

**Global Conference on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics  
Towards a Strategic Framework for Statistics in Support of the Post-2015  
Development Agenda**

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***Session 1: New requirements from policy demands for the global statistical system***

***Towards a comprehensive global policy agenda: what does it mean for statistics?***

***Prepared by Enrico Giovannini***



## **Global Conference on a Transformative Agenda**

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### **Session 1: New requirements from policy demands for the global statistical system**

#### **Towards a comprehensive global policy agenda: what does it mean for statistics?**

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### **1. Introduction**

In September 2015 the UN Member States should agree, for the first time ever, on a comprehensive and long-term policy agenda for all countries of the world. The expected agreement on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, including Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and related targets, should lead to a universal effort to improve economic, social and environmental policies, as well as public and private governance, fostering the collaboration among various components of modern societies to achieve the desired goals.

Given the wide range of topics covered by SDGs, it is not yet clear how the new agenda will encompass sectoral agendas developed over the years by the UN and other international, regional and supranational organisation. For example, at European level it is still unclear if and how the “Europe2020 Strategy” (the medium-term strategy for EU countries) will be merged with the “Sustainable Development Agenda” (in table 1 a very first attempt of mapping EU2020 and SDGs strategies is presented). On the other hand, over the years UN conferences have built a long list of commitments and political agendas that could, at least in theory, be now incorporated into the universal Post-2015 Development Agenda.

As already happened with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the adoption of SDGs should also stimulate a massive investment to improve the availability and the quality of statistical indicators, with the aim of monitoring progress towards SDGs and supporting the design of more effective policies, at sub-national, national, regional and global levels. As already mentioned with reference to the political agendas, also for the statistical agenda the demand for SDGs indicators should absorb, at least partially, some of the existing sectoral programs for data and indicators. If these synergies are not exploited, the global statistical system could face a proliferation of requests for data and indicators that would lead to an unsustainable situation, given the limited resources available.

The recent report *A World that Counts*<sup>1</sup> published by the Independent Expert Advisory Group (IEAG) on data revolution for sustainable development, among other things, calls for a better coordination of statistical programmes developed by international organisations, an attempt closely linked to a better coordination of political agendas and reporting obligations. Notwithstanding the improvements made over the last few years, such a coordination is still unsatisfactory, especially in terms of data collection and the development of common infrastructures.

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.undatarevolution.org](http://www.undatarevolution.org).

**Table 1 - Mapping of UN SG Synthesis Report six elements against possible universal goals, SDG goals and EU seven flagship initiatives for growth**

UN SG Report Six Elements	Possible Universal Goal	SDG goals	EU seven flagship initiatives for growth		
<b>Dignity:</b> to end poverty and fight inequalities	Poverty, income and wealth	1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 10	<b>Inclusive growth</b> Fighting Poverty: EU flagship initiative 'European platform against poverty'		
<b>People:</b> to ensure healthy lives, knowledge, and the inclusion of women and children	Close relationships and social support				
<b>Dignity:</b> to end poverty and fight inequalities	Community engagement and the local environment in which we live	11			
<b>Dignity:</b> to end poverty and fight inequalities	Inequality	1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 10	<b>Inclusive growth</b> Fighting Poverty: EU flagship initiative 'European platform against poverty'		
<b>People:</b> to ensure healthy lives, knowledge, and the inclusion of women and children	Subjective or personal self-reported well-being	17			
<b>People:</b> to ensure healthy lives, knowledge, and the inclusion of women and children	Health	3, 5, 6 and 10	<b>Smart Growth</b> Education: EU flagship initiative 'Youth on the Move'		
<b>People:</b> to ensure healthy lives, knowledge, and the inclusion of women and children	Education and Skills	4, 5 and 10	<b>Inclusive growth</b> <b>Employment and skills:</b> EU flagship initiative 'An agenda for new skills and jobs'	<b>Smart Growth Education:</b> EU flagship initiative 'Youth on the Move'	
<b>People:</b> to ensure healthy lives, knowledge, and the inclusion of women and children	Inequality				
<b>Prosperity:</b> to grow a strong, inclusive, and transformative economy	Employment and other activities	8, 9, 5 and 10	<b>Sustainable Growth</b> Competitiveness: EU flagship initiative 'An industrial policy for the globalisation era'	<b>Inclusive growth</b> Fighting Poverty: EU flagship initiative 'European platform against poverty'	<b>Smart Growth</b> Education: EU flagship initiative 'Youth on the Move'
<b>Prosperity:</b> to grow a strong, inclusive, and transformative economy	The economy	8, 9, 5 and 10	<b>Smart Growth</b> <b>Digital Society:</b> EU flagship initiative 'A digital agenda for Europe'	<b>Smart Growth</b> <b>Innovation:</b> EU flagship initiative 'Innovation Union'	
<b>Planet:</b> to protect our ecosystems for all societies and our children	The environment	7, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15	<b>Sustainable Growth</b> <b>Climate, Energy and Mobility:</b> EU flagship initiative 'Resource efficient Europe'		
<b>Justice:</b> to promote safe and peaceful societies, and strong institutions	Governance	5 and 16			
<b>Partnership:</b> to catalyse global solidarity for sustainable development		10 and 17			

