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Background document
Available in English only

Data and indicators for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

**Report on the Third Meeting of the High-level Group for Partnership,
Coordination and Capacity-Building for post-2015 monitoring**

(HLG for post-2015 monitoring)

New York, 14-15 January 2016

Conference Room 6

Third meeting of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for post-2015 monitoring (HLG for post-2015 monitoring)

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Closed meeting

Meeting report

Introduction

The third meeting of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for post-2015 monitoring (HLG for post-2015 monitoring) took place on 14-15 January 2016 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The agenda is included in Annex 1. The HLG for post-2015 monitoring was established by the Statistical Commission at its 46th session to promote national ownership of the post-2015 monitoring system and foster statistical capacity building, partnership and coordination.

The membership of the HLG for post-2015 monitoring was determined using existing regional mechanisms to ensure equitable regional representation. Representatives from 17 of the 22 countries who are members of the group, a representative of the current chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission as an ex-officio member and the two co-chairs of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators attended the meeting (see Annex 2).

Agenda Item 1. Opening

Ms. Gabriella Vukovich, co-chair of High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for post-2015 monitoring, opened the meeting.

H.E. Mr. Lykketoft, President of the 70th session of the General Assembly, gave opening remarks noting the progress over the past fifteen years in the availability, granularity and timeliness of data on all three dimensions of sustainable development, and recalling the commitment by Member States to a robust and integrated follow-up and review framework for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Mr. Lykketoft stressed that the High-level group will provide strategic guidance in order to strengthen statistical capacity of national authorities, “particularly in the poorest and more vulnerable countries”, to enable the “full use of new technologies and innovations”, and to improve cooperation among all stakeholders, which will

be important “to support evidence-based decisions making; help measure progress; improve accountability and spur targeted responses to the challenges which member states face”.

Mr. Wu, Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs, emphasized that Member States tasked the Statistical Commission with overseeing the development and implementation of global indicators for the SDGs, and the HLG for post-2015 monitoring with providing strategic leadership to promote national ownership and foster statistical capacity building, partnership and coordination. Furthermore, the HLG will advise the Statistical Commission on how to best follow-up on the recommendations on the Data Revolution. The HLG has two key roles as the voice of official statistics and as the lead in effective statistical capacity building efforts to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Ms. Vukovich reminded HLG members of the broad range of issues to be discussed in the meeting, including the review of the group’s working mechanisms to enable contributions from observers; the discussion of strategic aspects of the implementation of the SDG indicator framework; and the definition of a programme of work for 2016, which will include the organization of the UN World Data Forum.

Mr. Stefan Schweinfest, Director of the Statistics Division of DESA, stressed that the High-level Group is tasked with supporting the Statistical Commission, which is at the center of the global statistical system. Noting the accelerating pace of changes brought about by the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs, the data revolution, and the new voice of stakeholders from civil society in statistical matters, Mr. Schweinfest emphasized the importance of the High-level Group’s long-term view to make the connection between major themes currently being discussed under the auspices of the Commission, such as the indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals, the data revolution and the transformative agenda for official statistics. Mr. Schweinfest concluded by inviting the High-level Group to contribute its leadership and guidance in order to help the secretariat set priorities.

After a brief discussion, the agenda was adopted with an amendment under agenda item 3 to include a point on “Relation of the HLG with the Global Partnership for Sustainable development Data (GPSDD)”.

Agenda Item 2. Mandate and working mechanisms of the HLG

a. Summary of HLG activities in 2015

Ms. Vukovich provided an overview of the first two meetings of the High-level Group, which took place via teleconference on 7 October 2015 and on 11 November 2015, respectively.

b. Relationship with the IAEG-SDGs

Mr. Enrique Ordaz Lopez and Ms. Lisa Bersales, co-chairs of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDGs) presented an update on the status of work of the IAEG-SDGs and its work programme for 2016. They responded to questions from the High-level Group members on the current list of proposed indicators for the SDGs, including on the criteria to

classify them as “green” and “grey” and the nature of the three-tier system being proposed to further organize the development of the indicators.

