United Nations Statistics Division/ESCWA
High-level Regional Workshop on Implementation of the SDG Indicator Framework

Beirut - Lebanon, 5 – 6 April 2017

SUMMARY AND MAIN CONCLUSIONS

The document presents the key outcomes of the High-level Regional Workshop on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Indicator Framework, held at the UNHouse in Beirut, from 5 to 6 April 2017, organized jointly by the Statistical Division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD).

I. Introduction

1.   The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the United Nations Statistical Commission had jointly organized the Workshop on the Implementation of the SDG Indicator Framework, held at the UN House in Beirut, Lebanon, on 5 and 6 April 2017. The workshop was organized as a post event of the 12th Statistical Committee of ESCWA, which was held from 4 to 5 April in Beirut.

II. Attendees

2.   A total of 40 participants attended the meeting. Representatives from 12 countries (27 participants), namely: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen.

3.   The meeting was also attended by representatives from the UNFPA, United Nation's Resident Coordinator's Office – Arab African International, UNEP, ILO, UN-Habitat, UN-Habitat Regional Office for Arab States, UNDP Regional Office, UNICEF MENARO, UNHCR, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Sciences in the Arab States, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States, the Statistical Center for the Gulf Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf (GCC-STAT), the Statistical Economic and Social Research and Training Center for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), UNSD, and ESCWA.

4.   In addition to 14 participants, from different Arab countries, watched the meeting through the webex technology organized by UNESCWA.

III. Organization

5.   The Opening statements were delivered by ESCWA and UNSD. The four sessions of the meeting were chaired, in order, by Tunis, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and UNSD (Annex I Agenda).

6.   The following substantive topics were discussed:

- Setting the stage
- Session 1: SDG indicators – global, regional and national frameworks
- Session 2: Global Action Plan and its translation into regional and national development strategies
- Setting up a system for measurement of SDGs in countries
- Session 3: SDG country reporting system
- Session 4: The Way Forward

7.   All documents for the meeting are available at: https://www.unescwa.org/events/implementation-sdg-indicator-framework-escwa-region

8.   15 Participants from Member States received financial support from the 10th tranche of the United Nations Development Account project.

IV. Objectives

9.   The overall objective of the workshop is to reflect on the preparation of national indicator frameworks based on national, regional and global priorities. The key points of the meeting were:
- a. Provide information on the DA 10 Programme among bilateral and multilateral partners to improve coordination and synergies, leveraging financial support, and avoid overlap[1]. Discuss the preparation of

---

[1] The DA 10 is a comprehensive programme of action centered around strengthening national statistical systems to measure, monitor and report on the sustainable development goals for which 10 entities of the UN Secretariat have joined hands to implement. The Programme aims to strengthen national statistical systems to respond to the data challenges of the 2030

national indicator frameworks, based on national, regional and global priorities
b. Discuss the process of integration into the national development strategies and development of roadmaps and clear set of strategies to strengthen NSS and deliveries in line with GAP
c. Reflect on strategies for reporting and dissemination mechanisms

V. Summary of Discussions and Conclusions

10. It is evident that a national statistical development strategy (NSDS) is vital for the development of statistics and meeting the SDGs needs. Since very few Arab countries have updated NSDS, most countries are encouraged to step up their efforts to complete their NSDSs. NSDS will facilitate developing and enhancing the capacities of the national statistical systems (NSS) to produce timely and quality statistics and data to assess the implementation of the goals and targets of sustainable development agenda.

11. Disaggregated data are important for effective programme planning; however, few countries collect, compile and disseminated disaggregated data for key development indicators. There is a dire need to produce more detailed disaggregated data for SDGs. Countries will have greater level of difficulty and challenge and will therefore need further capacity building efforts to produce basic comparable and standardized statistics.

12. Countries seek advice and technical assistance on how to meet the demands of the 2030 Agenda in particular in localizing the global indicators, and reporting on progress achieved in implementing Agenda 2030. Therefore, mainstreaming the SDGs into national development strategies and sectoral plans will be a challenge for many countries in the region, including those that need to integrate the SDGs into their current development plans.

