

*Sustainable Development Goals, targets and indicators
and the CES Recommendations
on measuring sustainable development*

Prepared by

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Sustainable Development Goals, targets and indicators and the *CES Recommendations on measuring sustainable development*

Note by UNECE¹

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

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its report to the UN Statistical Commission², the Friends of the Chair (FOC) Group on Broader Measures of Progress stated that: "as a first step the Open Working Group targets should be mapped against each other and analysed with respect to the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) and the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) recommendations in order to identify interlinkages, overlaps and gaps." (para 13). The report further suggests to integrate the new SDG indicators into the framework presented in the CES Recommendations (para 35b).

2. Following this request, the UNECE secretariat started to map the goals and targets developed by the Open Working Group to the indicators and framework presented in the *CES Recommendations on measuring sustainable development*³. The mapping is currently in progress and the paper presents some initial outcomes that could be produced with a limited timeframe for the current Expert Group Meeting. The UNECE Secretariat is ready to share the results with the FOC and contribute to a full mapping, as proposed in the FOC report to the UNSC.

3. Although the results are preliminary, the mapping exercise provided interesting insights into the SDGs and targets, and provided ideas for the architecture of an SDG measurement framework.

4. The paper shortly introduces the CES framework and informs about the outcome of the pilot testing of the CES framework in 8 countries (Australia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Turkey and Ukraine). The paper then presents the main outcomes of the mapping and conclusions that can be drawn for the SDG measurement framework.

II. CES RECOMMENDATIONS ON MEASURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

5. In June 2013 the Conference of European Statisticians endorsed the *CES Recommendations on measuring sustainable development* and its associated sets of indicators. The CES Recommendations are a key step towards harmonising the measurement approaches to sustainable development. **The Recommendations provide countries with a universal measurement framework based on synergies between the theoretical concepts and policy needs.** The framework shows in practice how the countries could present the information on sustainable development in a concise and structured manner.

6. The CES Recommendations were developed by a joint Task Force of UNECE, the Statistical Office of the European Commission (Eurostat), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and a number of countries. The measurement frameworks of individual countries were analyzed

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² E/CN.3/2015/2

³ <http://www.unece.org/stats/sustainable-development.html>

extensively and the various international initiatives were taken into account, such as the ones by the United Nations, Eurostat and OECD. **About 65 countries and the major international organizations endorsed the Recommendations in June 2013.** The CES Recommendations were published in the beginning of 2014 and a Russian version is currently being prepared for print.

7. The CES sustainable development indicator framework links the theory to policy relevant themes. It aims to base the measurement of sustainable development on solid conceptual grounds while at the same time proposing an indicator set to respond to policy maker's needs in all areas of sustainable development covering its environmental, social and economic aspects.

8. The CES framework draws on three conceptual dimensions of wellbeing as defined in the Brundtland report: wellbeing of the present generation in one particular country (the 'here and now'); the wellbeing of future generations ('later') based on the capital approach; and the wellbeing of people living in other countries, incorporating the transboundary impacts of sustainable development ('elsewhere'). These dimensions are further linked to 20 policy relevant themes.

9. The framework can be used in a flexible way. Although the proposed sustainability themes are universal, there is room for selecting country-specific indicators. The framework proposes a comprehensive set of 95 indicators selected on a thematic basis covering the three dimensions of wellbeing. From these 95, a subset of 60 indicators specifically focused on the three dimensions of wellbeing, and a small set of 24 internationally comparable indicators can be drawn.

III. OUTCOME OF PILOT TESTING OF THE CES RECOMMENDATIONS

10. Following the endorsement of the *CES Recommendations for measuring sustainable development*, eight countries, namely Australia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Turkey and Ukraine pilot tested the recommended framework and indicators in 2014.

11. In the pilot testing exercise, the countries were asked to review the set of 95 indicators, examine the indicator descriptions and see whether these indicators are used in their country. In addition, the countries were invited to match their national indicators to the CES framework and provide feedback on whether the proposed framework had been helpful in reviewing and constructing the national indicator sets. Finally, the countries were requested to pinpoint implementation issues, in particular to analyze possible data gaps, identify proxy indicators and suggest indicators to fill in "placeholders".