Assuming the availability of international organisations to improve their methods of work, this paper provides some ideas on how to do that. In particular, the paper presents a preliminary taxonomy of global initiatives concerning censuses, national accounts, economic and social statistics, etc., showing how some of them could be linked to the foreseen SDGs dimensions. Moreover, it proposes a method for building a comprehensive global statistical programme and some ideas on how to improve the coordination of statistical activities carried out by international, regional and supranational organisations. Finally, the paper illustrates some recommendations on how the functioning of national statistical systems could be improved in response to a very wide range of national and international policy-oriented demand for information.

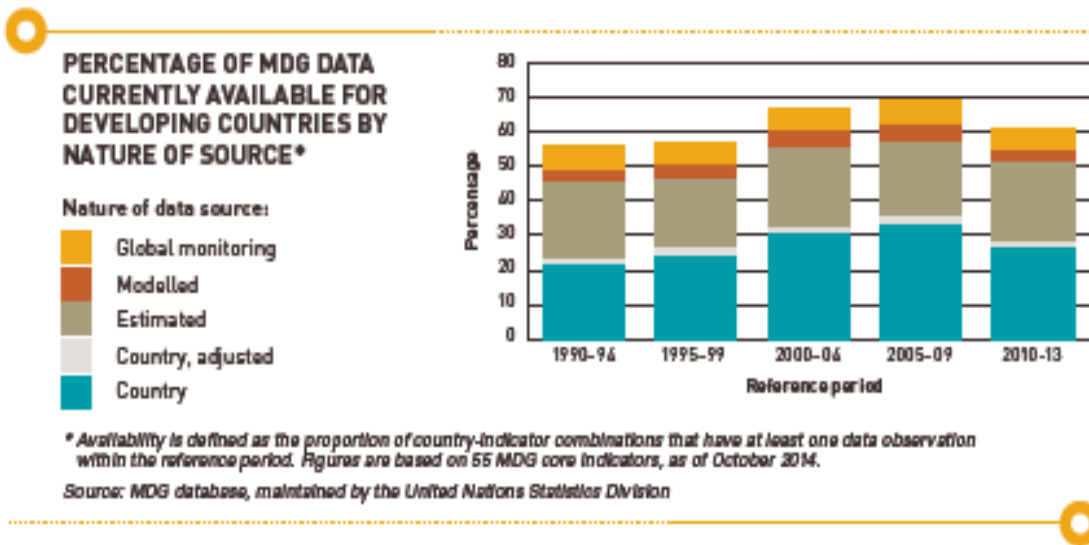
The list of actions to be potentially undertaken for adjusting the current conditions of the international statistical system to the new challenges is quite long and the resources needed are huge. Modifying well consolidated statistical systems and international arrangements will require time and efforts by all parties involved, but it is important to try to develop a comprehensive picture of the processes to be activated and of the related responsibilities of individual institutions. This paper has been prepared to stimulate a process that could lead, in 12-18 months, to the development of such a picture and to the launch of specific initiatives that could significantly improve, by 2020, the current condition of the international statistical system.

