015 agenda to operate in full respect of the human rights norms and principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (the most translated document in the world) and other international legal instruments. In the Millennium Declaration, States made a first commitment to uphold and promote civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all. This pledge did not however find its counterpart in the approach to the indicators and accountability framework of the MDGs. Human rights standards and concerns were kept away from the statistical work, and population groups, in particular vulnerable groups, remained largely invisible in statistics and excluded from relevant policy efforts. The new SDGs offer a unique opportunity for addressing this failure. The human rights commitment reiterated by States is now being echoed in the process of elaborating the SDGs measurement framework. The call for a data revolution recognises the need for integrating the protection and advancement of human rights in the development of modern statistical systems. Consequently, there are high expectations on the statistical community, both at national and international levels. The human rights component of the data revolution is expected to be reflected in the collection, processing, dissemination and analysis of data. The expectations are particularly high on official statisticians, as they will assume the primary responsibility for measuring the SDGs. In this context, it is particularly timely to explore the main features and implications that a human rights-based approach to statistics and data collection could have. The authors argue that it would include inter alia reaching out to vulnerable population groups, enhancing participation of rights-holders in data collection efforts, ensuring the adoption and implementation of relevant human rights safeguards, balancing the right to privacy and the right to information, and measuring inequalities, risks of discrimination and other human rights concerns that are essential to the realisation of the new sustainable development goals for all.

Keywords: data revolution, millennium development goals, United Nations, post-2015 development agenda.