Designing indicators for the SDGs: Collecting comprehensive, timely data
Expert Roundtable Discussion organized by the SDSN and UNSD
New York, 23-24 June 2014

Key discussion points:
- Data must serve **three essential functions** in support of the SDGs:
  - **Management** – regularly collected data should serve as a management tool, helping to improve national planning and budgetary processes;
  - **Accountability and advocacy** - to ensure governments and other stakeholders are fulfilling their commitments;
  - **Verification** - to cross-check and confirm the state and/or end state of a process.
- The MDGs are a prelude and foundation for the SDGs, which must also be public, motivational and clear goals (as highlighted at Rio +20). Data has played a positive role under the MDGs (e.g. there are now nearly 60 countries that collect annual poverty data) but it has not been significant enough – **data should help to drive implementation of the SDGs.**
- The SDGs will cover a much broader spectrum than the MDGs. To be successful they must be underpinned by a robust and timely data system. We are presented with an urgent **window of opportunity** (of 12-18 months) to lay the foundations for this data system. This not only includes identifying new sources of data ("Big Data") and improving quality and coverage, it is also vital that we fix basic problems (e.g. insufficient investment in civil registration and vital statistics). The meeting of the Statistical Commission in March 2015 will be a key moment. This could be followed by a campaign for good SDG data and monitoring.
- The zero draft goals of the Open Working Group are broadly consistent with goals proposed by the HLP, the SDSN and others. **We know enough to start developing SDG metrics**. Indicators can then be mapped against goals adopted in September 2015.
- **Timeliness is crucial** for data to be a useful management and policy tool. **Annual reporting** is therefore essential. Not every issue needs to be measured annually, but we need to identify what can and should be. Not only will this strengthen the utilization of data at national level, but it will make annual SDG progress reports more meaningful. A key challenge is how to pursue rapidity without compromising rigor and/or to differentiate between "quick and quality data".
- Monitoring the SDGs requires many **different types of data**. Surveys, administrative data and many of the other methods used to compile 'official statistics' will be crucial, but so too will 'unofficial data', for example business data and global and national polling. Our challenge is to find a robust method for integrating relevant 'unofficial' data, at international and national levels. This is an opportunity to capture innovation ("the data revolution") in the design of SDG monitoring framework.
- National data systems can capture very large numbers of indicators and metrics. **For harmonized global reporting on the SDGs it may be necessary to limit the overall number of official SDG indicators**. Some NSOs felt that 100 SDG indicators, as proposed by the SDSN, might already be too many.
- Need to **ensure national ownership** of indicators and data systems, but also promote international coordination of SDG metrics and reporting.
- Various frames were discussed for assessing the preparedness and capacity of the current statistical system, for example its ability to respond to the commonly-held SDG principle that we 'leave no one behind', which will require disaggregated data / civil registration, etc. The assessment frame is likely to evolve over the SDG negotiation process.
- Participants discussed **differentiating SDGs indicators** by four dimensions:
  - **Form:** Input / process / output / outcome: it was noted that input or outcome data may not be so relevant on an annual timescale, but process and output indicators may be monitored annually.
  - **Function:** Indicators for management, accountability and verification (as above), as well as awareness-raising
  - **Speed:** Fast-collection indicators that raise awareness and are useful for driving progress (e.g. Gallups's World Poll) and long-term indicators that are useful for measuring specific problems and disaggregated rates of progress (e.g. U5 mortality)
  - **Level:** Indicators for driving global progress, national progress and local / district level progress.
- Select **indicator gaps** identified (based on but not limited to SDSN's 100 *Indicators for SDGs*) included:
  - A **multi-dimensional poverty** indicator (e.g. OPHI's MPI)

- **Nutrition** and shortfalls in micro-nutrients
- **Climate and environment**, which was referred to as a silent crisis (e.g. current model measures stocks and flows, but environmental problems are systems-based)
- **Agriculture** as another black box or silent crisis. We lack good, comparative indicators on sustainability, productivity and/or efficiency measures, fertilizer use, chemicals, land-use change and food waste.
- Measure of **decent work**
- Measures of **values and wellbeing**
- **Quality service provision** for health and education.

