



## Developing an indicators and monitoring framework for the Post-2015 Agenda

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### Abstract

With the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) reaching their deadline at the end of 2015, governments and people around the world have come together to design a new pathway to inclusive and sustainable development for all. The UN Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recently proposed a new set of 17 goals, covering a much broader scope than the MDGs, from ending poverty and hunger, promoting prosperity and well-being for all, to protecting environment and addressing climate change. The newly proposed SDGs will underpin the post-2015 development agenda, which is expected to be adopted by the Member States at a high level summit in September 2015. For the monitoring and reporting of progress on the new agenda, an indicator framework will need to be in place. This paper presents the ongoing discussion on how to design a coherent set of indicators that addresses the overall monitoring requirements of the post-2015 development agenda. The paper also reviews the main principles for the design of the indicator framework, the criteria for the selection of indicators, and the process and modalities on how to carry out the work for their compilation. The new monitoring requirements demand better, faster, more accessible and more disaggregated data to assess progress towards achieving sustainable development and hold governments and other stakeholders accountable. Finally, the paper discusses how to set up the monitoring framework, operationalize the data revolution and develop a country-based sustainable data system to monitor sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Data revolution, measurability and accountability, statistical capacity, country ownership



## 1. Introduction

At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, Member States agreed to launch an intergovernmental process to develop a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs) to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) after 2015<sup>1</sup>. These SDGs (as part of the post-2015 development agenda) are expected to be adopted at a High-level Summit in September 2015. Leading up to the summit, between January and July 2015, intergovernmental negotiations have been taking place at the UN General Assembly, under the leadership of two Co-facilitators appointed by the President of the General Assembly. The following milestones in this process can be highlighted<sup>2</sup>.

(i) *On 19 July 2014*, the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals<sup>3</sup> (OWG) released a proposal on sustainable development goals for consideration by the General Assembly, containing 17 goals and 169 targets. In September 2014, the General Assembly welcomed the report (A/68/970) and decided that the OWG proposal “shall be the main basis for integrating sustainable development goals into the post-2015 development agenda, while recognizing that other inputs will also be considered in this intergovernmental negotiation process at the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly.”

(ii) *On 29 August 2014*, the Secretary-General established the Independent Expert Advisory Group<sup>4</sup> (IEAG) on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development to advise on how to close the data gaps and strengthen national statistical capacities, to assess new opportunities linked to innovation, technical progress and the surge of new public and private data providers, and to utilize the data revolution for sustainable development. The IEAG recommended that a new funding stream for statistical capacity development be established, mobilizing domestic and external resources and strengthening the role of national statistical offices in their coordination function. The establishment of a mechanism to share technology and innovations was also recommended as well as a global partnership for sustainable development data to mobilize and coordinate the actions and institutions required to serve sustainable development, including the establishment of a “World Forum on Sustainable Development Data”. The IEAG highlighted in its report the need for a “Global consensus on data” to adopt principles concerning legal, technical, privacy, geospatial and statistical standards that facilitate openness and information exchange while promoting and protecting human rights. Data is a crucial pillar for the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda as it is the basis for evidence-based decision-making and accountability. The necessary data revolution is a joint responsibility of Governments, international and regional organizations, the private sector and civil society.

(iii) *On 4 December 2014*, the Secretary-General submitted to the General Assembly a report (A/69/700)<sup>5</sup> entitled “The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet”, which synthesizes the full range of inputs available on the post-2015 development agenda as a contribution to the intergovernmental negotiations in the lead up to the Summit in September 2015. In particular, the synthesis report proposes a framework to monitor and review implementation, based on enhanced statistical capacities and tapping into the potential of new and non-traditional data sources.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.un.org/en/sustainablefuture/>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015> for further details

<sup>3</sup> See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg.html>

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.undatarevolution.org/>

<sup>5</sup> See [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/700&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/700&Lang=E)

The Statistical Commission, as the intergovernmental focal point for the elaboration and review of the indicators used in the United Nations system, as indicated in General Assembly resolution 57/270 B, will lead the work on the preparation of the indicator framework. Specifically, the Commission is the technical forum for the development and implementation of the indicator and monitoring framework and reporting mechanisms for the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda. The basis for this indicator framework are the goals and targets proposed by the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) and the outcome of the General Assembly (GA) process on the post-2015 development agenda.

