

Determining Immediate Capacity Building Priorities

Prepared by the Joint Subgroup of the High-level group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Inter-agency and expert group on SDG indicators (Joint HLG/IAEG-SDG subgroup)

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Capacity building in the area of statistics is of crucial importance for evidence-based follow up on the 2030 Agenda. The High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity building (HLG-PCCB) and the Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) Joint Sub-Group on Immediate Priorities for Statistical Capacity Building was requested by the Statistical Commission to develop a plan to address the immediate capacity building needs of countries as they relate to the 2030 Agenda. This work feeds into the ongoing work of the Cape Town Global Action Plan (CTGAP) Implementation Drafting Group.

The aim of this paper is, in accordance with the mandate of the group, to provide concrete proposals for priority areas of work on capacity building that relate to the follow-up on the 2030 Agenda and statistical capacity building more generally. This paper addresses three overall areas identified as crucial for the statistical capacity building relating to the 2030 Agenda: identifying national needs and priorities, identifying capacity building tools to address those needs, and financing options for this capacity-building.

At the 47th Session of the Statistical Commission in March 2016, the list of global SDG indicators (the Global Indicator Framework) was agreed upon in principle. Further work was undertaken on the Global Indicator Framework by the IAEG-SDGs in 2016 and 2017, and the Global Indicator Framework was included in a resolution adopted by ECOSOC and the General Assembly (A/RES/71/313) in 2017.

Resolution A/RES/71/313 states, among other things, that 'official statistics and data from national statistical systems constitute the basis needed for the global indicator framework, recommends that national statistical systems explore ways to integrate new data sources into their systems to satisfy new data needs of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as appropriate, and also stresses the role of national statistical offices as the coordinator of the national statistical system'.

Parallel to this process, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) was working on the Tier classification of the indicators, classifying them into three Tiers:

Tier 1: Indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, and data are regularly produced by countries for at least 50 per cent of countries and of the population in every region where the indicator is relevant.

Tier 2: Indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, but data are not regularly produced by countries.

Tier 3: No internationally established methodology or standards are yet available for the indicator, but methodology/standards are being (or will be) developed or tested.

The IAEG-SDGs completed an initial tier classification following adoption by UNSC and this classification (as of April 2017) contains 82 Tier I indicators, 61 Tier II indicators and 84 Tier III indicators. In addition to these, there are 5 indicators that are included in multiple tiers (different components of the indicator are classified into different tiers). The Tier classification will be updated on an annual basis based on methodological developments of Tier III indicators and increased data availability of Tier II indicators. Within each indicator tier, indicators cover a wide array of topics and areas. Taking into account that all goals, targets and indicators are considered of equal importance, focusing on developing a mechanism to prioritize capacity building efforts of Tier II indicators will provide the most benefit for global monitoring and the follow-up and review process of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda.

A closer study of the indicators shows that many indicators share common underlying statistics, such as a 'percentage of population (incl. women and girls)', 'percentage of government spending' or 'percentage of GDP' and common data sources (civil registration, business registers, household surveys, population censuses, etc.) (See Annex). Both the statistics and the relevant data sources can cut across many indicators and focusing on building capacity within these common data sources could provide a methodical way to examine the statistical capacity building needs and to build statistical capacity for several indicators at the same time. Additionally, through a review of indicators, it was noted that there are cases where indicators denoted as Tier I cannot be produced in some countries and some countries may want to focus statistical development on these indicators.

Approach to address immediate capacity building needs

The members of the High-level group on Partnership, Coordination and Capacity Building and the Inter-agency and Expert Group for SDGs are kindly requested to contribute with their experience in the following areas of work of Joint Group on immediate priorities for statistical capacity building:

1. Cross Cutting Data Sources (Tier II indicators)

The Joint Sub-Group determined the best way to begin this work was to develop a mechanism to prioritize Tier II indicators for capacity building support by topic and by region. The group proposes furthermore to focus initially on cross-cutting data sources that would improve data production more generally.

To further guide capacity building planning, the group proposes to hold a consultation with National Statistical Offices (in December 2017/January 2018) to identify their most acute capacity building priorities in relation to the 2030 Agenda. As to reduce the burden on national statistical offices, the group proposes that this consultation could be coordinated with the questionnaire /consultation on statistical capacity building being proposed by Paris21. Furthermore, other regional initiatives undertaken to assess capacity building needs can also be consulted.

The results from the individual countries will be used to inform national, sub-regional, regional and global capacity building needs. The consultation could, among other things, ask countries to classify their national capacity to produce SDG indicators, and which national capacity building needs should be prioritized. As

capacity-building activities should be demand driven and take into account a country's self-defined needs, this exercise would ensure that, from a national perspective, the most relevant areas are addressed.

It is expected that the proposed approach would contribute to more streamlined capacity building as it could give background for targeting specific statistical areas (methodology and sectoral domains), data sources, and/or groups of countries. This could also contribute to coordination of initiatives being carried out in countries and thus lead to cost effectiveness.