13. Countries may choose to develop their national frameworks in different ways, depending on objective and availability of information. Whatever the method used there are three phases to undergo: firstly, review and assess data availability and frequency by adopting a SMART[2] criteria; secondly, assess indicators' relevance to regional/national context; and thirdly, localize the framework by introducing new indicators to reflect national/regional priorities and common concerns, where needed.

14. Countries commended ESCWA on the first draft of the regional SDG framework, and requested ESCWA to monitor and report on data availability on periodic basis. The total number of indicators under GTier I and GTierII combined is 241 indicators (main and disaggregated indicators) representing 92 per cent of the UNSD SDG Global

---

[2] S (Simply), M (Measurable), A (Accessible), R (Reference), T (Timely).

database[3]. At the regional level, the 241 indicators were reclassified into three "regional tiers" on the basis of data availability and frequency as follows:

> RTier I: 44% Currently available with sufficient quality, frequency and disaggregation in 60 – 100% of the Arab countries.
> RTier II: 16% Not available on regular basis or frequency, or not of sufficient quality or disaggregation, requiring improvements in 41 – 59% of the Arab countries
> RTier III: 39% Missing, requiring substantial capacity-building, investments in new collection tools, not available in 0 – 40% of the Arab countries

15. Countries are encouraged to assess indicator readiness. The SDG matrix for the national framework should specify the source with the number of indicators; their frequency; available disaggregation; small area; latest data and make a report on the national framework with 2016 baseline data, along with short term strategy to compile NTier II and long strategy to compile NTier III indicators.

16. It is worth noting that international technical assistance activities are expected to centre on implementation of the global indicators, therefore incorporating as many or most of the indicators agreed for global monitoring would be advantageous. None of the agreed indicators should be rejected if it is not available in an equally accurate and timely fashion. Such indicators form the basis for identifying data and capacity gaps to help design capacity development programmes and strategies, while substitute indicators are used in the interim.

17. The meeting commended those countries that have initiated the SDG processes. The following are some good national practices that have been implemented by some countries: establishing a SDG unit and team from relevant departments working on development indicators to assess data availability and frequency for SDG framework; establishing a management, monitoring, and follow up mechanism to implement agenda 2030. Organizing trainings and meetings to introduce sustainable development concepts and monitoring indicators to the concerned departments in the ministries and local administrations. Some meetings focused also on integrating a gender perspective as a basis for achieving the SDGs. Mainstreaming the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, goals, targets and indicators into its National Development Plans, and promoting the preparation of sectoral frameworks and annual work plans and strategies such as the poverty reduction strategy. Some countries also implemented the modernization of GSBPM to include administrative data; prepare SDG metadata catalogue (SDMX); and raise awareness of SDGs in the general public.

---

[3] Tier III was not included for lack of standardized metadata, in addition to the Global indicators that are collected at the global level.

18. With regard to reporting, establishment of a national and regional databases for SDG indicators was emphasized. SDG databases would greatly facilitate the implementation of the indicator framework including by ensuring the consistency of indicators methodologies across countries and regions and by fostering the necessary statistical capacity building programmes. At the same time, the global data set will facilitate the implementation of the national and regional indicators as the backbone for national and regional SDG reporting, and will allow the global reporting on progress across all goals and targets in an integrated way. UNSD make available the internationally comparable country data on each of the indicators alongside the regional and global aggregates in the SDG Indicator global database provided by international agencies. This fulfills the need for full transparency and allows data users, including Member States, to easily access all data on SDGs in one single place, together with the respective metadata.

19. Therefore, it is important that international and regional entities should strengthen their data and metadata sharing to reduce reporting burden of countries. Data for a particular indicator should be collected by one international agency. Data and metadata should be disseminated in a transparent manner at national and international levels. Moreover, quality assurance procedures at national and international levels should be followed. Every effort should be made to reconcile data provided at the global level with the data published by the national statistical authorities, and any discrepancies should be resolved, when possible, or carefully explained.

