UN SYSTEM TASK TEAM
ON THE POST-2015 UN
DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Statistics and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda

Overview

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The working group on monitoring and indicators was created by the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda to initiate thinking about the challenges of designing an appropriate monitoring framework for the post-2015 agenda. This document represents the collective thinking of over 60 UN entities and is intended to support the multiple discussions taking place about the post-2015 agenda and the identification of sustainable development goals.

http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/them_tp2.shtml.

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Statistics and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda

A report from the Working Group on Monitoring and Indicators

"It is indispensable to resist any unnecessary complexity."
("*Realizing the Future We Want for All," para. 102***)**

Overview

Global monitoring since the Millennium Declaration

i. The monitoring process for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) taught important lessons on how to maintain focus on internationally agreed development goals and targets, while keeping the world informed of achievements, problem areas and emerging issues.

ii. The global statistical community, led by the United Nations Statistical Commission and guided by the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, has played an authoritative and leadership role in strategic and technical guidance for monitoring the MDG indicators, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 57/270B,[1] and must continue to occupy a strategic, oversight position on statistics and indicators for monitoring.

iii. One key lesson learned is that there is clear need for a broad-based technical but inclusive monitoring group, and for a succinct annual report for the public on progress and challenges. The Inter-Agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators (IAEG) has been critical for the coordination, credibility and

1 Throughout this document, UN documents are referred to by their document "symbol". These can be found by visiting the United Nations Official Document System (ODS), available from http://documents.un.org.

sustainability of global monitoring and reporting and should be maintained in some form post-2015.

iv. Another finding has been the importance of investment in country capacities for data collection and reporting, leading to progress in disaggregation as well as towards the development of new indicators.

v. Finally, the monitoring process has brought to the fore the necessity of having well-defined, objectively measurable indicators that can be used to track progress across countries and be aggregated to represent regional and global trends.

Numerical target-setting

vi. While goals themselves may be aspirational, numerical targets should balance ambition with realism. They should challenge preconceptions of what is possible to achieve, and inspire concerted public efforts to meet them within a reasonable time period. They should be results-oriented in terms of well-being and sustainability, and sufficiently specific so as to clearly relate to public and policy concerns.

vii. Numerical targets should reflect a clear consensus and understanding of objectives among policymakers, civil society and the public.

viii. To be effective, global development targets need to be specified in clear, concise, and objectively measurable terms. They should specify an easy-to-understand numerical scale for measurement and be capable of aggregation to represent global and regional trends.

ix. Global targets are agreed at the global level for global monitoring. It is up to each country to determine its own targets, consistent with its own comprehensive, broad-based development agendas. Assistance to countries for this purpose should be part of the new global development agenda.

Integrating population dynamics in target-setting

x. Forward-looking development targets must factor in the need to improve the living conditions of a growing global population over the next decades. Target-setting and indicators must be informed by population data and projections, for example targets on employment and social protection. Targets must take into account growing populations and changing age compositions. Targets must also account for population mobility, growth of cities and changes in the spatial distribution of people—in coastal and other regions vulnerable to climate change, for example.

Criteria for indicators

xi. Indicators of progress towards targets may take various forms; changes in rates, ratios, percentages and differences are the most common.

Indicators should be mainly "outcome" indicators to keep the focus on long-term results. They should be clearly linked to the targets, measurable over time using data collected in countries in a cost-effective and practical manner, helpful in informing policy, and clear and easy to communicate to the general public and civil society.

xii. Capacity or potential capacity for data collection and analysis to support the indicator must exist at both national and international levels.

xiii. Time scales and benchmark dates for targets and indicators should take account of the rates of change currently observed and the present and potential availability of data to measure and compare levels and trends. When indicators are used to show which data coverage is still incomplete, the time and resources needed to implement new national and international statistical infrastructure should be specified.

xiv. The number of indicators for global monitoring should be kept strictly limited. The development of indicators and indicators to support national monitoring should fit within and not distort countries' own statistical development strategies. Indicators for national monitoring should also be limited in number and consistent with internationally agreed standards and, to the extent possible, with definitions used in each country.

xv. High priority must be given to continuity and consistency over time of statistics to be used for indicators and to their scientific and technical soundness, using international guidelines and standards and subject to peer review for indicators and data sources. Small-scale and ad hoc statistical sources which have not been tested over time cannot be relied on for trend analysis or representativeness.

xvi. Innovation is critical in developing new topics and methods of data collection. Application of innovation must be based on adequate testing in countries, and necessary national and international support, time and resources must be allocated to develop new programmes.

xvii. MDG indicators have been useful tools in analyzing the realization of the social and economic rights conveyed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Methodologies and data have also been developed on issues of civil and political rights, such as personal security, political participation and administration of justice. Target-setting and the formulation of indicators in these fields should be consistent with norms set in international human rights treaties and other country-agreed instruments.