Do the Members of the HLG support the proposed approach?

What other approaches than the one proposed above can be taken into consideration in order to specify the most urgent capacity-building needs most accurately? Based on the consultation, can we consider focusing on some specific data areas, such as population, education or GDP and/or on data sources such as Big Data, administrative data etc.?

Finally, the Members of the HLG are requested to discuss a possible approach regarding the indicators for which the data are available only very rarely (i.e. only once every 10 or 15 years). Given the need for regularity in the production of statistics and a sustainable impact of capacity building efforts, should periodicity be addressed as a potential priority for capacity building, taking into consideration additional costs and possible benefits of more frequent data?

2. Tier I indicators requiring attention

As countries work to report on the indicator framework, it has become clear that some countries are unable to report on some Tier 1 indicators. For this reason, the group would also like to draw attention to these and note that capacity building activities should be considered for Tier 1 indicators where countries are unable to report. Tier I indicators are, according to their definition, '*conceptually clear, have an internationally established methodology and standards are available, and data are regularly produced by countries for at least 50 per cent of countries and of the population in every region where the indicator is relevant.*' This means that the production of these indicators should not present a problem for most countries. However, recall that the spirit of the 2030 Agenda is to ensure that no country and no person should be left behind. As such, some countries may require support on some Tier I indicators and may view the production of these indicators as their immediate priority.

The Members of the HLG are asked to provide their views on the proposed approach of also targeting Tier I indicators in addition to Tier II indicators, when necessary, and whether such a need has been identified by Member States.

3. Approaches to Capacity Building

Provided that the mapping of immediate necessities and priorities for capacity-building will be conducted in January 2018 at the latest, the joint group believes it would be beneficial to initiate the discussion on next steps. Providing a high-level overview of capacity-building priorities is a challenging issue as the countries vary in their level of statistical maturity, and it might be useful to outline a general direction of capacity-building at three levels: national, regional and global, keeping in mind that national statistical systems are the main beneficiaries of capacity-building.

More specifically, it could be considered whether, in order to ensure economies of scale, some capacity-building initiatives can be conducted at the global level, while others could be conducted at the regional levels addressing statistical challenges that are more prevalent on a regional level. Another approach could be to target capacity building initiatives toward specific groups of countries mentioned within the context of the 2030 Agenda such as Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) or Land Locked Developing Countries LLDCs.

Following the consultation, the subgroup would prepare an overview of the types of capacity building activities needed at the three levels (global, regional and national).

The HLG is invited to discuss different approaches to statistical capacity building, including whether outlining the immediate priorities of capacity-building into national, regional and global is the best way forward. Following the consultation and preparation of the analysis of the types of activities should pertain to the three levels, the HLG is invited to review the results and its proposed prioritization of capacity building needs, at the HLG meeting in March 2018.

4. Financing of Statistical Capacity Building

Another aspect that this Joint Subgroup is supposed to explore as per their Terms of reference is a financial framework for the implementation of the global SDG indicators. The budget pressures faced by National Statistical Institutes are challenging and a solution needs to be found in order to improve statistical capacity. One of the possibilities to be considered is creating a fund for statistical capacity building specifically focused on the data needs of the 2030 Agenda. This fund could finance statistical capacity building initiatives identified or approved by the HLG. The concrete management of the fund has to be further investigated.

Furthermore, it may be possible to coordinate with other organizations (multilateral, regional, etc.) that undertake statistical capacity building in order to leverage comparative advantages in the various domains and create economies of scale in the provision of technical assistance.

The HLG is invited to discuss which approaches of ensuring financing for statistical capacity building can be recommended and what next concrete steps are to be considered.

5. Next Steps and Concrete Actions

The work on statistical capacity-building urgently calls for concrete steps to be conducted.

Further to the items above, the HLG is invited to discuss concrete work assignments and deadlines in order to ensure concrete progress of work with statistical capacity-building. The joint sub-group will then develop these proposals into concrete actions for addressing the immediate capacity building needs and a concrete action plan. Actions completed and the plan for the further work will be presented at the next meeting of the HLG (March 2018) and as part of the background paper to the 49th session of the Statistical Commission.

6. Suggested timeline

2017 November –	Decisions on the further work on identifying priorities for statistical capacity building regarding the SDGs taken by the HLG
2017 December -	Webex meeting to discuss recommendations from the HLG meeting and drafting of the questionnaire for the identifying priorities
2018 January -	Questionnaire on priorities sent to Member States with a 3 to 4 week turnaround
2018 February -	Analysis of results and proposal of (immediate) priorities for statistical capacity building related to the SDGs
2018 February -	Overview of financing possibilities to address immediate statistical capacity building needs
2018 March -	Findings and recommendations on priorities on statistical capacity building related to the SDGs and an approach to financing the implementation of the global SDG indicators presented by the joint Subgroup for consideration by the HLG
2018 March -	Preparation of a background document for the 49 th session of the Statistical Commission