12. The pilot testing exercise proved the usefulness of the CES framework, its flexibility and its ease of application in practice. The results show that all of the participating countries produce the majority of the 95 CES indicators. Australia, Italy and Russian Federation produce more than 77% of the CES indicators. Mexico, Kazakhstan, and Slovenia produce two thirds of the CES indicators.

13. Furthermore, the pilot testing proved that basic statistics are available to produce CES indicators for all the policy themes included in the CES framework. One of the next challenges will be, therefore, to ensure that the same basic statistics are used by all countries and that comparable results could be achieved in making assessment on progress made towards the SDGs.

14. The following main findings from the pilot testing can be drawn:

- **Countries showed willingness to produce certain CES indicators that are currently not produced**

15. Countries indicated that they have the capacity to produce certain CES indicators which are currently not produced. Furthermore, some indicators with only small differences in the method of calculation could be easily adjusted and further produced, e.g. when age groups are slightly different (employment rates, smoking prevalence, etc.).

- **National SDI sets could be easily expanded to include more CES indicators**

16. Several countries shared their plans to introduce the production of certain CES indicators in the near future. For example, indicators on leisure time, healthy life expectancy, natural capital, contacts with family and friends and participation in voluntary work in Russian Federation; competency of adults and trust in institutions in Kazakhstan; and expenditure on education in Turkey. Furthermore, Australia explained that one of the most difficult CES indicators – the “Human capital” indicator – is being produced on experimental basis.

- **Countries provided suggestions for indicators that could fill in the placeholders in the CES framework**

17. The CES measurement framework is forward looking, and as such 22 of the 95 CES indicators were noted as indicators that are not yet produced but would be needed in the future. These were referred to as “place holders”.

18. Countries made useful suggestions in pilot testing to fill in the missing indicators, especially in the area of environment, housing and social capital. For more than half of the “place holders” the countries proposed indicators from their national indicator sets.

IV. MAPPING OF SDG TARGETS AND INDICATORS AND THE CES FRAMEWORK

19. The purpose of the mapping was to show how a conceptual framework can be used to structure SD goals, targets and indicators. Although the work is in progress and more work needs to be done, some conclusions can be drawn. This kind of analysis helps to get a much better grasp of the targets and indicators, and helps to structure the measurement of the many different policy issues that are incorporated in the SDGs and targets. As such, it can provide a basis for the architecture of the SDG measurement framework.

20. The SDGs and related targets already provide a kind of “frame” for the measurement. This is based on policy priorities and the agreement found through negotiations between different countries and interest groups. However, the resulting list of goals and targets can easily include inconsistencies, overlaps and gaps. A framework, well-grounded in theory, functional and practically feasible is crucial for a successful process of defining the indicators to measure progress towards the SDGs and the related targets.⁴ The framework can help to understand the linkages and trade-offs between goals and targets, and reveal overlaps, gaps and inconsistencies.

21. Use of a framework is important to:

- (a) organise the goals and targets into a coherent structure;
- (b) give a broad view, looking at SDGs not only from viewpoint of a specific sector;

⁴ A framework is a basic structure underlying a system, concept, or text. It provides a coherent, logical structure to organize ideas.

- (c) link national, regional and global perspectives;
- (d) identify inter-linkages, overlaps, gaps and trade-offs between the goals, targets and respective indicators;
- (e) facilitate the selection of indicators and balance the indicator system (concerning number of indicators on different aspects, level of detail);
- (f) facilitate communicating the indicators.

22. The mapping was based on analysing the goals, targets and the indicators that have been proposed so far. The analysis took into account the different indicator lists that are being circulated for comments in preparation for establishing the SDG indicators. One of the main sources was the survey by the Friends of the Chair Group on Broader Measures of Progress, as this provided an extensive list of indicators from various sources. The mapping was done in two ways:

- (a) taking the SDG targets and indicators as a starting point and allocating them to the CES framework;
- (b) taking the CES Recommendations as a starting point and allocating the indicators to the SDG targets.

23. When taking **the SDG targets and indicators** as a starting point, the initial analysis shows that great majority of these **can be mapped to the CES framework**. Some themes and dimensions in the CES framework may need to be extended to take into account all related aspects from the SDG targets. Some new themes may be added, if it is not possible to incorporate them in already existing themes.

