

Informal Note for Statistical Commission agenda item 3 (a) Data in support of the post-2015 development agenda (i) Broader measures of progress.

**Expert Group Meeting on the Indicator Framework for the Post-2015  
Development Agenda  
UNHQ, New York, 25-26 February 2015**

**Main points of consensus:**

- Need to define an architecture for an integrated monitoring framework which would include global indicators and different levels of regional, national and thematic monitoring;
- Small number of global indicators;
- Indicators should be selected on the basis of an agreed set of criteria;
- Initial proposal for indicators by the Statistical Commission is expected to be further refined and reviewed by the Commission at its 2016 session;
- Establishment of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs);
- Need to ensure national ownership of indicators (including of estimation process);
- Need to ensure disaggregation of indicators and include a human rights dimension (no one left behind principle);
- Need for further strengthening national statistical capacity, including by mobilizing the necessary resources;
- Importance of drawing from existing integrated statistical frameworks;
- Importance of building on the MDG experience and lessons learnt.

**Roadmap for the development and implementation of the indicator framework and architecture of the framework**

1. The meeting reviewed and discussed how to develop a system of indicators for different levels of monitoring. For the purpose of global monitoring, the group recognized the enormous challenge of addressing a large number of targets, some of which embed several elements, each one to be monitored separately. While recognizing that everything is measurable and choices should not be made predominantly on the basis of immediate data availability, there was general consensus that in order to serve its purpose, the list of global indicators should be limited in number. Also, the issue of investments and increased capacity necessary to meet the new monitoring requirements was raised.

2. It was pointed out that indicators should be organized in an integrated architecture with various appropriate levels of reporting to meet the requirements of sustainable development. The need to consider the development of a small set of high-level indicators for the full set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the economic, social and environmental pillars, for effective communication of progress was also stressed. This high-level should be universally relevant and effective in detecting changes resulting from policy interventions and explicitly include equity indicators.
3. It was also stressed that, based on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) experience, the monitoring benefitted tremendously by having a small subset of key global indicators. Only a few indicators are generally used to indicate overall progress in each of the goals and those are the ones that are communicated easily and resonate with a wide audience, and that can easily inform the global political discussion.
4. The need to prepare a concise and user-friendly report such as the MDG blue booklet was also emphasized.
5. There was recognition that after a clear mapping between the existing statistical frameworks and the SDG indicator framework, the development of the global indicators could draw from existing integrated statistical frameworks such as, for example the Conference of European Statisticians recommendations for measuring sustainable development, the standards of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians, the System of National Accounts, and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting.

## Targets

6. While fully recognizing the independence of the political process and that the statistical community has no intention to enter into the discussion on the targets being agreed by the intergovernmental process, it was stressed that in the current list of goals and targets there are several inter-linkages and overlapping targets and that there could be some common indicators for targets where inter-linkages and overlapping are evident. Also, in some cases, the complexity of the target makes it very difficult to choose only one or two indicators. These issues can be addressed by identifying appropriate (multipurpose) indicators.

### Several levels of monitoring

7. There was recognition that in view of the need to develop a comprehensive monitoring framework for the SDGs while, at the same time, limiting the number of global indicators, several levels of monitoring should be clearly defined and agreed upon. These would include regional, national and thematic/sectorial monitoring levels. In this context, it was also pointed out that it is easier to inform effectively with fewer indicators, whilst not preventing programme and project specific indicators from being generated.
8. The importance of the existing monitoring groups that have already conducted significant methodological work and data development in various statistical areas was also stressed. Those groups should continue to carry out their work and feed their results into the overall work for the development of the SDG indicator framework.
9. There was also consensus that a certain level of flexibility should be allowed in the framework of indicators so that new and emerging issues can be integrated at a later stage. There should be some flexibility so that indicators can be refined or adjusted over the 15 year period to adapt the framework to newly emerging policy priorities, as well as to changes in data availability.
10. It was recognized that where MDG indicators were considered to be appropriate measures for specific SDG targets, there was value in integrating them into the new framework. This would allow for some continuity and also for the possibility of building on the extensive methodological and data development already done both at the national and international levels.

### Implementation arrangements

11. Based on the experience in countries, it was recognized that the concise, clear and internationally agreed set of MDG goals, targets and indicators was instrumental for advocacy and sensitization, which resulted in budgetary increases to address information gaps. The MDG framework was also useful in bringing line ministries together and improving coordination of the statistical system. Creating and/or strengthening national coordinating mechanisms remain a priority.
12. There was consensus that the mechanism used for the MDGs, with an inter-

agency and expert group that met regularly and covered both the methodological developments of the indicators and the coordination of work with countries, had been effective. Based on the roadmap recommended by the Friends of the Chair on Broader Measures of Progress, there was also consensus that a new Inter-agency and Expert Group (IAEG) on SDG indicators would be an appropriate mechanism.

13. The group also emphasized that it was crucial to continue and further strengthen the collaboration between the international and the national statistical systems on the indicators. The importance of engaging national statistical systems in the selection and development of the indicators was stressed, as well as the need to have the support and commitment of national governments for the production of the necessary data.
14. The group commented on the wide range of topics covered by the SDGs and emphasized that importance of involving all sides of the statistical system when developing SDG indicators.
15. Differences between national and international estimates should be fully and clearly explained. Also, the need for producing estimates would be largely reduced by improving national statistical capacity. In this context, the key role played by regional agencies and mechanisms was stressed. Statistical experts from the international agencies and national authorities should be more closely engaged with the work at the regional level.
16. It was pointed out that there has been a large mobilization of resources for conducting the population and housing census in African countries and the 2020 round will include almost all countries in the region. It was suggested that the same level of commitment should be made for mobilizing resources for the development and improvement of civil registration and vital statistics, a fundamental data source for many of the indicators.