The group commended the IAEG-SDGs for its achievements over a very short period of time. The subsequent discussion underlined the need to focus on the architecture of the indicator framework, so that a roadmap for the implementation of the follow-up and review process can be developed. It was stressed that the High-level Group has an important role to play in helping shape the interaction between the technical and political aspects of the work on indicators. There was also agreement on the need to define mechanisms for the High-level Group to make recommendations to the IAEG-SDGs with respect to strategic issues in different national contexts, including: (1) the use and interpretation of indicators, (2) means of implementation, and (3) strengthening of national statistical systems.

Mr. Ibrahima Ba, co-chair of the High-level Group, noted that the proposed indicators should become part of the national strategies for statistical development, while various members stressed that countries need to assess data gaps, estimate costs of implementation, and develop strategies for the mobilization and management of resources moving forward. There was also agreement among members on the need to define roles of national statistical systems, international agencies, and other stakeholders in the collection, compilation, transmission, and aggregation of data, with a view to ensure coherence between national, regional, and global levels, while ensuring that the process is country-led and that national statistical systems retain the ownership of the indicators. In this connection, it was stressed that the role of international agencies will be very important and needs to be clarified.

Mr. Schweinfest indicated that UNSD will establish a database on SDG indicators, which will be the basis for the annual SDG report. This database will be populated gradually as data become available over the coming years. The 2016 report will be a “state of the world data” report, taking stock of current data availability and data gaps.

Action points:

- *To ensure effective communication between the IAEG-SDGs and the HLG, UNSD will invite the HLG co-chair(s) to the meetings of the IAEG-SDGs, and vice versa.*
- *UNSD, as the Secretariat of the IAEG-SDGs, will facilitate communication with the international agencies to clarify the role of the agencies in the work on the SDG indicators.*

c. Review of HLG terms of reference

Some members noted that the version of the terms of reference of the High-level group included in the report to the Statistical Commission may not capture the full scope of work of the group, and that some language, especially with respect to the organization of the UN World Data Forum, could be strengthened or clarified. However, the group agreed that this should not be an obstacle for the group to start addressing important and urgent issues.

It was noted that in clarifying the role of observers, a balance between openness and practicality is needed. It was suggested that the experience of the Friend of the Chair groups could be a useful model moving forward, whereby there would be different categories of invited observers (e.g., a representative of regional commissions, a representative of UN agencies, a representative of non-UN agencies, etc.). The distinction between “permanent observers” and “issue partners”, and between restricted and open meetings (e.g., during the main session of the Statistical Commission) was also discussed.

Some members of the group underlined the importance of being transparent and inclusive towards observer countries. However, it was also noted that there is a risk of having an unbalanced regional representation if only observer countries with sufficient financial resources would be able to attend the meetings of the High-level group. Therefore, members reiterated the importance of their role as representatives of their respective regions as well as of the rotation mechanism in the membership of the group.

Some members noted that it is necessary to identify mechanisms to allow observers from civil society organizations to contribute to the work of the High-level group, including, for instance, special meetings between the co-chairs of the High-level group and representatives from civil society organizations, or in the framework of the UN World Data Forum.

Also, it was noted that many countries already work with partners (such as PARIS21 and the World Bank) to improve national statistical capacities and that these partners need to be included in the High-level Group discussions on resource mobilization for capacity building and coordination as issue partners.

Finally, members agreed that “issue partners” would be invited to participate in HLG meetings when relevant. The group agreed to strike a balance between restricted and open meetings. Furthermore, the members agreed on the need to use the High-level group’s website efficiently as one means for keeping observers and stakeholders informed about the activities of the group. Members agreed that transparency will be best served by sharing the documents of the HLG with the interested public on a website. Also, it was suggested that the use of video-conference facilities, or the organization of special sessions back-to-back to other meetings, would be useful means for inviting partners to participate in the discussion of specific issues.

