

*Background document/discussion paper*

*Discussion paper on elements of data disaggregation in the SDGs*

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### **Background document/discussion paper**

#### **Discussion paper on elements of data disaggregation in the SDGs**

The Secretary-General in his Report “Realizing the Future we want for all” calls for sustainable development for all. The objective is that no one be left behind. In order to achieve universal development, it is essential that the new monitoring framework explicitly goes beyond global and national averages and aggregate progress into disaggregated data with the ability to differentiate levels of achievement of different social groups. This allows us to highlight which groups are being left behind.

An important lesson learnt from the MDGs was the need for disaggregated data to monitor progress in all groups. By utilizing regional averages, some groups were not visible in the MDG monitoring framework. In the post-2015 development agenda, ensuring that no one is left behind and that sustainable development reaches the vulnerable populations will require a higher level of disaggregation.

#### *1. Levels of Disaggregation*

Data collection and monitoring as well as the capacity to disaggregate data are crucial elements in being able to understand where progress is unequal. Obstacles to sustainable development can only be removed if we understand them and have data to be able to monitor them. Disaggregating data under each goal would also help to strengthen the analysis of social inequalities.

Targets call for various levels of disaggregation. Where relevant, indicators should be disaggregated at the person level by Age and Sex<sup>1</sup>. These are the basic levels to ensure that no one is left behind. The concept of age and sex are statistically defined and in many cases routinely collected. In order to improve coverage of age and sex breakdowns, we need to strengthen the civil registration and vital statistics systems and work toward household survey harmonization.

Other disaggregation levels need to identify different social groups as far as possible. The aim of including these specific sub-groups or social groups in disaggregation is to ensure that the SDGs reach the most vulnerable groups. The most disadvantaged groups in each country context (e.g. caste, indigenous peoples, migrants, minorities, disability status, refugees) need to be identified through a consultative and participatory national process and in accordance with related human rights, ethical and statistical standards. While there might be agreed protocols, there are not always agreed means of collecting data. Thus, inclusion of some disaggregation levels will require additional data. It is crucial to address how to bring country-specific issues into the Global framework.

Disaggregation of data for under-five mortality, nutrition, school enrolment and basic services access by location, household wealth and sex and age (as relevant) is widely possible and needed. These classifying disaggregations are used to understand the driving factors, such as location (e.g. rural-urban/remote areas/slum locations), income/wealth, educational levels.

From a statistical perspective, it is therefore important to consider 1) the stratification variables for disaggregation<sup>ii</sup> and 2) particular indicators that reflect inequality issues not captured by disaggregation under other goals (e.g. Gini coefficient and relative poverty for income inequality or

measures to reflect multidimensional poverty, or gender equality measures, etc.). It will be important to consider both vertical and horizontal inequalities within countries as well as possible measures of global or international inequality to capture inequalities between countries.

## *2. Basic analytical elements*

Three basic analytical elements to keep in mind in the development of a common approach to incorporating disaggregation into the SDG indicator monitoring framework.

1. The principle of “No one left behind” which means that we have to define a metric to assess whether progress is equally “shared” and not concentrated in cities or higher income groups, etc.
2. Issues of discrimination and human rights also need to be analysed based on data disaggregation, plus some specific indicators?
3. Very specific groups – such as migrants or refugees or people with disabilities. In these cases disaggregation might not be enough as very few data collection instruments would allow you to collect detailed information on aspects that are relevant to these groups.

## *3. Points for consideration*

Highly disaggregated data are essential to be able to monitor both the degree to which development progress is indeed inclusive and sustainable and to analyse the extent to which the needs of the most deprived and vulnerable groups are being addressed. Much of the work of disaggregated data might fall on the National level. How do we ensure that the disaggregation is not pushed to the National level only? It is essential that we reflect on how to bring these analytical elements into the Global level of monitoring.

In defining the levels of disaggregation, we need to take into consideration the feasibility of disaggregating at various levels. The collection of data on some topics is sensitive or subjective. The inclusion of questions on these sensitive or subjective topics in the survey instrument or national data collection mechanism needs to be well thought out. When reporting data, it is also important to be alert to the sensitivities of reporting disaggregated data.

Another consideration in planning and collecting survey data is the cost implications of the larger sample size needed to be able to provide data at smaller population levels. Not only does the sample size increase, but there will be increased costs related to the larger collection efforts needed and additional resources for extended data analysis.

Relatedly, both the extensive scope of the sustainable development goals and targets and call for greater disaggregation of data, there is a need for strengthening of statistical capacities in most countries. These increased requirements will pose a significant challenge for any statistical system, but it is crucial that the requirement of data disaggregation be made part of all plans and strategies for strengthening statistical capacity, both at the national and international levels.

## *4. SDG Targets and Disaggregation*

In the OWG’s outcome document, the Goals and Targets included inconsistent reference to levels of disaggregation both in terms of quantity and quality. Often general language included in Goals includes wording of attaining the goal “for all” or “by all” people. Another set of language includes reference to specific groups (e.g., men and women, women, older persons,

youth, persons with disabilities, poor and the vulnerable, among others). Other targets are not at the people level, and thus do not necessarily need to be or can be disaggregated.

In conclusion, to ensure sustainable development for all, we need more detailed data. We need to have consistent disaggregation of the indicators. To achieve the data needs, significant scaling-up of national statistical capacities are required. In determining the level of disaggregation, a strategic approach needs to be taken on the systematic inclusion of consistent disaggregation within the indicator framework.

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<sup>i</sup> However, data by sex are not meant to replace specific indicators that will address gender equality and women's empowerment.

<sup>ii</sup> On the issue of the most appropriate "stratification variables", sex and age are uncontroversial. However, "disability, location, income/wealth", are variables where statistical problems are much more important. For example, while the Canberra 2011 *Handbook on Household Income Statistics* provides international guidance on how to measure household income in surveys, this cannot be easily implemented in surveys whose primary purpose is to measure aspects other than income. Similarly the notion of cross-classifying respondents by their wealth holdings seems almost impossible to implement (there are no international standards on how to measure wealth; and the guidance that exists -- the OECD *Guidelines for Micro-Statistics on Household Wealth*— cannot be implemented in non-wealth surveys.