## **2. Developing an indicators and monitoring framework for the post-2015 development agenda**

Over the past two years, the Statistical Commission has been actively supporting the inter-governmental process towards the formulation of a new development agenda through its Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress<sup>6</sup> (FOC). The FOC, in its recommendations on the preparation of the indicator framework, suggested the following principles for developing an indicator framework for the post-2015 agenda:

- a) Existing and agreed indicators sets and proposals for new sets of indicators (be it from existing monitoring initiatives, international agreements, conceptual frameworks, thematic consultations or other efforts) as well as their conceptual bases should be taken into account in the design of the indicator framework as appropriate.
- b) The five conceptual issues identified in the Compendium of Statistical Notes under Conceptual Issues<sup>7</sup>, should be considered, namely: (i) universality, (ii) inclusiveness, (iii) scope of the development agenda, (iv) inter-linkages and cross-cutting issues, and (v) means vs. ends and focus on meaningful outcomes.
- c) The conceptual basis for the indicator framework should be discussed and elaborated as appropriate. The Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Recommendations on Measuring Sustainable Development<sup>8</sup>, having been reviewed and agreed upon by an inter-governmental process, are a useful starting point for the statistical community. The Rio+20 outcome document “The future we want” and the OWG Outcome Document represent the conceptual basis from a political/policy perspective, which the indicator framework will need to reflect and respond to. It is suggested that as a first step the OWG targets should be mapped against each other and analyzed with respect to the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) and the CES recommendations in order to identify inter-linkages, overlaps and gaps.

Furthermore, the design of the indicator framework should take into account the very significant mismatch between the capabilities of national statistical systems in particular in developing countries, and the ambition to report on a much broader set of indicators, at a much greater level of disaggregation, compared with the MDGs. Therefore, the indicator framework is expected to contain a limited number of universal and global indicators but may also allow for elements of flexibility such as additional tiers of indicators, depending on the overall requirements.

A design of a multi-dimensional and multi-tier indicator framework is needed for monitoring progress on the sustainable development goals and targets. The indicator framework is expected to have at its

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/broaderprogress/default.htm>

<sup>7</sup> See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/3647Compendium%20of%20statistical%20notes.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.unece.org/stats/sustainable-development.html>



core a limited number of global and universal indicators that will be proposed as a common basis to compare across countries and regions. The main objectives of this core set of global indicators will be to inform policy making at the international level and provide the basis for communication and advocacy in order to bring global attention to the priority areas of sustainable development. Furthermore, the focus on a core set of global indicators is expected to facilitate their monitoring.

The core set of global indicators will also be used as the basis to develop complementary lists of regional, national, and sub-national indicators. Most of the global indicators should be applicable for most countries also at national level. However, whenever an indicator is not applicable for a country at national level to measure a specific target, one or more complementary indicators will be needed. Furthermore, complementary indicators can be chosen to monitor an aspect of the target not covered by the global indicator(s) but of particular relevance at a national, sub-national and regional level (see also thematic monitoring).

The (global, regional, national and sub-national) level of monitoring is one dimension of monitoring. The thematic focus is a second dimension. Complementary indicators for each specific thematic area should be established at all levels of monitoring. There can be complementary indicators for instance on health at the national, sub-national, regional and global levels to cover certain elements of a specific target that the core set of global indicators may not cover. For an indicator not to be included in the core set of global indicators does not necessarily mean the indicator is less important. Individual indicators are not always equally relevant for all levels of monitoring and decision-making. Therefore, the fitness for purpose is an important criterion for the selection of a specific indicator.

The core set of global indicators (the indicator framework at global level) will need to consider the issues of (i) universality, (ii) inclusiveness, (iii) scope of the development agenda, (iv) inter-linkages and cross-cutting issues, and (v) means vs. ends and focus on meaningful outcomes. Universality is an important criterion for the selection of global indicators. Inclusiveness requires an appropriate level of disaggregation across the core set of global indicators. The core set of global indicators should cover all aspects of sustainable development in a balanced way, not overemphasizing one aspect over the other. Furthermore, the core set of global indicators should be coherent, recognizing inter-linkages and crosscutting issues while avoiding redundancies. It is expected that the core set of global indicators will focus more on ends/outcomes while national monitoring will focus, in addition, on means, hereby informing national policy making and planning.