Action points:

- *UNSD will revise the proposed update to the Terms of Reference of the group, taking note of the discussions, and specifically strengthening wording about the group’s role in the UN World Data Forum. The revised proposal to update the Terms of Reference will be presented orally at the UN Statistical Commission.*
- *HLG Members will send any additional comments on the Terms of Reference to the Secretariat by 27 January.*
- *The Secretariat will make the meeting documents available on the UNSD’s SDG website.*

Agenda Item 3. Strategic aspects of the implementation of a global SDG indicator framework

- a. Role of official statistical systems in harnessing the data revolution for sustainable development and transformative agenda

Mr. Schweinfest emphasized the strategic role of the Group in defining a global action plan for data. Members agreed on the importance of building on already existing work by the Statistical Commission on the issue of the data revolution for sustainable development and the transformative agenda for official statistics. In this connection, while some countries expressed the view that work on these topics should not be delegated to other sub-groups given their strategic importance, other members indicated that, at least initially, it may be useful to establish a taskforce in order to have a focused conversation.

Also, some members noted that there are “low hanging fruits” to be considered in the development of an action plan for data, such as the development of a communication strategy aimed at reaching and influencing different audiences.

It was noted that the main topics in the discussions on a data revolution for sustainable development and a transformative agenda for official statistics are closely inter-related and highly relevant to the work of the High-level group, namely:

- *Data revolution:*
 - Capacity and resources
 - Governance and leadership
 - Principles and standards
 - Technology, innovation and analysis
- *Transformative agenda:*
 - Coordination at and between the global, regional and national statistical system
 - Communication and advocacy
 - Integrated statistical systems for data collection, processing and dissemination
 - Innovation and modernization through standards-based statistical business architecture
 - Training and capacity building

In this context, the issues of governance, coordination and leadership, as well as communication and advocacy, were emphasized as being of particular relevance for the High-level group in setting the strategic direction for the implementation of the SDG indicator framework.

Furthermore, it was underlined that the group needs to maintain a long-term perspective and build upon the vast experience of the official statistics community in developing standards and dealing with new sources of data. With respect to the innovation and modernization, some members indicated interest in working to update the Handbook of Statistical Organizations.

Members agreed that while the main focus of High-level Group should remain the implementation of SDG indicators, the group should not limit the scope of its work to only the

SDGs. The global action plan for data should address all major issues raised in the context of the data revolution and the transformative agenda, indicating not only what needs to be done, but also who, how, and when, as well as the estimating the financial resources required. A number of countries offered to work over the next couple of weeks on a draft outline for a global action plan for data, which could be circulated during the next session of the Statistical Commission for comments.

Action points:

- *UNSD will collect expressions of interest by HLG members to be part of a sub-group tasked with drafting an outline of the Global Action Plan for Data (by Wednesday 27 January).*
- *UNSD will provide an initial draft outline of the Global Action Plan for Data*
- *The draft outline will be circulated at the next session of the Statistical Commission for comments from the full Commission*

b. Partnerships between the statistical community and other stakeholders

On the issue of partnerships between the statistical community and other stakeholders, members of the High-level group agreed on the need for a global partnership for sustainable development data. Some members expressed the view that such a partnership should be convened under the auspices of the United Nations, as proposed by the Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development. At the same time, many members agreed it would be useful to create an institutional framework to engage with already existing stakeholder groups that can contribute their existing experience and resources, without undermining the central role of the UN Statistical Commission and of National Statistical Offices.

c. Relation of the HLG with the Global Partnership

Members noted that a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data was launched in New York last fall. Some members expressed concern that the partnership had not been established under the auspices of the United Nations, as recommended in the report of the IEAG on the data revolution. Other members expressed the view that it would be useful to explore to what extent the existing partnership, as well as other partners, could contribute to work streams initiated by the HLG.