Development indicators that go beyond the MDG framework

Measuring inequalities

xviii. There has been substantial research and discussion of comprehensive inequality measures based on dispersion, such as the Gini coefficient of distribution, but there is no technical consensus on an appropriate measure which can be calculated across countries to provide a global or regional measure of trends.

xix. Other measures available to measure income and consumption inequality use comparisons of income, consumption or wealth for various quantiles, such as bottom 20 or 40 per cent of the population, top 10, 5 or 1 per cent, and so on, and these can be used over time to show trends. These measures capture many aspects of distribution and trends which are of concern.

Indicators of population groups

xx. The principle of non-discrimination and equality is enshrined in international human rights instruments adopted by States. This principle supports the need for more systematic statistics to inform on racial discrimination, gender equality, rights of the child, rights of migrant persons, and rights of persons with disabilities, as well as statistics on other vulnerable populations which may be excluded from mainstream sources of indicators such as household surveys.

xxi. Indicators should be disaggregated to the extent possible by wealth quintile, geographical location, sex, rural/urban, and other relevant characteristics to track progress in addressing inequalities. However, data by sex are not meant to replace specific indicators that will address gender equality and women's empowerment.

Indicators linking sustainability and development

xxii. Natural resource concerns appropriate for global monitoring have been established in the outcomes of the global environment conferences and in treaties and international agreements related to the environment. These include the sustainability of forests, land and soil, water supply, oceans, coastal zones, land and water species and stocks, genetic resources, atmosphere and climate change and ecosystems. A genuine commitment to sustainability requires indicators that track increased efficiency in resource use and measure progress towards defined targets.

xxiii. Goals that integrate social, environmental and economic objectives for sustainable development pose new challenges for monitoring and assessment.
xxiv. Sustainability indicators should form a subset of poverty-social-environment indicators and be part of an integrated monitoring programme post-2015.

xxv. Some basic indicators for assessing sustainability are now available for many countries. These include population size, age structure and geographical location including projections, employment growth, consumption, energy consumption and CO_2 emissions per capita and per unit of gross domestic product, investment in research and applied technology in energy consumption and CO_2 emissions, intensity and productivity of land and energy use in agriculture and aquaculture, bio capacity, and value of ecological services.

xxvi. In order to integrate social, economic and natural resources targets with sustainability indicators, balance and tradeoffs in development, investment, natural resources and sustainability objectives must be taken into account in targeting sustainability to 2050 and beyond.

Subjective indicators of well-being

xxvii. Objective data on development can be supplemented by subjective indicators of well-being to provide a fuller picture, for example, regarding inclusive political processes, access to justice, corruption, peacebuilding, equitable social services, victimization, safety and security, health and work satisfaction.

xxviii. Surveys of population attitudes, expectations and satisfaction are well-established practice in studies conducted by research institutions and in the private sector in developed and many developing countries, in some cases in partnership with inter-governmental organizations. In official statistics there is growing interest in such measures but in developing countries especially, these series are usually privately sourced and have mostly not been taken up by national statistical services.

Composite indexes

xxix. Composite indexes comprised of several measures with different numeric scales are widely used for comparisons and trends, advocacy and as an intuitively appealing single measure of a complex concept but are controversial among official statisticians because they can lack a satisfactory theoretical basis for the selection of the component indicators and weights. They may also require estimates for missing data for one or more of the components, which undermines their transparency and accountability.

Indicators of governance, rule of law, peacebuilding, violence and conflict, human rights

xxx. Growing interest in quantitative measures of governance, rule of law, peacebuilding, violence and conflict and human rights at national and international levels has fostered a large number of data initiatives among official and non-official data producers. Work on standardization and harmonization of concepts and methods now underway provides a strong foundation for numerical target-setting and subsequent selection of indicators.

xxxi. Basic standard methodologies have been developed for example for victimization surveys, violence against women, homicide, mortality statistics by cause of death, human rights, rule of law, and there is considerable ongoing

data development on governance (for example, election statistics, transparency and corruption, and business climate), security and violence, crime and criminal justice, which could be drawn on for numerical target setting.

Technology-based innovations in data collection and indicators

xxxii. Access to new technologies is important to ensure full participation by all segments of the population in new opportunities in, for example, employment, education, health, governance and peacebuilding.

xxxiii. Internet, mobile and geographical coding technologies are rapidly changing the ways in which national and international statistical services collect, process and disseminate statistics. Working within the limitations of financing, human resource skills and legal responsibilities for data quality and confidentiality, statistical services are responding to these opportunities to work more efficiently and productively.