### **3. Current progress**

An Expert Group Meeting<sup>9</sup> on the indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda (EGM) took place on 25 and 26 February 2015, organized by the United Nations Statistics Division. The meeting was attended by 110 participants from 22 countries, 28 agencies, funds and programmes, three United Nations Regional Commissions, as well as approximately 40 observers, which included civil society, academia and Permanent Missions to the United Nations. The meeting discussed the organization of work and the key elements and principles for the development and design of the indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda. Consensus from the EGM was reached on the following main points:

- It is necessary to define an architecture for an integrated monitoring framework that would include global indicators and different levels of regional, national and thematic monitoring;
- The global level monitoring framework should be limited to a small number of indicators;
- Such indicators should be selected on the basis of an agreed set of criteria;

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/post-2015/activities/egm-on-indicator-framework/default.html>

- The initial proposal for indicators to be put forth by the Statistical Commission is expected to be further refined and reviewed by the Commission at its forty-seventh session, to take place in 2016;
- A mechanism such as an Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) should be established;
- It is necessary to ensure national ownership of indicators (including of the estimation process);
- It is necessary to ensure disaggregation of indicators and to include a human rights dimension to the indicator framework (following the “no one left behind” principle);
- It is necessary to further strengthen national statistical capacity, including by mobilizing the necessary resources;
- It is important to draw from existing integrated statistical frameworks;
- It is important to build on the Millennium Development Goals’ experience and lessons learnt.

On 6 March 2015, at its forty-sixth session<sup>10</sup>, the Statistical Commission endorsed a roadmap for the development and implementation of an indicator framework and, in particular, its suggested timetable foreseeing the endorsement of an indicator framework at the forty-seventh session of the Commission in 2016. The Commission stressed that the development of a robust and high-quality indicator framework is a technical process that requires time and needs to be conducted in stages, including the possibility of future refinements as knowledge evolves. Furthermore, the Commission endorsed the formation of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), composed of Member States and including regional and international agencies as observers.

The Co-facilitators of the intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda sent a letter on December 2014 to the then Acting Chair of the Statistical Commission requesting the Commission to prepare an initial proposal for an effective indicator framework that is measurable to be provided in advance of the intergovernmental meeting of 23-27 March 2015. In her response to the Co-facilitators, the Acting Chair of the Statistical Commission confirmed that the UNSC would provide the necessary statistical support for the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda, while also expressing the concerns of Members of the Commission regarding the enormous challenge that a large number of indicators would pose for national statistical systems. Also, the Acting Chair of the UNSC indicated that any preliminary proposal would need to allow for any required technical adjustments and completion at a later date.

On Monday, 23 March 2015, the Chair of the Statistical Commission, Mr. John Pullinger, presented to the General Assembly, which was convening for the intergovernmental negotiations (IGN) on the post-2015 development agenda, the technical report<sup>11</sup> by the Commission. The initial assessment of proposed provisional indicators is based on the views of experts from national statistical offices and systems. The Member States at the IGN expressed their great appreciation for the work done by the statistical community and welcomed the technical report by the Statistical Commission. In their interventions, Member States overwhelmingly agreed with the decisions of the Statistical Commission presented in the technical report and supported its way forward.

#### **4. The way forward**

As per decision of the Statistical Commission, the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), consisting of national statistical offices and, as observers, the regional and international organizations and agencies, will be established shortly.

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<sup>10</sup> See <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/sc2015.htm>

<sup>11</sup> See [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/broaderprogress/pdf/technical%20report%20of%20the%20unsc%20bureau%20\(final\).pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/broaderprogress/pdf/technical%20report%20of%20the%20unsc%20bureau%20(final).pdf)



The IAEG-SDGs, at its first meeting on 1-2 June 2015, will commence its work on the development of a proposal for a global indicator framework for the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda and will discuss and decide how it will conduct its work based on the requirements of the intergovernmental process, the guidance received by the Statistical Commission, and the work that has been conducted already.

The road map endorsed by the Statistical Commission envisages the development by July 2015, of a first note on possible global and universal indicators and an indicator framework. This note is expected to contain the proposed criteria for the selection of indicators for global monitoring. Keeping in view the spirit of the discussion at the Commission, it is suggested that the intergovernmental negotiations give broad political guidance for the future work of the Statistical Commission for the development of a proposal for a global indicator framework. By December 2015, the IEAG-SDGs will provide a proposal of global and universal indicators and an indicator framework for consideration by the Statistical Commission at its forty-seventh session in March 2016. The proposal will then be submitted to the further intergovernmental process.

The IAEG-SDGs will report back to the Statistical Commission in the following years and is expected to review any required updates of the global indicator framework based on the guidance received by the intergovernmental process and relevant technical developments. In parallel to the IAEG-SDGs, the Statistical Commission agreed that a High-level Group (HLG) should be established to provide strategic leadership for the SDG implementation process as it concerns statistical monitoring and reporting. Such group will consist of national statistical offices and regional and international organizations, as observers, operating under the auspices of the Statistical Commission.