The HLG also noted that the eleventh Africa Symposium on Statistical Development (ASSD) petitioned the Secretary General of the United Nations to establish a Global Partnership for sustainable data as committed to in his Synthesis Report titled the Road to Dignity.

Action points:

- *HLG members will further consider how and when to engage with the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data.*

d. Relationship between national and global monitoring and reporting, and priority areas for funding and resource mobilization

Members recognized the importance of aligning global, regional, and national data monitoring and reporting. There was agreement that global monitoring is only meaningful if it reflects national realities and capacities. Global monitoring is also key to understand gaps and needs at the national level and to establish priority areas where resources need to be channelled in order to strengthen national capacities. It was also noted that the new emphasis of the 2030 Agenda on no one left behind will require the statistical community to develop strategies and channel resources to allow the necessary data disaggregation. .

Some members stressed the role that the High-level Group can play in establishing principles to ensure the independence, methodological integrity and accessibility of the data and metadata being transmitted and used from the national to the global levels. It was mentioned that the commitments expressed in ECOSOC resolution 2006/6, dealing with these issues, would need to be renewed.

Some members also pointed to the need to avoid duplication in the data requirements from different international agencies, as well as the fragmentation of support to national statistical systems. Reference was also made to the experience of countries that participated in a UNSD/DFID project, which developed templates and tools for the transmission and reconciliation of data on development indicators. In this connection, various members agreed on the need to provide strategic guidance to help reduce reporting burden for the SDGs indicators and other data collected by international agencies.

Mr. Schweinfest noted that the global SDG report is a report by the Secretary-General, with the IAEG-SDGs being responsible for the methodological specification of the data that will be included and the High-level Group being responsible for the formulation of strategies to address the remaining data gaps. The co-chairs of the IAEG-SDGs noted that once the classification of the indicators into a three-tier system is completed, along with their respective metadata, the High-level Group will have a solid basis to develop its recommendations. With respect to data reporting mechanisms, Mr. Schweinfest indicated that international agencies are expected to have a role in the collection of data, with a view to ensuring international comparability, as well as supporting methodological work and capacity building in their respective areas of expertise. However, he also stressed the importance to ensure coherence in reporting and compliance with international standards. He emphasized the critical coordinating and quality control role of NSOs. In this context, SDMX can be an important tool to address data traffic issues. Also, Mr. Schweinfest stressed the need to develop and agree on principles for the estimation and adjustment of national data for the purpose of international comparability.

Some members noted that, in order to ensure that data reporting mechanisms are country-led, it is necessary to have adequate institutional structures in place at the country level. Also, it was suggested that the analysis of case studies could be a useful first step in order to take stock of the situation of statistical systems in different regions, and to hold consultations with data scientists

and technology specialists, before making specific recommendations regarding data reporting mechanisms. One concrete request was to produce a visual representation of the envisioned data flows from the national to the global level.

Action points:

- *As Secretariat of both the IAEG-SDGs and the HLG, UNSD will prepare a visual representation of the envisioned flows of SDG Indicator data from the national to global levels.*

Agenda Item 4. Work programme of the High-level group

a. Concept note for the UN World Data Forum

Members of the High-level group reiterated that organizing the UN World Data Forum under the auspices of the UN Statistical Commission is one of the main activities of the group and should be used in a strategic manner.

Members agreed that the forum should build communities that bring together producers and users of data, and should be a launching pad, at the highest political level, for a broad consultation on a global action plan for statistics.

In terms of the themes to be discussed in the Forum, members agreed with the list of topics proposed in an initial draft circulated by the secretariat, namely:

- Statistical capacity building and data literacy
- Resources and means of implementation of the global indicator framework
- Innovative technologies and methods for data production, dissemination and analysis
- Needs and insights from data users
- Synergies between traditional and new sources of data
- Data communication and visualization tools
- Geo-spatial information systems

In addition to these topics, some members suggested to include the topic of institutional arrangements. It was also suggested that the Forum's programme committee should be open to representatives from academia and other partners and consultations should be held with a large range of stakeholders on topics to be discussed.