National capacities in statistics and indicators

xxxiv. It is fundamental that the international data compilation for global monitoring be based to the greatest extent possible on official statistics produced by national services, and assistance be made available to national services as needed to produce their development statistics and indicators.

xxxv. Developing countries continue to need assistance in improving their statistical systems so as to measure their development progress, participate effectively in their national monitoring programmes and help guide policy. A target for achieving sound statistical systems is needed to further support capacity development for basic statistics and analysis in these countries.

xxxvi. Where new topics and new approaches to development indicators are agreed for inclusion in the post-2015 framework, cost implications and data quality and continuity must be considered. It will be essential to identify new resources to support the needed data collection in countries and compilation and well-documented dissemination in the responsible agencies. New work will also have to be undertaken on a step-by-step basis so that national skill pools and managerial capacities are not overwhelmed.

xxxvii. While national capacities have developed substantially since the MDG framework and indicators were established in 2001, with considerable new international support provided for the development of national statistics, more work and resources are still needed to ensure full completion of and follow-up on the MDG agenda.

Gaps in national capacities

xxxviii. At the national level, some significant gaps have been identified in many if not most developing countries with respect to both the MDG framework and new fields under discussion, some of which are listed below.

Countries with special needs

xxxix. Most of the conflict and fragile countries—such as the g7+ members as well as the least developed and landlocked countries and small island developing States—continue to have significant problems in supporting many ongoing basic data collection programmes and dissemination, in adapting international methodologies to national circumstances and in developing programmes in new fields such as environment and natural resources.

xl. A concerted effort is needed if these countries are to achieve more effective national statistical services capable of implementing basic development monitoring statistics programmes in the next decade.

Vital statistics

xli. Reliable and comprehensive civil registration systems are a basic component of good governance and are essential for the production of vital statistics and of many health and population indicators. Vital statistics on births, deaths and cause of death have greatly expanded in coverage in the last decade in the middle-income developing countries but are still inadequate to support many needed indicators, particularly key health indicators such as maternal mortality and deaths from malaria and other critical diseases. In the lower-income developing countries, in spite of rapid increases in literacy and urbanization, coverage is particularly weak. A focused programme of support to improve these statistics will be essential to strengthening basic statistics for post-2015 indicators in many fields.

Coordination and harmonization of household surveys

xlii. Countries are making increasing use of household surveys as one of the most comprehensive sources for data on mortality, fertility and family planning, education, access to water and sanitation, use of preventive measures for major diseases, and other important topics in the development agenda. However, currently available data on household income and consumption are inadequate in many developing countries to support reliable and timely indicators on poverty and inequality, especially for time series and international comparisons. Nor can they readily be used to measure interlinkages of poverty with issues measured through other surveys, such as those focusing on health, population, sustainable development, employment and hunger. A strong collaborative effort among concerned agencies and countries is needed to harmonize agreed international recommendations on methodologies and coordinate support, implementation, data collection and analysis in countries.

International capacities and collaboration

xliii. International statistical services have been strengthened in the fields covered by the MDG targets, driven especially by the international focus on the MDG indicators and trend assessment, and the impetus to greater coordination, harmonization, and peer group review.

xliv. Review of existing capacities in rapidly developing fields that might be added for post-2015 shows:

a. Considerable infrastructure already in place for gender statistics, environment statistics and indicators, and for data on population group;

b. Advanced development of methodology and testing in income distribution, peace and security fields including victimization and conflict, peace and human security;

c. Rapid development of concepts, methods and testing for statistics and indicators relating to human rights and good governance;

d. Considerable basic data and descriptive indicators relating to equity of special population groups, migration, urbanization and social protection.

Data quality control

xlv. The framework for statistics and indicators in the post-2015 agenda should maintain data quality control mechanisms such as those already developed in the MDG indicators programme, including strategic, technical and policy review in the Statistical Commission and technical responsibility for data compilation and peer review in the IAEG.

xlvi. Data dissemination must encourage inputs and feedback from national offices and sources and calculations of indicators and estimates must be transparent, with public access to databases, including detailed data and metadata for specialists and researchers, and a commitment to international standards and recommendations for harmonization of statistical methods.

Partnerships among regional institutions

xlvii. Partnerships among regional institutions and their member States have played a growing, effective role in implementing the MDG framework at regional, sub-regional and national levels. They have assisted interested countries in adaptation of global goals, targets and indicators to their national circumstances and priorities, implementing needed basic data programmes, and compiling regional indicators and analyses attuned to regional concerns. They should continue to play a positive role in developing and implementing indicators for the post-2015 agenda.