20. National reports on the SDGs are key elements of the national review process. Reports can identify gaps in implementation, including in data and strategies, as well as policy challenges, trade-offs, and emerging global, regional and national issues. Reports should not just describe trends in indicators; they should analyse underlying causes behind the trends, and offer policy suggestions to overcome obstacles and deal with emerging challenges. The structure of the report will include an introduction, tracking progress, assess means of implementation, analyse thematic issues, evaluate policies and strategies, conclude with recommendations and include a statistical annex. The SDG reports are expected to: provide an analysis of implementation gaps and challenges, in terms of policy in particular when it comes to: integrate social, economic and environmental dimensions, policy inclusiveness…'leaving no one behind', as well as in light of emerging regional and global issues; probe into key cross-cutting issues (e.g inequality, water-energy-food and other nexuses, climate change, data…), review/analyze means of implementation; be based on participatory/inclusive processes starting from report conceptualization to the validation of findings and recommendations.

21. On-line dissemination of official statistics and data analysis is critical to facilitate the engagement of stakeholders (CSOs, private sector, academia and citizens at large) in the public debate on the performance of countries on SDGs and strengthen ownership of the Agenda. Advocating evidence-based change, and providing a platform fostering informed, evidence-based policy-making for sustainable development. Currently, there are 19 NSOs with a functioning website; nine NSOs offer a dynamic database and three NSOs continue to publish data in the form of static pdf files. When data are not confidential, they should be available and useable as open data, especially microdatasets,

are particularly important for data disaggregation and the principle of leaving no one behind.

22. Countries cited the following challenges in implementing the SDG monitoring framework: data gaps in terms of lack of inclusiveness and completeness within the required level of detail, and time series; lack of experience in monitoring and reporting; reduced resources to localize global indicators into development plans and sectoral strategies; difficulty in adopting administrative records as main source for some indicators due to wide variety of sources, definitions and methodologies, including units of measurement; lack of financial resources and prioritization to implement large sample surveys; lack of qualitative indicators; and unclear calculation methodology for some indicators. Moreover, some countries also reported that some indicators have not been collected at all and require special surveys, and therefore additional financial and human resources would be needed. There is poor coordination between the producers of SDG indicators, and aadditional resources will be needed to address and ensure that data for new areas outside the scope of NSS are available.

23. To resolve some of the national challenges countries recommended the following: include new questions in existing surveys to collect SDG data; prepare proposals for financial and technical support to implement new surveys targeting SDG indicators (time use survey, violence against women survey); develop metadata tailored to the country needs; improve dissemination of data; improve coordination within the NSSs by strengthening cooperation, and genuine partnership with all partners to adopt international standards, and redesigning collection and compilation of administrative data to provide regular and timely data. In addition, the level of disaggregation required by SDG needs designing bigger sample sizes and hence more financial resources to support implementation of those surveys. Emphasize the importance of capacity building and strengthening the statistical infrastructure to ensure the production of quality of indicators, in addition to importance of establishing a national task force to prepare the report on sustainable development by engaging all national focal points. It was also noted that it is important for the NSO to be designated as the official national SDG center for indicators for line ministries to avoid duplication. NSOs need to better prioritize and harmonize data collection programmes, and strengthen basic data production. NSSs, including national statistical offices need to be modernized for collecting high-frequency and high-quality data on the varied dimensions of sustainable development. Countries also will need to build or strengthen their geospatial infrastructures to integrate geospatial information and statistics, and to collect real-time data from remote areas. All this will require substantive investments in new and existing data sources.

24. At the regional level countries recommended to adopt a clear and a binding regional action plan for the Arab countries to produce sustainable development reports on a regular basis; provide technical and financial support to Member States to comply with reporting requirements and collection of data; establish and promote the development of an Arab SDG information platform that would include definitions, concepts and mechanism for calculating indicators; enhance development of data

dissemination mechanisms; and make use of censuses and GIS in linking environmental indicators with social and economic indicators. Moreover, with the new SDG data requirements countries expressed the need for technical assistance in emerging areas such as digital transformation, to facilitate data integration from different sources in addition to data interoperability.

25. UNESCWA took note of the issues reported by countries and will consider them in the planning of the regional road map on statistics for SDGs.