#### Criteria for indicator selection

17. A few criteria for the selection of indicators were reviewed—including being methodologically sound, measurable, accessible, relevant, timely, internationally comparable, and limited in number. The need for consistency with international laws was also stressed.

18. There was consensus that there should be some degree of flexibility to allow indicators that are not yet fully developed, to still be considered as part of the framework. These would be a special tier of indicators that have yet to be conceptually fully developed and that will require further work for the definition of their metadata and identification of the most appropriate data sources.
19. In the case of targets covering multiple dimensions, the approach of selecting one indicator to focus on a key aspect or desired outcome of the target while linking other dimensions to indicators in other goals was considered viable. An example of such approach was provided by FAO.
20. Recognizing the enormous challenge posed by the large number of targets that need to be monitored, the group agreed that it is important to seek inter-linkages across the targets to minimize the number of indicators needed.
21. An approach towards integration was proposed and received support, in particular to allow for the monitoring of tradeoffs where gains in one area may be at the detriment of others, and to benefit from synergies. Many examples of connections across targets and sectors were presented.
22. It was also stressed that at the national level it will be important to look at the institutional arrangements to transform statistical systems and respond to the new monitoring requirements, including in particular integrating geospatial competencies and considering the financial and capacity building requirements.
23. When identifying indicators for global monitoring, it was stressed that, to the extent possible, the required data should come from National Statistical system. The reporting mechanism from the national to the international level should be considered and well defined. This will be particularly important for indicators for which there is no existing agency mandated for gathering data from national statistical authorities.
24. In cases where estimates or data adjustments for international comparability are necessary, national estimates procedures should be taken into account and international agencies should work closely from the beginning of the process with national statistical systems to define methodologies.
25. It was suggested that an accountability and quality framework would be

useful for international organizations engaged in reporting on global monitoring indicators. Such a framework could be developed by the new IAEG-SDGs. This may also be useful for other data providers.

### Elements of disaggregation

26. Overall, three conceptual approaches to disaggregation were discussed: the disaggregation of indicators based on several key categories – including sex, age, residence, different levels of geographical unit, etc.; the consideration of elements of discrimination and the definition of indicators from a human rights perspective; and the focus on specific groups – including for instance migrants, refugees, older persons and persons living with disabilities.
27. There was broad consensus that elements of disaggregation are fundamental for the development of the indicators for post-2015 considering the key principle of “no one left behind”. It was also repeatedly highlighted that the experience of MDG monitoring has shown the importance of going beyond national figures in assessing whether progress reaches all groups of the population. In the context of specific groups of population, the importance of using statistics on refugees, which are now more widely available than before, was stressed.
28. Elements of disaggregation should be considered from the start of the process of developing the indicators. This was considered particularly important as the implications for data collection can be a big challenge, including from the point of view of increased costs, and need to be well understood and addressed. From the point of view of data sources, the need to strengthen administrative data was pointed out, as was the need to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics. Consideration of the use of robust statistical methods (e.g., small area estimation) in producing local level estimates was recommended. The importance of creating new partnerships with civil society, private sector and human rights institutions was also stressed — as also recommended by the report of the Independent Expert Advisory Group (IEAG) on the Data Revolution — to ensure that everyone is “visible” and included in SDG measures.
29. The issue of sensitivities in using disaggregated data was also raised—both from the point of view of confidentiality issues when utilizing the data and the difficulties and highly sensitive nature of collecting data on individual

characteristics such as religion and ethnicity. Here the framework provided for by the UN fundamental principles for official statistics can be invoked and applied including statistics laws.

30. The group agreed that territorial/spatial disaggregation is fundamental for most of the indicators. In particular, the use of geospatial information for the development of some of the indicators (for instance in the case of cities) was stressed. In this context, the need to increase the utilization of data at the lowest geographical sub-national level was highlighted – as it was also a recommendation by the IEAG report on the Data Revolution.
31. Also, the importance of disaggregating indicators chosen for global monitoring was widely recognized, as was the need to reflect overall issues of inequalities across all targets at the global level.
32. There was consensus that issues and criteria for disaggregation should be systematically discussed and agreed by the new IAEG on SDG Indicators, as soon as it is established.

#### The new IAEG on SDG Indicators and the work ahead

33. The proposal by the Friends of the Chair for the establishment of a new Inter-agency and Expert Group (IAEG) on SDG Indicators, and its terms of reference and membership, was reviewed and discussed.
34. While it was recognized that the Statistical Commission will have first to express its views and reach its decision, the group supported the creation of a new IEAG on SDG Indicators. In particular, the group agreed that it should be composed of representatives of national and regional statistical systems and international agencies, and should be tasked with developing, finalizing, and implementing the indicators framework.
35. In relation to its membership, it was pointed out that the criteria should be agreed for the selection of representatives from national statistical systems. Mechanisms for the inclusion of the views of civil society should also be discussed.
36. There was consensus that representation of both national and international statistical systems in the group will promote closer collaboration on the definition, development, and measurement of indicators.

37. There were also suggestions for organizing the work around thematic groups, while maintaining an overall integrated approach. The thematic focus of the groups should be sufficiently broad to allow for integration and for working across goals and targets.
38. The issue of timing was also discussed, especially in relation to the completion of the proposal on the indicator framework. There was consensus that the preliminary proposal from the UN Statistical Commission to the intergovernmental negotiations on post-2015 should be considered as the first step of a process and that the list of indicators to be included in the framework will have to be based on an agreed set of harmonized criteria. This revision process will culminate with the 2016 session of the Statistical Commission, and later with the High Level Political Forum in 2016.
39. It was agreed that as soon as the Commission establishes the new group, efforts will be made to organize its first meeting.

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