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MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS: DATA QUALITY AND QUANTITY

Summary

This report has been prepared as part of commitments made by ESCWA relating to continuous monitoring and reporting on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The report builds on the assessment of the MDG monitoring studies that was presented to the eighth and ninth sessions of the Statistical Committee held in Beirut in 2008 and 2009, respectively. The theme of the present report is on data quality and quantity; it emphasizes the importance of data communication, a step forward from data dissemination, in providing quality metadata and through effective coordination processes to produce and report on MDG national data reconciled with international data.

The Committee is invited to consider the recommendations made to national statistical systems in the region in order to improve monitoring and reporting for evidence-based policymaking.

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Introduction

1. The member countries represented in the ESCWA Statistical Committee along with the larger statistical community represented by the United Nations Statistical Commission, and other regional statistical bodies had formally recognized the existence of the problems and issues related to discrepancies between national and international sources together with shortcomings in MDG monitoring, including the following: (a) more data are available at the national level than those reported in the MDG database of UNSD; (b) some substantial differences exist between data produced and disseminated by countries and those reported by international agencies; (c) the poor content of metadata for some MDG indicators; and (d) the use of imputations by international agencies to fill in data gaps.[1]. Unanimously, stakeholders; statisticians and other producers of statistics at the national and international level were urged to take immediate action to find solutions.

2. Mandated by the Statistical Commission[2], the Statistics Division at ESCWA has been actively monitoring discrepancies in MDG data and publishing its results in the Parliamentary reports[3] presented to the 8th and 9th Statistical Committees held in 2008 and 2010, respectively. These reports, similar to the present report, focus on analyzing data quality and quantity (data availability and gaps), i.e. data discrepancies between national and international sources with regard to MDG indicators.

3. The Statistics Division has also been coordinating efforts in resolving data gaps and discrepancies between national and international sources with the objective to build national capacities, improve data quality, ensure transparency of data description (metadata), reduce inconsistency, enhance coordination, increase production, and improve data communication.

4. In this connection, ESCWA organized two regional workshops on MDG Data Conciliation. The first workshop was organized in close collaboration with UNSD and five UN agencies the World Bank, the World Health Organization, International Labor Organization, UNICEF, and ITU) in December 2009. ESCWA held a second Workshop on MDG Data Conciliation in collaboration with ILO to address issues related to Employment Indicators (Beirut, on 12 and 13 July 2012)[4]. A third Workshop on MDG Data Conciliation related to Water and Sanitation, planned to be held in December 2012.

5. The objective of the Workshops on MDG Data Conciliation is to improve the statistical capacities and inter-institutional coordination to invigorate the production of MDG indicators and metadata. It is expected that these workshops would contribute to a decreased statistical discrepancies between national and international sources, and improved data accessibility and transparency. The findings, recommendations and details of sessions are found in the relevant meetings' reports available on Statistics Homepage.

[1] See "Report of the thirty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission" (E/CN.3/2007/13).

[2] In 2003, the Statistical Commission endorsed (E/2003/24), the approach taken by the United Nations Statistics Division and the newly formed Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities regarding reviewing and resolving specific cases of data-collection duplication, and requested the Statistics Division and the Committee to continue working on this issue and to report on progress made.

[3] Millennium Development Goals: Monitoring Framework and Proposals for Improvement (E/ESCWA/SD/2008/IG.1/4), and the Report on Millennium Development Goal and Gender Indicators presented to the 9th session of the Statistical Committee (E/ESCWA/SD/2010/IG.1/9).

[4] The workshop was implemented as part of the umbrellas project "Strengthening national statistical and inter-institutional capacities for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals through interregional cooperation and knowledge-sharing". The Project aims to enable countries to produce more effective and timely information-sharing and analysis.

