

## **Expert Group Meeting on the indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda, New York, 25-26 February**

### Concept note

#### **Purpose**

1. The meeting will discuss 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. While the discussion will focus on the overall process and will not cover indicator proposals in specific areas, a few individual indicators will be reviewed for illustration. The conclusions of this meeting will be provided to the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission the following week (3-6 March 2015).

#### **Context and background**

2. 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. The post-2015 development agenda will be adopted at a High-level Summit in September 2015. Leading up to the summit, between January and July 2015, intergovernmental negotiations are taking place at the UN General Assembly, under the leadership of two Co-facilitators appointed by the President of the General Assembly.

3. On 19 July 2014, the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) released a proposal on sustainable development goals for consideration by the General Assembly, containing 17 goals and 169 targets. On 10 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.”<sup>1</sup>

4. On 4 December 2014, the Secretary-General submitted to the General Assembly a report (A/69/700) 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.

5. 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

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<sup>1</sup> A/RES/68/309.

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.

6. At its forty-sixth session (3-6 March 2015), the Commission will consider the report of the Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress (E/CN.3/2014/2), which presents a roadmap for the development and implementation of an indicator and monitoring framework for the post-2015 development agenda and suggests the establishment of an Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDG), tasked to develop an indicator framework for the monitoring of the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda (see the suggested terms of reference of the group in Annex 1 of the report).

7. In December 2014, the Co-facilitators of the intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda sent a letter to the 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, the Acting Chair, on behalf of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC), indicated that the work plan at this point foresees that a final proposal will be provided towards the end of 2015, once the development agenda has been agreed. However, a preliminary proposal could potentially be provided earlier, assuming that it allows for required technical adjustments and completion later.

### **Participants**

8. Representatives of Member States and specialized agencies and UN entities with expertise in development indicators and monitoring are invited to attend and contribute to this meeting. Statistical experts from civil society, academia and the private sector may attend as observers.

### **Substantive issues**

- **Developing a framework of global indicators**

9. The MDGs have demonstrated that an inspirational global vision, transformed into a set of simple and concrete goals and targets, monitored by statistical robust indicators, can contribute to bring global attention to the most pressing development challenges of our time and help galvanize development efforts. The simplicity of the MDG indicator and monitoring framework is one of the main reasons why the monitoring exercise was effective and also helped bring increased attention to statistics and statistical development. It is important that in developing a global indicator framework, these key features be maintained.

At the same time, the new development agenda is universal and covers a much wider range of policy areas than the MDGs did, requiring a larger number of indicators. It will be important that all relevant stakeholders participate in the discussion and preparation of the indicator framework.

10. The global indicator framework will inform policy makers and the general public on progress achieved towards a set of concrete universal SDG goals and targets and help focus the debate at the international/global level. The main objectives of the global indicator framework will be to facilitate monitoring and inform policy making at the international level and provide the basis for communication and advocacy to bring global attention to the priority areas of sustainable development. At the same time, the post-2015 indicator framework will need to promote a collaborative environment and offer incentives for all stakeholders and build upon and bring together evidence from various accountability mechanisms at the national, regional and global levels.

11. The list of global indicators will be proposed as a common basis to compare across countries and regions. It will also be used as the basis to develop lists of national and supplementary indicators to be used at the national and sub-national levels and for monitoring in the various sectors.

- **The multi-stage process of developing an indicator framework**

12. The roadmap that will be presented to the Statistical Commission at its forty-sixth session (3-6 March 2015) by the Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress envisions a multi-stage process for the development (and implementation) of an indicator and monitoring framework for the post-2015 development agenda under broad participation of Member States, agencies and other stakeholders. The roadmap suggests providing a final proposal of an indicator framework by end of 2015, and an initial proposal earlier, depending on the requirements of the intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda.

13. As indicated above, the Co-Facilitators of the intergovernmental negotiations requested that a provisional proposal be provided in advance of the intergovernmental meeting on 23-27 March 2015. On 16 January, the United Nations Statistics Division invited international agencies to submit for each goal their proposals for a set of indicators for global monitoring in their respective areas of work, with a deadline of 6 February.<sup>2</sup> As indicated in the request, the purpose of this list of indicators is strictly for global monitoring and for that reason the list should include a limited number of indicators. Considering the capacity

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<sup>2</sup> This request was sent to members of the inter-agency technical support team (TST) that has been established to support the OWG, the agencies' respective Chief statisticians represented in the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) and indicator experts within organizations that have already been involved in monitoring the MDGs.

concerns expressed by the UN Statistical Commission, the aim would be to produce a list with a maximum of 120 global indicators overall. If more than one indicator is suggested per target, the priority should be indicated.

14. The various proposals will be compiled and shared ahead of this Expert Group Meeting with all participants. Since the Co-Facilitators requested the UN Statistical Commission to provide a proposal for global indicators, a consultation will be conducted with national experts for them to finalize such a preliminary proposal.

- **The development of an architecture for the indicator framework**

15. The Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress, in their recommendations on the preparation of the indicator framework, also suggested the following principles:

- 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, 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 CES Recommendations on Measuring Sustainable Development, 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.

16. 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.

- **Criteria for indicator selection and setting quantitative targets**

17. As indicated by the Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress criteria for the selection of individual indicators have been already discussed in different fora. These criteria should be reviewed and taken into consideration as appropriate. When inviting agencies to provide their indicator proposals, it was suggested to consider some important criteria, including those of relevance, methodological soundness, measurability and ease to understand and communicate. It is also crucial that countries should have the capacity to measure the proposed indicators with reasonable effort and costs.

18. The Co-facilitators have also asked the UN Statistical Commission to provide some technical inputs in relation to the measurability of targets. Agencies were invited to comment on targets for which no indicators were identified and on targets that are to be considered of an aspirational nature. Also, they were asked to indicate numerical targets that appear different or less ambitious than targets already set by other international instruments and agreements.

### **Outcome**

19. The meeting is expected to agree on suggestions for the organization of work on the indicator framework, criteria for indicator selection and comments on numerical target setting. Those will be provided as an input for the discussion at the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission for the preparation of its proposals to the intergovernmental process on post-2015.

20. The discussions on the various issues identified above will be informed by dedicated sections on lessons learned from the MDG monitoring, and by examples of proposed indicators in different SDG areas.

### **Background documents:**

- Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals (A/68/970), available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>.
- Report of the Friends of the Chair report on broader measures of progress to the forty-sixth session of the UNSC (E/CN.3/2014/2), available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/sc2015.htm>.
- Background document to the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission containing the results of the survey on the availability of indicators to measure the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and associated 107 substantive targets agreed upon by the OWG, forthcoming, available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/sc2015.htm>.

- Compendium of Statistical Notes for the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG), March 2014, available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/broaderprogress/work.html>.
- Lessons Learned from MDG Monitoring From A Statistical Perspective, Report of the Task Team on Lessons Learned from MDG Monitoring of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IAEG) on MDG Indicators (IAEG-MDG), March 2013, available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/broaderprogress/development.html>.
- United Nations Task Team Report on statistics and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda, July 2013, available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/broaderprogress/development.html>.
- Conference of European Statisticians recommendations on measuring sustainable development, December 2013, available at [http://www.unece.org/publications/ces\\_sust\\_development.html](http://www.unece.org/publications/ces_sust_development.html).
- Indicators and a monitoring framework for Sustainable Development Goals, Launching a data revolution for the SDGs, A report by the Leadership Council of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (Revised working draft), January 2015, available at: <http://unsdsn.org/resources/publications/indicators/>.