## **2. The internationally driven statistical agenda: towards a better taxonomy**

The design of a fully integrated international statistical agenda would require a massive investment. Some years ago, the UN Statistical Commission carried out a comprehensive review of indicators developed by official UN global conferences and the picture was quite impressive: UN Member States were supposed to report annually on more than 350 indicators, an effort that was already considered unsustainable, especially for developing countries, given the available resources.

Since then, the international demand for statistical data and indicators has increased a lot, without mentioning the demand coming from national authorities and users. In particular, European and OECD countries are asked to report on a huge number of subject matters, with an unprecedented geographical and sectoral detail, while emerging countries, especially the BRICS, are progressively adjusting their reporting systems to OECD requirements. As far as the other countries are concerned, over the last ten years the main challenge was represented by the reporting obligations on MDGs. According to UNSD data, as reported in the IEAG report on data revolution:

*“The figure presents a summary snapshot of current data availability in the MDG database (as of October 2014), covering 55 core indicators for 157 developing countries or areas. There, a country is counted as having data for an indicator if it has at least one observation over the reference period, and availability is broken down by whether the data comes from country or international data sources, and whether it is estimated, adjusted or modelled. Overall, the picture is improving though still poor, so there is no five-year period when the availability of data is more than 70% of what is required. The drop in data availability after 2010 demonstrates the extent of the time lags that persist between collection and release of data.”*



Reporting on MDGs was not the only international process that put a lot of pressure on developing and emerging countries. The 2010 Census Round, the adoption of the 1993 System of National Accounts (SNA) (and more recently the move to the 2008 SNA), the two rounds of the International Comparison Programme (ICP), the IMF’s SDDS and GDDS reporting obligations are just few examples of the challenges that several countries have found (and still find) very difficult to meet, notwithstanding the support provided by the international community in terms of technical assistance and training, development of manuals, classifications, ICT tools, etc.

While the international community has already agreed on statistical programmes that imply the development of new statistical data, the acceleration of the production of existing data, the improvement of international comparability, the increase of territorial and sectoral breakdown, etc., the adoption of SDGs will lead to a significant increase in the range of data to be reported. The list of agenda items that the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) regularly discusses during its annual meetings is quite clearly linked to the 17 SDGs. On the other hand, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), the Friends of the Chair on Broader Measures of Progress (FoC) and the UNECE guidelines for indicators on sustainable development have already proposed lists of possible indicators for SDGs and checked about their availability. The picture is quite impressive: a lot of data do not exist or are produced too late, and big differences exist between developed and developing countries, although no countries look able to produce all data with the necessary timeliness.

Although the list of indicators needed to monitor progress towards SDGs will not be agreed before the beginning of 2016, several actions could be undertaken in 2015 to improve the way in which national and international statistical activities are carried out. First of all, the tentative list of SDGs indicators should be mapped with the activities carried out by the UNSC, to check whether the current “domains” used to frame the work of the UNSC should be adjusted to better incorporate the subject matters included in the SDGs list or whether new “domains” of statistical activities should be included. A very first attempt to do that is contained in table 2. A more detailed analysis has to be carried out looking at both tentative indicators selected by the FoC and SDSN and at detailed activities described in individual UNSC programme reviews presented over the last few

**Table 2 – Tentative mapping of UNSC programmes and SDGs**

Programme of UN statistical commission	GOALS 1-8							
	1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere	2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture	3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages	4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all	5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all	7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all	8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
Population and housing censuses	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Human settlement	X		X		X	X	X	
Disability	X		X	X	X	X		X
Social	X	X	X	X	X			X
Gender	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Poverty	X	X	X	X	X			X
Drugs			X					
Crime			X					X
Migration	X	X	X					X
Refugee	X	X	X					X
Employment	X		X	X	X			X
Education	X		X	X	X			X
Culture			X	X	X			X
Households	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Civil registration and vital	X		X	X	X			X
National accounts	X					X		X
Agriculture and rural	X	X	X		X	X		X
Industrial					X			X
Business registers					X			X
Energy							X	X
Distributive trade								X