Figure I. Quality of data is metatdata and coordination

6. This report presents data conciliation issues in the ESCWA region. It focuses on quality of metadata, MDG coordination processes; main variables in increasing the production of quality data (figure I). The analysis presented hereunder will be supported with findings and examples discussed in the workshops. The report also attempts to propose a regional strategy for capacity building based on assessment of discrepancy and availability levels at the policy level. In conclusion, the reports provides concrete recommendations on reconciling national and international data, alternatives to increase data production and increase quantity of available data, enhance coordination mechanisms among major stakeholders, and improve the reporting mechanism.

I. DATA CONCILATION ISSUES

7. Central statistical offices, whether at the national level and international level, have been bestowed with the responsibility to officially produce, coordinate, and disseminate MDG data. At the international level, UNSD plays the coordination role for various MDG data inputs from UN specialized agencies. The main role of specialized agencies, within their areas of competency, is to provide standard comparable data based on national data sources. For each indicator one or more agencies are responsible for providing the data and metadata and for leading the methodological developments.

8. At the national level the national statistical offices (NSOs) are the main official source of statistics. These offices produce MDG related statistics from surveys and censuses; in addition they coordinate data inputs from line ministries and disseminate them officially. In addition, country NSO is responsible to guide development of methodologies into standard formats to allow international comparability. NSOs are therefore responsible to support and enhance capacities of the statistical offices in the statistical system to produce standardized data.

9. Discrepancies between these two official sources, national and international, exist in data value and in availability of data being disseminated by the both sources. There are major discrepancies in data availability; i.e. number of data points (time series) being reported against each indicator, between national and international sources. The comprehensiveness of these time series is important to monitor trends of progress and regress at the indicator and policy level.

10. In addition, there is discrepancy in data values between different sources which mainly emanates from one or more components related to metadata. These differences may be attributed to definitions used, classifications implemented, method of calculation applied, age groups and targeted population and subpopulation selected. They may also be attributed to whether the indicators were replaced by proxy indicators, had different sources of data, used different range of data series, and whether adjustments made on country data or extrapolation/estimation methods were applied to extract them.

Example (1): It was evident during the workshop that some country representatives were not aware of the inclusion of the new MDG target on employment under Goal 1. Many did not know the definition and method of calculation. These facts pointed out to the problem of sharing information and knowledge gained by national staff attending MDG or related meetings. In addition, some country representatives did not have access to internet in their offices which hindered their ability to conduct research essential for their daily work.

11. There are many issues at stake, and discrepancies maybe attributed to different reasons, however, with good coordination, collaboration and communication between the different sources most, if not all, discrepancy issues could be resolved and data may be reconciled.

12. The questions that may be called to investigate the causes behind these discrepancies are: Why are there discrepancies in data availability between national and international sources? Why are there more disseminated data at the international level not reported by national agencies? Why many more data are disseminated by countries have not been reported or considered by international agencies? Why after more than one decade conciliation issues in discrepancies in data value have not been resolved yet?

13. More concrete questions would include; why countries have not yet provided users with access to national central repository of key development indicators, including the MDG indicators? Why some indicators have not yet been standardized? Why disseminated data are not transparent to users with their metadata? Why coordination processes are still lagging in some statistical systems? Why collected data are not disseminated on a timely basis? Why some though collected their MDG related indicators are not computed?

14. Why training is not reaping its fruits; are the right experts being trained? Has information received in training been transcended and knowledge was shared with all concerned? Why the institutional capacity of some countries have self-imposed restriction on research? Why some countries promptly reply to requests emanating from national and international users, and at no effort, while other countries respond at best incompletely? Is the supply of data meeting the demands of policy makers, and other stakeholders including the international community? However, the scope of this paper will be limited to answer the first set of questions on data availability and data discrepancy.

15. To answer these questions, we will present each section with facts, reasons, and proposals based on analysis of data and outcomes of the regional workshops and consultation processes undertaken with representatives from countries.