The group agreed that the dates and location of the Forum should be determined as soon as possible, preferably by March. While recalling that Kenya had offered to host the UN World Data Forum, some members suggested having a call for expressions of interest open to all countries or organizations (in which the offer by Kenya would also be considered). Some potential candidates that were mentioned include South Africa, Republic of Korea, China or PARIS21/OECD. It was also suggested that the focus should be on organizing this year's forum

(UN World Data Forum 2016), while leaving for a later stage the definition of more formal mechanisms for the regular organization of the forum in subsequent years.

While the need to maintain the UN World Data Forum under the auspices of the inter-governmental process led by the Statistical Commission was stressed, some members recognized the need to find partners for the organization of the Forum that have previous experience in the organization of events of this magnitude, as well as sufficient logistic and funding capabilities. In this connection, the group agreed to explore possibilities of cooperation with members of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data initiative and other actors in the international data and information scenes (multinational corporations, international organizations, universities, etc).

There was agreement that the UN World Data Forum should be innovative and dynamic in its format, and go beyond the traditional model of international statistical meetings. Also, it was suggested that the Forum could invite the participation of the UN Secretary-General.

The representative of the State of Palestine offered to produce an initial draft document calling for expressions of interest to host the UN World Data Forum, to be circulated among High-level group members for further refinement. UNSD offered to approach potential host countries.

Action points:

- *The representative of the State of Palestine will produce an initial draft document to be used for a call of expressions of interest to host the UN World Data Forum, to be circulated among High-level group members for further refinement.*
- *UNSD will approach potential host countries.*
- *UNSD will finalize the concept note of the UN World Data Forum and circulate it in advance of the Statistical Commission.*
- *UNSD will collect expressions of interest by HLG members to join the UN World Data Forum programme committee (by 27 January).*

b. Side events at the Statistical Commission.

Two side events were proposed in connection with the work of the High-level Group. The first will be the High-level Forum on Official Statistics held on the Monday before the commission, which will focus on the UN World Data Forum. South Africa offered to prepare a room document to promote the discussion of the role of the statistical community in the context of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. A second event will be co-sponsored by UNICEF and UNSD with the purpose of providing space to showcase capacity building initiatives of various partners.

Action points:

- *HLG members will send suggestions for invited guest speakers for the Monday High-level Forum to UNSD as soon as possible.*

Agenda item 5: Conclusions and next steps.

It was agreed that the next meeting of the High-level Group will take place during the 47th session of the Statistical Commission in March 2016. The agenda for this meeting will cover the global action plan and the UN World Data Forum. Members of the High-level Group are requested to express interest to UNSD to be part of a sub-group that will initiate work on an outline for the Global Action Plan. It was agreed that the draft outline would then be shared with the whole group in the next two weeks so that by the time of the forthcoming session of the UNSC, the plan will have gone through a few iterations.

Action points:

- UNSD will prepare for the fourth meeting of the HLG to be held in conjunction with the next session of the Statistical Commission.
- A sub-group of the HLG and UNSD will work in the preparation of an initial draft of a Global Action Plan.

Annex 1. Agenda

Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Statistics Division

ESA/STAT/AC.307/L.1
7 January 2016

Third meeting of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for post-2015 monitoring (HLG for post-2015 monitoring)

New York, 14-15 January 2016

Conference Room 6

Closed meeting

Thursday, 14 January 2016

Morning session (9:30am – 12:30pm)

- 1. Opening**
- 2. Mandate and working mechanisms of the HLG**
 - Review of HLG terms of reference and summary of HLG activities in 2015
 - Relationship with the IAEG-SDGs
- 3. Strategic aspects of the implementation of a global SDG indicator framework**
 - Role of official statistical systems in harnessing the data revolution for sustainable development
 - Relationship between national and global monitoring and reporting