Programme of UN statistical commission	GOALS 1-8							
	1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere	2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture	3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages	4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all	5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all	7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all	8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
International trade/economic globalization								X
Services								X
ICT			X	X	X			X
Tourism								X
Finance						X		X
ICP	X							X
Price	X							X
S&T			X	X	X			X
Informal sector	X				X			X
Integrated economic								X
Short-term economic								X
Environment						X	X	
Environmental-economic accounts								X
Climate change	X							X
Economies based on natural resources								X
Human development	X	X	X	X	X			X
Regional development								X
Governance, peace and security	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X



Programme of UN statistical commission	GOALS 9-17								
	9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation	10. Reduce inequality within and among countries	11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable	12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns	13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts	14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development	15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss	16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels	17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development
Population and housing censuses	X	X	X		X				
Human settlement			X						
Disability		X							
Social		X	X					X	
Gender		X	X	X	X			X	
Poverty		X	X						
Drugs								X	
Crime			X					X	
Migration		X						X	
Refugee		X						X	
Employment		X	X						
Education		X	X	X	X			X	
Culture			X					X	
Households		X	X	X	X			X	
Civil registration and vital		X						X	
National accounts	X			X					
Agriculture and rural				X	X	X	X		

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Industrial	X			X					
Business registers	X			X					
Energy	X		X	X					
Distributive trade				X					
International trade/economic globalization	X	X		X	X			X	X
Services	X			X					
ICT	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
Tourism	X			X					
Finance	X								
ICP		X							
Price	X								
S&T	X			X					
Informal sector		X		X					
Integrated economic	X			X					
Short-term economic	X			X					
Environment			X	X	X	X	X	X	

Programme of UN statistical commission	GOALS 9-17									
	<b>9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation</b>	<b>10. Reduce inequality within and among countries</b>	<b>11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable</b>	<b>12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns</b>	<b>13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts</b>	<b>14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development</b>	<b>15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss</b>	<b>16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels</b>	<b>17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development</b>	
Environmental-economic accounts	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		
Climate change					X					
Economies based on natural resources	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		
Human development	X	X				X	X	X		
Regional development	X	X								
Governance, peace and security	X	X	X					X	X	

years, in order to develop, by the end of 2015, a comprehensive proposal to be presented for decisions at the 2016 meeting of the UNSC.

### 3. Towards global statistical infrastructures for SDGs and beyond

As already mentioned, there is a concrete risk that the Post-2015 Agenda and the SDGs-related work will result in a “mission impossible” for national and international statistical authorities. Of course, exploiting new technologies and new sources (like Big Data) may help in overcoming tight resource constraints, but it is likely that these new approaches (whose use requires anyway an investment in human capital and ICT infrastructures) will not be able to avoid a substantial increase of the workload on statistical agencies<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, it is absolutely vital that the international community dramatically improves its organisation and its approach to data collection, standardisation and analysis. Therefore, a detailed strategy should be developed over the next 12 months, involving all main actors, including users.

The first step of this strategy should be the development of a **truly coordinated global statistical programme** among all relevant organisations. As the experience made by UNECE, Eurostat and OECD demonstrates, this is not an easy task: it took years to become effective and a lot of commitment by the three organisations’ top officials was needed. Through the development of the “integrated presentation of international statistical activities”<sup>3</sup>, the Conference of European Statisticians has forced the international organisations active in the UNECE region to work together to avoid duplications of effort, maximise the use of common questionnaires, definitions, metadata, etc. This model could be effectively replicated in all regions of the world and at global scale, eventually using the IT infrastructure already developed by UNECE.

To be effective, a global statistical programme of work cannot be based on the simple merge of materials sent by each organisation. It requires an in-depth discussion to concretely align the activities foreseen by each organisation in terms of data and metadata collection, development of standards and handbooks, etc. Especially important would be to coordinate the future cycles of household surveys, censuses, ICP, etc., as well as of other initiatives funded by international organisations. In this perspective, **the role of CCSA should be further strengthened**, also adopting a “name and shame” approach with a full transparency of results achieved and problematic cases, to increase the overall accountability of the international statistical community vis-à-vis national and international stakeholders. Moreover, UN regional commissions and other regional bodies (including regional development banks) should carefully identify the role they could play in this process. Finding the right **balance between global and regional dimensions** is not easy, also because different continents have different needs and capacities: this is why this issue should be openly discussed as soon as possible, eventually within the CCSA, to identify feasible proposals to be implemented in the next 12-18 months.