II. DISCREPANCIES IN DATA AVAILABILITY

A. QUALITY OF MDG METADATA

16. The first question that comes to our minds is why are there discrepancies in data availability between national and international sources? The main source of data, whether national or international, is based on official country estimates. Therefore, discrepancy in data availability in both sources depends mainly on the quality of the national MDG statistical metadata[5].

17. There are major differences that exist in data availability as reported by national and international sources. The greater the difference in data availability reported, the higher the possibility of major shortcomings in the quality of metadata and/or reporting mechanism between both sources. However, it is worth noting that countries with low discrepancy level in data availability with international sources may reflect low capacity of the statistical institution in compiling and producing data.

18. Figure II illustrate the magnitude of available national data that have not been reported by international sources ranging from a low of 24 data points to a maximum of 169 data points in ESCWA member countries. On the other hand, Figure III provides an example of the magnitude of country and country adjusted data disseminated by international agencies but are not available in country datasets.

[5] Statistical metadata are data which are needed for proper production and usage of statistical data. They describe statistical data and –to some extent- processes and tools involved in the production and usage of statistical data. Expressed briefly, statistical metadata are data about statistical data. (Source: ISO/IEC FDIS 11179-1"Information technology – Metadata registries – Part 1: Framework", March 2004).

Figure II. Available National data Points Missing in international sources by country

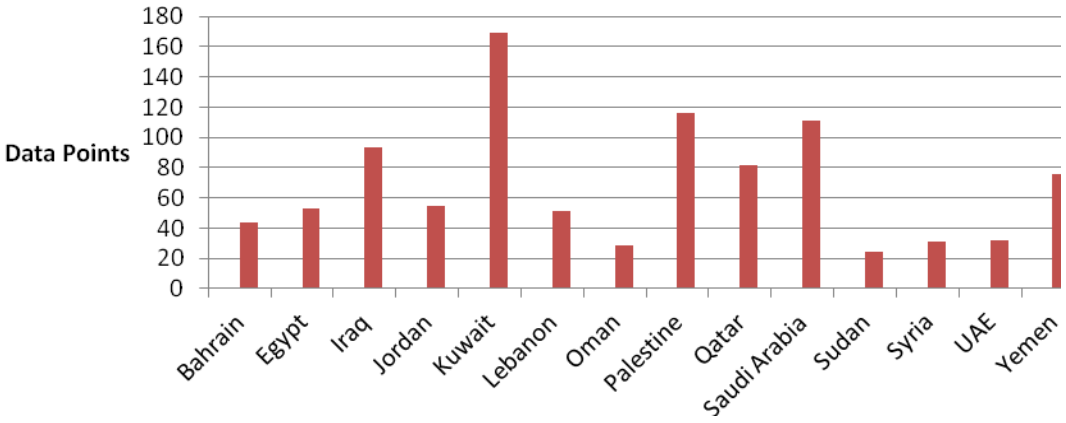
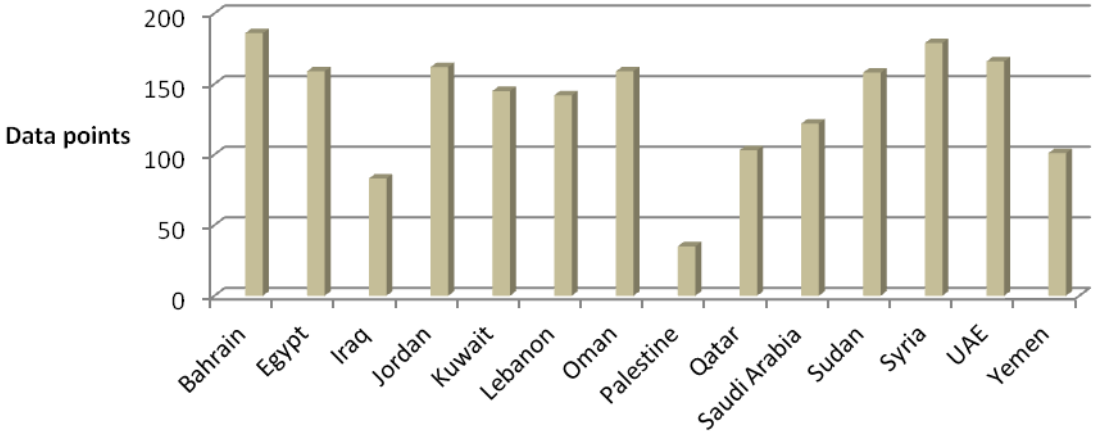


