

First Meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators

New York, 1-2 June 2015

Venue: UNHQ, Conference Room 3

Process of selecting indicators

(as of 28 May 2015)

It is suggested to consider the following for the indicator selection process:

1. Tiers of indicators

Indicators might be grouped in three different tiers: a first tier for which an established methodology exists and data are already widely available; a second tier for which a methodology has been established but for which data are not easily available; and a third for which an internationally agreed methodology has not yet been developed.

2. Guidance received at the intergovernmental negotiations in March 2015

At the March session of the intergovernmental negotiations on the SDGs, Member States stressed that the indicators must directly respond to the goals and targets agreed in the Open Working Group and their level of ambition, must not undermine or re-interpret the targets, cover all targets including targets on means of implementation, give equal weight to all targets, maintain the balance achieved, and should not introduce any new or contentious issues. There was also wide consensus that the number of global indicators should be limited and should include multi-purpose indicators that address several targets at the same time.

3. Results of the Expert Group Meeting in February 2015

In respect to the selection of indicators the Expert Group Meeting on the indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda which took place on 25-26 February 2015 in New York identified the following main points of consensus:¹

- The global level monitoring framework should be limited to a small number of indicators;

¹ See Report of the Expert Group Meeting on The indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda, New York, 25-26 February 2015, available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/post-2015/activities/egm-on-indicator-framework/default.html>.

- Such indicators should be selected on the basis of an agreed set of criteria;
- It is necessary to ensure national ownership of indicators (including of the estimation process);
- It is necessary to ensure disaggregation of indicators and to include a human rights dimension to the indicator framework (following the “no one left behind” principle).

Please refer to the full report for more detailed and additional conclusions in respect to the selection of indicators. One important additional point is the need for flexibility to adapt the framework to newly emerging policy priorities, to changes in data availability and to also consider indicators as part of the framework that are not yet fully developed.

4. Criteria for indicator selection

Annex I contains a discussion paper on the criteria for indicator selection, which was presented in an earlier version at the Expert Group Meeting on the indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda which took place on 25-26 February 2015 in New York.

Annex I: Discussion paper on criteria for indicator selection²

The “Chapeau” of the OWG SDGs proposal states that “The sustainable development goals are accompanied by targets and will be further elaborated through indicators focused on measurable outcomes. They are action-oriented, global in nature and universally applicable. They take into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respect national policies and priorities”. This provides the guiding principle for indicator selection. The set of proposed criteria for indicator selection are modified based on the paper “Lessons Learned from MDG Monitoring” produced by the IAEG-MDGs.

The SDGs indicators should be:

1. Relevant

- 1.1. Linked to the target: The indicator should be clearly linked to one or more targets and provide robust measures of progress towards the target(s).
- 1.2. Policy relevant: The indicator should be relevant to policy formulation and provide enough information for policy making. It should also be sensitive and responsive to policy interventions and other underlying causes of change at the appropriate level (global, regional, national, and local).
- 1.3. Applicable at the appropriate level: For global monitoring, the indicator should be relevant to all countries. For national monitoring, the indicator should be relevant to national priorities.
- 1.4. Consistent with international law

2. Methodologically sound

- 2.1. Based on sound methodology: The indicator should be scientifically robust and based, to the greatest extent possible, on existing internationally agreed definitions, classifications, standards, recommendations and best practices. The methodology behind the indicator (data sources, method of computation, treatment of missing values, regional estimates, etc.) should be well documented and readily available
- 2.2. Tested to be valuable: Empirical analysis showing the indicator is valuable has been undertaken and results have been documented. The indicator should be recommended by a well-established and recognized peer review mechanism or through international mechanisms. For new indicators, pilot projects are needed and must be supported with necessary resources to test the indicators and data collection methods and the results need to be fully documented.
- 2.3. Coherent and complementary: The indicator should be consistent with and complementary to other indicators in the monitoring framework. It will be useful to develop an inter-dependency map to show the information required and the relationship between the indicators.

² This paper is prepared by Yongyi Min from United Nations Statistics Division.

3. Measurable

- 3.1. Sustainable and of high quality: The indicator should be measured in a cost-effective and practical manner by countries. A regular and timely data collection mechanism has been or can be developed with reasonable costs and effort. To the greatest extent possible, indicators should be constructed from well-established sources of public and private data. The statistical capacity or potential capacity for data collection and analysis to support the indicator must exist at national and international levels. Data quality should be considered when selecting indicator.
- 3.2. Disaggregated: It should be possible to disaggregate the indicator by geographical region, sex, income, or special population groups where applicable and relevant.
- 3.3. Managed by one or more responsible agencies: There is one or more designated lead responsible agencies for timely and high quality reporting of the indicator and for undertaking the related analysis. At the international level, there should be an agency or agencies responsible for the production of country-level data, regional aggregates, development and dissemination of concepts, methods and analysis used, describing the assessment of progress made globally and by regions. In addition, the agency should provide guidance and/or assistance to countries to strengthen their capacity to produce the indicators.

4. Easy to communicate and access

- 4.1. Easy to interpret and communicate: The indicator is clear and easy to understand for policy makers, the general public and other stakeholders, and unambiguous for interpreting. Use of language and terminology and the presentation of information should be carefully considered. In some cases where scientific concepts and terminology have to be used, statistical training should be provided to policy makers and the general public.
- 4.2. Easily accessible: The indicator should be easily and openly accessible to the general public, policy makers and other stakeholders.

5. Limited in number and outcome focused at the global level

- 5.1. Limited in number: One of the main strengths of the MDGs was their focus on a limited number of indicators, which made the framework clear and manageable. A long list of indicators is neither communicable nor effective in galvanizing public support. The number of indicators at the global level should be minimal. At the national level, supplemental indicators can be added according to national priorities and circumstances to address their specific needs.
- 5.2. Flexible: An indicator framework should be reviewed and updated periodically to accommodate methodology development.
- 5.3. Outcome focused (for non-MOI target): When possible, indicators should be mainly outcome focused. In the absence of reliable outcome indicators, process or input indicators can be used.

A global indicator framework will inform policy makers and the general public on progress achieved towards a set of concrete universal SDG goals and targets and help focus the debate at the international/global level. The main objectives of the global indicator framework will be to facilitate monitoring and inform policy making at the international level and provide the basis for communication and advocacy to bring global attention to the priority areas of sustainable development. The global indicator framework will also be useful for preparing a concise and user-friendly global report.