- Significant **innovation is occurring in household, business, and other surveys**, which can drastically improve data quality and availability while strengthening national statistical systems. Much innovation is happening inside national statistical systems. Key innovations include: (i) continuous surveys that can yield annual data and strengthen national capacity, (ii) improved ex-ante coordination of questionnaires; (iii) technological innovations including systematic geo-referencing, and tablet-based surveys. Yet, some of these innovations are slow to reach scale – partly because there's not enough political attention and support devoted to them.
- It is vital to **improve and harmonize the global statistical architecture** including through **integrated statistical reporting**. We need a systems-based approach in which we identify the various tools needed to monitor key concerns and have common standards for quality, as well as space for national differentiation, in respect of national ownership. It was noted that UNSD are trialing a Common Statistical Production and Information Architecture.
- There is a need for **ex-ante indicator harmonization**, between national and international data sets as well as data collection tools (in particular survey questionnaires). This requires common meta data standards and common principles, agreed between international initiatives and country NSOs, including an agreed system of variables, concepts, definitions, and classification at country level / agreed methodological approaches / common tabulation etc.
- **Ensuring quality of national statistical offices (NSOs):** Some NSOs consider themselves producers of surveys but not analysts who can combine data for use in policy or information management. The international community needs to clarify expectations of NSOs within the context of SDG reporting, to ensure statistical preparedness.
- The whole national and international statistical community needs to be better at **communicating** the essential elements of a competent statistical system. What are the essential data components and sources e.g. administrative data / civil registration / survey and how are they prioritized, specifically within the context of measuring the SDGs? Furthermore, there is a need for better communication of data via data-sharing platforms, user-friendly interfaces. Open data and technology must be a key component of the new statistical system.
- Urgent call for a **comprehensive and standardized needs assessment** (including costing) of the international and national statistical system. The statistical system needs to produce an estimate of their needs in advance of the global Financing for Development Summit next July, 2015.

Overview of next steps:
1. Fill indicator gaps for minimum core set of SDG indicators:
   – Official indicators for outcomes and inputs
   – Complemented by management data
2. Clarify which high-quality data can be available annually and how
3. Needs assessment for SDG data and fundraising strategy to be part of Financing for Development 2015
4. Standards for better integration of "non-traditional" data (e.g. subjective surveys/polling, big data) into official data system
5. Define systems approach for statistical system (national and international) for monitoring of SDGs
6. Improved integrated business and household survey programs (continuous surveys, ex-ante harmonization, intensified use of administrative sources, strengthened registers and frames, improved technologies)

Principles for organizing next steps:
- This experts group is impressive and could continue as an informal group to identify gaps and test ideas (the group should be open to others!)
- In consultation with UNSD the group will review and where needed identify lead organizations/people for each next step – need to avoid duplication with FOC process

- Thematic discussions are usually led by international organizations (UN, World Bank, OECD, RDBs) working with NSOs
- SDSN can help with needs assessment, capture lessons in updated report, discussion papers, and interaction with OWG and other post-2015 processes

Action items for the next steps:

1. **Fill indicator gaps for minimum core set of SDG indicators:**
   – Official indicators for outcomes and inputs
   – Additional data to support management and implementation

2. **Clarify which high-quality data can be available annually and how**

- SDSN will align its indicator framework with the text of the OWG and identify remaining indicator gaps in relation to the OWG goals. A revised draft version of the SDSN indicator report will be published in July 2014 capturing lessons from this workshop. We will share it with this group for comments and advice.
- The SDSN will work with the UNSD to prepare a briefing document on how an annual reporting cycle could be organized. A draft of this document will be shared for comments with this group.
- The SDSN Thematic Groups are available to work with interested NSOs, UNSD, and specialized UN / international organizations to convene thematic discussions involving leading academics, business, and civil society organizations to identify data and metrics that are complementary to official indicators and can support the management and implementation of SDGs at the national level.

3. **Needs assessment for SDG data and fundraising strategy to be part of Financing for Development 2015**

- SDSN and UNSD will consult with members of this group, including Paris21 and World Bank, to inventory ongoing efforts to conduct needs assessment for statistics.
- Based on this gap analysis the group may consider preparing a paper on (i) methodology for data needs assessment, and (ii) preliminary results. The paper could be published for public discussion in late 2014.
- Members of this group will work together to help ensure that the 2015 conference on Financing for Development in Ethiopia includes a "slice" for statistics.

4. **Standards for better integration of "non-traditional" data (e.g. subjective surveys/polling, big data) into official data system**

5. **Define systems approach for statistical system (national and international) for monitoring of SDGs**

6. **Improved integrated business and household survey programs (continuous surveys, ex-ante harmonization, intensified use of administrative sources, strengthened registers and frames, improved technologies)**

- Work on #4 is currently conducted as part of the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics under the Statistical Commission. It is not clear what additional work our group can/should undertake in this regard.
- The UNSD is undertaking work on defining a systems approach as part of its regular work program. This work can be shared for comments with members of this group.
- Likewise, work on improving survey instruments is ongoing. The SDSN will explore with the UNSD and the large business and household survey programs to what extent it might be able to amplify key lessons coming out of this work.