Afternoon session (2:00pm – 5:30pm)

- 3. Strategic aspects of the implementation of a global SDG indicator framework (*continued*)**
 - Priority areas for funding and resource mobilization
 - Partnerships between the statistical community and other stakeholders
 - Relation of the HLG with the Global Partnership

Friday, 15 January 2016

Morning session (11:00am – 12:30am)

- 4. HLG programme of work for 2016**
 - World Forum on Sustainable Development Data (World Data Forum)
 - Objective, content and format
 - Organizational aspects and key partners

Afternoon session (2:00pm – 5:30pm)

- 4. HLG programme of work for 2016 (*continued*)**
 - Other activities, including UN Statistical Commission side event on partnerships for sustainable development data
- 5. Conclusions and next steps**

Annex 2. List of Participants

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Statistics Division

ESA/STAT/AC.307/L2

Third meeting of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for post-2015 monitoring (HLG for post-2015 monitoring)

New York, 14-15 January 2016

Conference Room 6

Closed meeting

HLG members

Bahamas	Ms. Leona Melva Wilson Acting Director Department of Statistics
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ibrahima Ba Director General Institut National de la Statistique
Denmark	Mr. Jørgen Elmeskov Director General, National Statistician Statistics Denmark
Denmark	Mr. Maciej Truszczynski Head of Section Statistics Denmark
Ecuador	Mr. José Alejandro Rosero Moncayo Executive Director Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos
Hungary	Ms. Gabriella Vukovich President Hungarian Central Statistical Office
Italy	Mr. Giorgio Alleva President Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat)
Italy	Ms. Marina Gandolfo Coordinator of the President's Secretariat for International Relations Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat)
Kazakhstan	Mr. Zhasser Jarkinbayev Vice Chairman Statistics Committee of Kazakhstan
Malaysia	Mr. Mohd Uzir bin Mahidin Deputy Chief Statistician (Social/Demography) Department of Statistics
Mongolia	Ms. Badamtsetseg Batjargal Director of Integrated Policy and Cooperation Department National Statistical Office of Mongolia
Mozambique	Mr. Saide Dade Director of National Accounts Instituto Nacional de Estatística
Saint Lucia	Mr. Edwin St. Catherine Director of Statistics Saint Lucia Government Statistics Department

South Africa	Mr. Pali Lehohla Statistician General Statistics South Africa
South Africa	Mr Risenga Maluleke Deputy Director-General: Corporate Relations Statistics South Africa
State of Palestine	Ms. Ola Shakhshir President Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)
Switzerland	Mr. Georges-Simon Ulrich Director General Swiss Federal Statistical Office
Switzerland	Mr. Benjamin Rothen Deputy Head of the Unit International Affairs Swiss Federal Statistical Office
United Kingdom	Mr. Neil Jackson Chief Statistician Department for International Development
United States	Ms. Katherine Wallman Chief Statistician Office of Management and Budget
United States	Ms. Jennifer Park Office of Management and Budget
Vanuatu	Mr. Simil Johnson Youse Acting Government Statistician Vanuatu National Statistical Office

Invited speakers

President of the General Assembly	H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft
IAEG-SDGs	Mr. Enrique Jesús Ordaz López Director General for Integration, Analysis and Research Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI)
IAEG-SDGs	Ms. Lisa Grace Bersales National Statistician and Civil Registrar General Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA)

Secretariat

DESA	Mr. Wu Hongbu Under-Secretary General Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNSD	Mr. Stefan Schweinfest Director United Nations Statistics Division
UNSD	Ms. Francesca Perucci Chief, Statistical Services Branch United Nations Statistics Division
UNSD	Mr. Luis González Morales Statistician United Nations Statistics Division
UNSD	Ms. Linda Hooper Statistician United Nations Statistics Division