In this perspective, especially important will be the **implementation of the recent Memorandum of Understanding** signed by UN, WB, regional development Banks and IMF for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Its program is characterised by a regional strategic approach that builds on

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<sup>2</sup> See Giovannini (2010) “Statistics 2.0: The next level”, available at [http://en.istat.it/istat/eventi/2010/10\\_conferenza\\_statistica/Relazione\\_pres\\_10conf.pdf](http://en.istat.it/istat/eventi/2010/10_conferenza_statistica/Relazione_pres_10conf.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/disaarchive/Database+of+International+Statistical+Activities+%28DISA+%29>.

regional values, policies and ambitions, including the need for common data and metadata platforms for sharing and exchanging harmonized data for regional economic integration. The MoU also identifies a clear set of limited actions or flagship programs on modernization, that could be integrated with a specific programme for SDGs indicators.

As new data producers have to be engaged in the context of the “data revolution for sustainable development”, they have to be involved in this co-ordination effort. Therefore, it is urgent to identify key partners in the private, civil society and research sectors (Gallup and other global data collectors, foundations that fund statistical work, research institutes that collect or re-package existing data, etc.) that could be associated to the work of CCSA. **New rules have to be established to engage these key non-governmental data providers in the international statistical system.** Extremely important, in this perspective, should be both a reinforced mechanism to force international organisations to adopt and implement in their own work statistical quality frameworks, and the development of a “quality assurance framework” for non-governmental organisations, also taking into account the “principles of data revolution” proposed by the IEAG.

A fundamental pillar of a better coordinated international statistical system could be **the development of a global data and metadata collection portal.** Several statistical offices have established this kind of infrastructures to facilitate the compilation of electronic questionnaires by businesses and households. A similar approach should be established at global level to exploit economies of scale through a joint investment by international organisations on the most advanced technological solutions. This infrastructure would facilitate the work of less developed countries, often obliged to send to different international organisations the same data according to different formats (of course, the portal should also be usable by statistical offices to collect data within national borders). A special attention could be given to the possible re-use of existing portals, like the SDDS-GDDS-DQAF platforms managed by the IMF.

An idea put forward by the report *A World that Counts* is the development of a **global statistical cloud**, where national statistical agencies should store microdata and make them available for research purposes. This would allow the international community of researchers and policy analysts to re-use microdata, maximising their usefulness and reducing the burden on national agencies to build their own microdata platforms. The availability of this kind of data would also contribute to reduce the demand for additional surveys coming from international organisations, who could more easily process microdata according to their needs.

A special effort has to be carried out to speed up **the development and the adoption of standards for data and metadata exchange** by all national and international agencies. The further improvement of SDMX and DDI standards is vital for cost reduction, data timeliness and international comparability. Beside the availability of standards, all international organisations should join forces to launch a global capacity building programs to facilitate their concrete adoption by statistical offices. In this perspective, the abovementioned portal would be a powerful tool to foster the use of these standards. Especially important would also be the extension of the recent DFID-UNSD project on “Improving the collation, availability and dissemination of national development indicators, including MDGs”<sup>4</sup> (which worked in 11 countries to improve the coherence of national development indicators, improve accessibility of indicators through national data platforms, and build statistical and IT capacity in the use of SDMX). Also the “Open Data for Africa” platform<sup>5</sup>, developed by the African Development Bank Group (AfDB) to boost access to

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/Dissemination/workshops/CountryData5/default.html>.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.afdb.org/en/knowledge/statistics/open-data-for-africa>.

quality data necessary for managing and monitoring development results in African countries, could be replicated in other regions.

As SDGs cover some topics for which statistical standards have not yet been developed, the UNSC should **quickly identify a research agenda to fill the existing gaps**. In this perspective, a revision of the way in which standards are defined should be discussed: it is not acceptable anymore, in the context of data revolution, that the international statistical community takes years to agree on new definitions and classifications. On the other hand, some international organisations have already developed proposals for measuring new issues (such as subjective wellbeing), but these proposals are not recognised as “standards”. Therefore, **a proposal on how to speed up the process of standard setting at global level, as well as on how to fully benefit from the work done outside the UNSC mandate, should be developed**.