24. For example, the CES framework includes a theme “Nutrition” which is also an aspect of human well-being. This theme can be extended to include food, food security and food waste aspects. Furthermore, the CES framework includes a dimension “Transboundary impacts” to measure how countries impact other countries through migration, trade, financial flows, technology transfer, etc. This dimension may be extended to cover also global aspects, such as oceans (Goal 14). Transport could be added as a new theme or incorporated under economic capital (as part of infrastructure).

25. Some of the targets are very wide, encompassing many different areas (e.g. 11.2). These are more difficult to match and it will be a challenge to measure these by one indicator. It is also challenging to match the targets that concern policies and means of implementation (these are mainly the targets denoted with letters, e.g. 1.a, 1.b, etc.). In this case, it has to be decided what kind of indicators to use: to measure the existence of policies (which is often done), or to try to measure the outcome of these policies.

26. Using the framework allows to identify overlaps. These are quite many, especially concerning areas that are addressed under several Goals, such as labour, gender, inequality, access to resources, climate change, etc. In the case of cross-cutting issues, three approaches are possible to reflect these in the SDGs: (i) to establish a Goal focusing on this particular issue, (ii) to mainstream the issue into several Goals, or (iii) to use both approaches simultaneously (this is often the case with the current SDGs).

27. “Gender” is a particularly good example as there is a specific goal about gender equality (number 5) and gender aspects are included in most of the other Goals: such as Goal 1 “Poverty” (targets 1.2, 1.4), Goal 2 “Hunger, nutrition and food security” (targets 2.2 and 2.3), Goal 3 “Health” (target 3.1), Goal 4 “Education” (targets 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7), Goal 8 “Economic growth, employment and decent work” (targets 8.5 and 8.8), Goal 10 “Inequality” (targets 10.2 and 10.3), Goal 11 “Cities” (targets 11.2 and 11.7), Goal 12 “Sustainable consumption and production”.

28. “Labour” is another such example: this is addressed in Goal 5 “Gender equality” (targets 5.1 and 5.4), Goal 8 “Economic growth, employment and decent work” (targets 8.2, 8.3, 8.5, 8.6, 8.7) and Goal 10 “Reduce inequality” (targets 10.2 and 10.3).

29. An overlap is not a disadvantage in itself. It shows a link between targets and it can help to reduce the number of indicators when one indicator can be used to measure several targets. However, it should be clear where such links are.

30. **When taking the CES framework as the basis, practically all CES indicators could be mapped to the SDGs and targets.** Only the four capital indicators could not be linked to a specific goal or target, namely the economic and financial capital, natural capital, human capital and social capital. These indicators are on a general level and cover several goals and targets. Furthermore, they are not available in most countries.

31. Inequality and distributional issues had a special place in the CES framework. They are recognised as a cross-cutting issue and comprise several aspects, including income, gender, age, ethnic background, etc. In the SDGs and targets the focus is on income inequality, in particular under Goal 10. E.g., target 10.3 “Ensure equal opportunities and reduce inequalities” cuts across several policy themes from the CES Framework, such as consumption and income, nutrition, health, labour, education, housing, etc.

V. CONCLUSIONS

32. The CES Recommendations provide an important contribution to the current process of establishing the measurement framework for the SDGs and related targets. It is a result of several years of work that has been endorsed by about 65 countries and major international organizations, such as Eurostat and OECD. The pilot testing in countries provides evidence of the potential which the CES Recommendations have in shaping the future SDG measurement framework.

33. The framework presented in the CES Recommendations can be used as a basis for the SDG measurement framework:

- (a) It is flexible and can be adapted to country/regional circumstances and policy priorities;
- (b) The pilot testing has proved its practical usability in countries;
- (c) It allows to link the goals and targets (policy themes) to conceptual dimensions of sustainable development.

34. The framework needs to be adapted to the SDGs: the coverage of some of the dimensions can be extended; new themes may be added to the framework. Taking into account the limited time, this will be the most efficient and practical way to develop a feasible architecture for measuring the SDGs and related targets.