Figure III. International Data Available While National Data are Missing



19. What is the story behind those missing national data in international sources? In order for national data to be disseminated as official country data by international agencies, the following minimum requirements/conditions need to be met/fulfilled:

- ✓ *Accessibility*: Do countries provide stakeholders with user-friendly access to national data through official tools? Access to absolute figures of related indicators; provision of on-line database with time series, responding promptly to agencies' questionnaires.

- ✓ *Reliability*: Do countries furnish enough information on how the sample was selected, definitions were used and methods of data collection?

- ✓ *Transparency*: Do countries disseminate data along with complete metadata at each data point, if different?

Example (2): Use of erroneous figures for some indicators, such as in the indicator on *Growth rate of GDP per person employed*. Some countries are reporting a high growth rate (GDP at 9% per year in country X in comparison to other countries with GDP at 2%). (2012

Example (3): There are minor discrepancies in the 3 employment indicators: *"Employment-to-population ratio; Proportion of own account and contributing family workers in total employment, and Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector"* in some countries attributed to difference in defining the working population age group. ILO sets the age of employed between 15- 64 years, while most countries sets it at 15+ years. (2012 Workshop).

- ✓ *Periodicity and timeliness*: Are data being produced regularly and disseminated in a timely manner to all stakeholders at the same time?

- ✓ *Consistency*: Are national data in time series are consistent over the years? Are justifications provided for outliers?

- ✓ *Standardization*: Do countries harmonize their indicators with international standards?

Example (4): Many countries produce data but have not calculated MDG employment indicators, nor reported and disseminated them. Country X has scarce data in general in all the five employment indicators although the labor force survey is implemented on a yearly basis.

Example (5): Many countries are not using international standards in the calculation of indicators such as the indicator on *Growth rate of GDP per person employed.* Most countries are using current or nominal prices for GDP instead of constant prices as per ILO guidelines. (2012 Workshop).

20. When the above criteria for producing and disseminating quality data are not met by national producers international agencies resort to filling the gaps by following three methods: (i) estimation and modeling, (ii) adjustment of country data; and (iii) computation of indicators. As a result, we find data available in international sources but missing in country data sets.

Example (6): Reporting employment data for nationals only is one of the major causes of discrepancy with ILO data based on total population. (2012 Workshop)

21. Countries need to make use of available data sources to compute and communicate indicators with relevant metadata. Countries also need to present data for all the population (nationals and foreigners). When data are not made available, or are inconsistent in a time series international agencies resort to estimation methods. In addition, when national data are not disseminated in a timely manner, or are not produced periodically, international agencies apply modeling.

Example (6): Country X has been reporting on *Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector*, while ILO reports on three indicators, namely: *Employment-to-population ratio, sexes, Proportion of own account and contributing family workers in total employment, and Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector,*

22. Moreover, international agencies apply adjustments on country data to produce harmonized and standardized data for comparability at the global level. In addition, international agencies implement computations of missing national indicators derived from available national statistics.

23. Dissemination of national data with relevant metadata in a timely manner would reduce issues of conciliation with international sources.

B. COORDINATION OF MDG DATA

24. The issue of coordination of data collection activities has been a longstanding concern both at the national and international levels. A number of countries continue to voice concerns about the insufficient coordination of statistical data collection by international agencies. Evidently communication and reporting mechanisms contribute to improving the availability of data in both national and international sources.