A very important element of the “data revolution” is **the linkage between statistical and geospatial information and standards**. The UN-GGIM initiative has already achieved important results, but a lot of work is still to be done, especially at national level, to fully connect these two worlds. Proposals to strengthen this type of work should be developed as soon as possible, also in terms of capacity building for less developed countries.

Finally, following the experiences made at national and supranational levels, a **“global data users network” should be established**. The network should help in defining the priorities for future statistical developments, to complement and integrate the demand coming from political authorities. Data and statistics represent more than ever a “global public good” and the growing demand coming from non-governmental organisations, also to increase accountability, must be taken into account when defining the priorities of the international statistical system. Periodic consultations of the network could be carried out in preparation of the *World Forum on Data for Sustainable Development* proposed by the IEAG and the results should be presented at the UNSC meetings for subsequent deliberations.

In conclusion, over the next 12 months a lot of work should be done to develop a stronger, more efficient and better coordinated global statistical system, to benefit from the transformative agenda represented by the SDGs. Therefore, the 2016 UNSC could represent a fundamental moment to discuss concrete proposals to:

- Update of the list of work programmes of the UNSC to take into account SDGs;
- Develop a fully integrated global statistical programme;
- Strengthen the CCSA and involve non-governmental international data providers;
- Develop common infrastructures for data collection and storage (common platforms, technical standards, statistical cloud, etc.);
- Review the international statistical standard setting system and develop new statistical standards to cover all SDGs domains;
- Strengthen the connections between statistical and geospatial information, including standards;
- Establish a global network of data users.

#### **4. Challenges and opportunities for national statistical systems**

As highlighted in the IEAG report, managing a statistical system in the context of data revolution is more complicated than ever. Moreover, as already mentioned, the production of data and indicators

to monitor progress towards SDGs will be very challenging, also for developed countries. In this context, each statistical system is asked to undertake a serious assessment on its current state of play and identify current and future challenges and opportunities. Without attempting to be exhaustive, in the context of this conference few points for consideration by chief statisticians and top experts in national statistical systems are worth to be mentioned.

### *Priority setting*

SDGs and other internationally agreed policy goals are not necessarily fully aligned with national priorities. Therefore, one of the main challenges for national statistical systems is represented by the development of multi-purpose statistical tools and approaches. Households and businesses sample surveys, administrative data, sensors and satellite images, other Big Data are fundamental building blocks for the development of a modern statistical system. The work done by international groups on the modernisation of statistical processes clearly shows the opportunities to reorganise existing processes. Of course, this requires adequate financial and human resources, not easy to get from political masters often more interested in short-term results than in medium-term investments. This is why the design of a multi-year statistical program through a strong engagement of all stakeholders is vital also at national level.

National strategies for the development of statistics (NSDS) have proven to be a useful instrument for less developed countries to mobilise resources and build consensus. However, they have to be updated to take into account experiences made over the last few years with this instrument, as well as new technological opportunities and the need to engage non-governmental data providers. This is why PARIS21 should review the NSDS framework in this direction and make it available by the end of 2015, to allow interested countries to use it in 2016 to launch national negotiations aimed at developing SDGs indicators.

### *Institutional setting*

The data revolution and the need to develop SDGs indicators may be a great opportunity to strengthen the institutional setting of national statistical offices and systems. In future, statistical authorities will be more oriented to re-use data collected by other organisations: therefore, administrative data and other Big Data must be fully accessible to national statistical offices, who will also be mandated, much more than in the past, to check the quality of data produced by others.

These processes need to be supported by appropriate revisions of legal and institutional settings under which statistical agencies operate. It would be crucial to promote the adoption of global principles on legal and technical issues, and to update the recommendations issued by international organisations on how to organise statistical systems. On the other hand, the protection of privacy has to be fully ensured, while allowing the maximum circulation of properly anonymised data for research and business purposes; also in this field an update of the international recommendations could be very helpful.

Of course, such a higher responsibility needs to be accompanied by a stronger national and international system for verification and monitoring of possible misbehaves. So far, the international community has not been able to anticipate crises of national statistical systems (like in Greece or Argentina) or to properly address inappropriate practices. Therefore, new proposals to strengthen the architecture of the international statistical system have to be developed, including the

establishment of an independent body such as “Worldstat”, who would have a watchdog function vis-à-vis national and international bodies active in statistics (like it already happens in Europe).

