



## **Five steps for the IAEG-SDGs to deliver an operational and universal SDG indicator framework**

The IAEG-SDGs has been tasked with identifying a small number of indicators that treat all SDG targets equally and are implementable universally. The group is currently considering a shortlist of over 160 indicators, which is likely to grow in coming weeks, as UN organizations, NSOs, and thematic communities push for additional metrics. Given the capacity constraints faced by most NSOs, and the priority they place on serving national data needs, the IAEG-SDG's two work streams on the conceptual approach and interlinkages need to consider how to move from the current draft of indicators towards an integrated set that can be implemented in every country.

The group may consider the following five practical next steps:

- Step 1. Defining a maximum number of indicators:** We encourage the IAEG-SDGs to consider defining a maximum number of indicators, respecting the need to make the set manageable for NSOs. Without such an indicative upper limit, agreed early in the discussions, it will be very difficult to resist the pressure to expand the indicator coverage. During our consultations, the SDSN was advised that 100 harmonized global SDG indicators were the maximum NSOs could reasonably handle – even well-resourced statistical systems in OECD countries felt this number was the upper limit.
- Step 2. Creating an open list of complementary indicators:** The terms of reference for the IAEG-SDGs leave room for considering indicators that are not part of a global list. The IAEG-SDGs may turn this to its advantage by considering a non-exhaustive list of complementary indicators that countries may consider, but will not be harmonized across every country. Such complementary indicators will support countries in tailoring the post-2015 agenda to their specific needs. They will also be an effective way for managing the process of prioritizing the global set of indicators and staying within a maximum number since complementary indicators recognize technically sound indicators as part of a broader monitoring framework.
- Step 3. Outlining principles for the indicators:** All the indicators should be carefully reviewed against an agreed set of principles or criteria. For instance, are the indicators, measurable, accessible, relevant, timely, internationally comparable, limited in number, and suitable for disaggregation? The conclusions of the Expert Group Meeting on the Indicator Framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the SDSN's 10 principles, or other “checklists” could be taken into account.
- Step 4. Identifying multi-purpose indicators:** The IAEG-SDGs should further review the current list of indicators to identify those that can track progress towards several targets. Some already appear more than once but deepening this approach will foster integration of the agenda and help reduce the number of indicators, without compromising on comprehensiveness. The right-hand column on multi-purpose indicators from the current priority list can provide a starting point. In addition, we encourage the group to analyze the targets and identify key linkages at that level as well. For example, Targets 5.1 and 16.b on discrimination are substantively very close and could be monitored by the same indicator. [Tables 1 and 2 in the SDSN Indicator Report](#) illustrate how indicators can track more than one target.

**Step 5. Proofing indicators:** The current list of indicators includes excellent proposals, but there remains significant room for improvement. Indicators should be based on best practice and be methodologically and technically sound. For example, experts at the World Bank, UNEP and the International Fertilizer Industry Association have criticized the indicator on fertilizer consumption for Target 14.1, and proposed instead the widely-endorsed and science-based indicator on nitrogen use efficiency. The IAEG-SDGs may request inputs from experts on how proposed indicators can be improved and help track more than one target.

We believe that each of these steps are feasible and that they may help the IAEG-SDGs use the little time and resources at its disposal to craft an effective indicator framework that will help guide the implementation of the SDGs.