

United Nations Network of Economic Statisticians Summary of Second Beyond GDP Sprint 2023 Meeting

Consulting Users on Wellbeing Themes

15 June 2023, 8:00 am to 10:30 am (New York time) | United Nations, Virtual Meeting

A brief welcome was given by Stefan Schweinfest, Director of the United Nations Statistics Division, noting the wide participation by the international community in the sprint series. Richard Heys, Deputy Chief Economist at the UK Office for National Statistics presented a brief summary of the first sprint session and contextualised the second sprint series.

In the first session, Anu Peltola, Senior Statistician at UNCTAD brought the sprint community up to date with the latest state of research at the UN and summarised the process led by the Secretary General since the publication of 'Our Common Agenda' in 2022, specifically the report '[Valuing What Counts](#)' which was co-authored by Anu Peltola, Stefan Schweinfest and George Gray Molina (Chief Economist UNDP). Within this, she explored why we need to go beyond GDP and why we need to do it now, and went on to present criteria for assessing Beyond GDP metrics. She explained how multiple UN agencies worked together to develop a system-wide contribution ([report](#)) under the aegis of SDG 17's Target 19 to "develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product". This formed the bases of UN Secretary-General's policy brief on Beyond GDP which will inform deliberations towards the September 2024 'Summit for the Future'. She highlighted the recommendations of the policy brief to urge countries to confirm their political commitment to develop a conceptual framework to 'value what counts' anchored in the 2030 Agenda and agree to convene an independent high-level expert group to develop a value dashboard of a limited number of key indicators (probably not more than 10-20). She highlighted the Secretary-General's personal commitment to encouraging countries to provide resources to strengthen statistical capacity-building and data collection, to support efforts to go beyond GDP.

Associate Professor Rutger Hoekstra (Institute of Environmental Sciences, Leiden University) brought the sprint up to date on the research work being delivered through the EU's Horizon Programme. Rutger is coordinating the WISE Horizons project which includes many leading academic groups (including those of Thomas Piketty and Lucas Chancel). He took as his starting point the increasing use of the terms "economic", "economy", and "economic growth" in New York time articles over the past 100 years. This showed the increase in the economic narrative which was amplified by the adoption of the System of National Accounts in the 1950s. He highlighted the need for a similar institutionalised metrics and accounts which would define core terms (a common language) around inclusive and sustainable wellbeing. The new UN process, which Anu Peltola discussed, and the SNA revision process, provide a historic opportunity to have a consolidation process. The WISE Horizons Network has been established to encourage co-creation of the metrics, accounts and models that will be created by the network. Participants were encouraged to join at <https://wisehorizons.world/>. He brought the sprint's attention to the new www.beyond-gdp.world website and the categorisation system which has been developed to map and systematically describe the key / popular metrics and how they relate to one another, in an effort to bring together a common understanding of different metrics.

The session 1 speakers then reacted to questions from the floor.

Session 2 presented further conceptual perspectives, primarily from the European perspective. Jonathan Barth, Co-Founder and Policy Director, Zoe Institute for Future-Fit Economies spoke on the issue of 'GDP lock-in', the phenomena where GDP has managed to gain as ascendancy in policy debates, and on the drive around Beyond GDP in Europe. He provided an overview of perspectives that the EU was falling short on many of its social and environment targets, alongside the challenges which were visible around a lack of governance frameworks for Beyond GDP. He therefore proposed a framework for thinking about the Beyond GDP debate and the different 'levels' at which action was required: the Policy level, Governance level, Technical level, and Narrative level, illustrating these with case studies. These showcased how part of GDP's "lock-in" is due to a mutual re-enforcement between the technical and governance level – GDP is used for governance as it is technically advanced, and it is technically advanced because it is well-funded as part of its role in governance. He made a series of recommendations around the use of metrics in terms of the governance 'level': defining binding targets for wellbeing and sustainability dimensions, using wellbeing and sustainability metrics for allocation of funds and implementing effective enforcement mechanisms for wellbeing and sustainability targets. He also made recommendations on the level of statistics and data quality, which included strengthening the consideration of wellbeing and sustainability aspects in impact assessment models, Improve the data basis of material needs satisfiers and their affordability, introducing a Planetary Boundary Account in the SEEA, establishing a Time Use Satellite Account, expanding the production and asset boundary of the SNA to allow the development of extended accounts in the SNA, which could permit the introduction of an adjusted GDP metric.

Gerard Eding, Director, National Accounts, Statistics Netherlands then spoke on the importance of Here & Now, the future and elsewhere as a framework from the perspective of implementation in the Netherlands. He presented the history between 2014 and 2018 of the development of a wellbeing monitor framework in the Netherlands and the importance of securing and developing political leadership and support, particularly at the parliamentary level and how the diverse user needs were supported by the development of statistical tools based on the Brundtland (1987) categories of: Wellbeing in the "here and now", wellbeing "later", and wellbeing "elsewhere". He presented key results from the Dutch wellbeing monitor and discussed how Statistics Netherlands supplemented and adjusted the wellbeing monitor to embrace the SDG agenda and went on to demonstrate how the framework is being used, e.g. being included in factsheets for ministers and being used in policy evaluation. To aide other countries who are considering similar tools, he emphasised the importance of a solid conceptual basis for any framework and outlined some challenges ahead that UN NES may want to tackle:

1. How to use (existing) economic, environmental and socio-demographic accounting systems in order to describe how indicators are related
2. Elsewhere/Inclusive dimension. Global consultation through regional commissions on themes and indicators to be included?
3. Increasing sets of indicators and (the development of) composite indexes (for communication purposes)

The session 2 speakers then reacted to questions from the floor.

Ms. Clíodhna Taylor, Assistant Deputy Director and Head of Research Partnerships, UK Office for National Statistics, opened the third session with a presentation on the measuring sustainability through the existing conceptual models around capitals and how these fit together, using the existing definitions and scopes of the Production and Asset Boundaries

in SNA 2008 as a base to explore efforts to integrate these data. They explored, at a high level, how intangible, human, and natural capital could be incorporated into the primary income account and presented an overview of how economic accounting could be used to estimate inclusive wealth, and a corresponding flow concept of inclusive income before presenting initial estimates of Inclusive Wealth for the UK, which highlights the importance of understanding human capital as the dominant asset class in value terms.

Finally, Graciela Marquez, President, INEGI presented to the sprint on how Mexico uses existing measures of wellbeing. She explored the mechanisms through which INEGI establishes data needs for Beyond GDP, which included Advisory Councils, Collegiate Bodies. Public consultations, working with Government Agencies and Non-State Actors and through international partnerships. She then recounted the three central data sources for better measures of wellbeing data which Mexico has focussed on developing, namely: satellite accounts, wellbeing surveys, and SEEA data. She detailed the development of four satellite accounts; unpaid household work, culture, housing, and Non-Profit Institutions, which have delivered particular benefits, and went on to explain how two wellbeing surveys, the Self Reported Wellbeing Survey and the Living Standards National Survey were developed and how they provide key additional insights around life satisfaction and subject wellbeing. She then discussed Mexico's publication of ecosystem accounts in 2022 which showed ecosystem services being worth at least 3.1% of GDP. She closed by detailing how Mexico undertook a public consultation on the update of the SNA in Feb-Mar 2022.

The session 3 speakers then reacted to questions from the floor including on the importance of considering culture as part of wellbeing.

Richard Heys brought the sprint to a conclusion thanking speakers and those who asked questions and confirmed the date and time of the next sprint.