### *Experimentation of new approaches*

The very high pace of technological and methodological developments, as well as the availability of new sources, require a growing capacity by statistical offices and systems to benefit from them. Given the limited resources available at national and international levels, it is vital to join forces to experiment new approaches and exploit economies of scale. For example, the use of satellite images by a properly resourced central unit, who could provide intermediate or final statistical information to all concerned countries, would overcome the limitations that most countries of the world still face in treating this kind of data. Similarly, the development of “experimental” statistics and indicators on some new SDGs domains so far not well investigated by statistical offices, or the development of “early estimates” of existing indicators (the so called “nowcasting”), could be usefully carried out through a cooperative effort at global or regional levels.

More generally, it is vital that statistical offices and national statistical systems invest in continuous innovation: this is the only way to minimise costs and improve efficiency and the quality of services provided to users. Other papers prepared for this conference argue that modernization of national statistical systems should be broadly formulated in terms of mainstreaming principles and standards, strengthening institutional arrangements (including access and use of public and privately generated administrative data sources) and harmonizing and centralizing statistical production processes using a standard-based architecture<sup>6</sup>. In this perspective modernization and the development of integrated statistical systems becomes a universal theme of the strategic agenda, relevant for all countries irrespectively of the stage of statistical development and whether centralized or decentralized.

This approach would have important organisational and human resources implications. Statistical divisions of international and regional organisation are more used to collect macrodata calculated by national statistical agencies than directly treating microdata to compile aggregate statistical figures, while at national level it is not so easy to have technological and human resources able to deal with new data sources or to compile “nowcasts”. The IEAG Report recommended the establishment of a “SDGs lab” to carry out this kind of activities and exploit global data sources, but it is clear that this approach could (and should) be carried out at both global (or regional) and national levels. Therefore, statistical offices should seriously address this issue and identify the “best” institutional and geographical level to carry out these activities.

### *New opportunities for capacity building*

It is quite clear that developing countries will continue to face huge challenges to meet the global statistical agenda. Without additional resources, most of them will not be able to produce the SDGs indicators with the desired timeliness. Therefore, the key question is how to build an institutional and financial framework to allow developing countries to make a leapfrog.

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/hlgbas/High-Level+Group+for+the+Modernisation+of+Statistical+Production+and+Services>.



The recent “Synthesis Report” published by the UN Secretary General has picked up the IEAG recommendation of considering the “statistical capacity building” dimension as an important part of the new investments for development. Moreover:

*“all countries are encouraged to adopt their own **national sustainable development financing strategies** that take account of all financing flows, based on continuing dialogue among relevant government entities and other stakeholders. Such strategies should review and strengthen the domestic policy, the legal and institutional environment and the policy coherence for sustainable development. All financing flows, including climate finance, should build stronger country ownership and lead to greater use of country strategies and systems.”<sup>7</sup>*

The development of a “SDGs data compact” associated to NSDS could help developing countries and the international community of donors to identify priorities, actions and expected outputs, increasing the accountability of public policies in this field. However, it would be important to go, where necessary, beyond the national dimension to fully exploit opportunities coming from Big Data and from the data revolution: this is not a trivial issue. The role of global and regional organisations could be fundamental to orient new investments towards the adoption of the most innovative solutions, and not a copy of approaches already used in developed countries.

## **5. Conclusions**

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the international debate on how the international statistical system could use the Post-2015 Agenda to dramatically improve its way of working. It is a huge opportunity to overcome a series of well-known limitations and constraints, and to stimulate a continuous innovation of statistical activities, at global regional and national levels. The next 12-18 months will be crucial to design this process and all organisations are asked to carry out an in-depth analysis of existing weaknesses and propose innovative solutions. Only in this way, the “transformational” nature of the Post-2015 Agenda will be fully exploited by the international statistical community.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/reports/SG\\_Synthesis\\_Report\\_Road\\_to\\_Dignity\\_by\\_2030.pdf](http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/reports/SG_Synthesis_Report_Road_to_Dignity_by_2030.pdf).

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