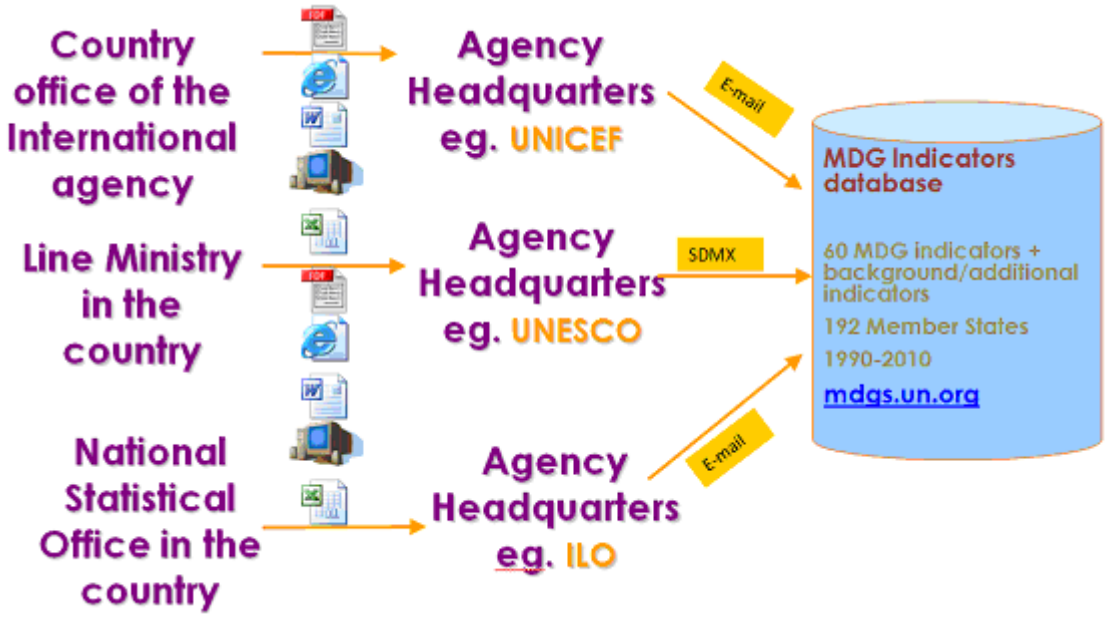
Example (7): Few country representatives reported receiving and responding to ILO questionnaire promptly and comprehensively. In addition, almost all did not provide the absolute figures much needed by ILO. (2012 Workshop).

25. The growing number of newly established “International Coordination and Cooperation Units” within the NSOs can contribute effectively to improvements towards availability of data in both sources. However, this would require that processes are well institutionalized. Otherwise, those efforts towards improving reporting, and coordination mechanisms would stay marginal at best.

26. Coordination issues emanates and feeds into a vicious cycle of challenges faced by most NSOs, such as inter and intra institutional reporting, streamlining processes, centralizing national data repositories, avoiding discrepancy at the national level, including dissemination of timely, quality and transparent data in line with standard guidelines.

27. The NSO is the national custodian of official statistics for its own country. NSOs receive data inputs in a variety of formats (excel sheets, word documents, pdf, etc..) each have advantages and disadvantages, however, to improve coordination and facilitate dissemination practices the establishment of a central repository of data is important. Databases are important to unify efforts and knowledge at the institutional level and across the national statistical system.

Figure IV. MDG data compilation and analysis



28. Ideally, national data producers submit data to a common repository hosted by the NSO to populate to national and international users. This is in compliance with Principle number 8 of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics on coordination among statistical agencies.

29. However, lack of streamlining data inputs to the national statistical office would result in time lag in production of data, differences in datasets and metadata, lack of harmonization, incompleteness and inconsistency in time series, burden on statistical system, and greater susceptibility to committing errors.

Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

Principle 8.

Coordination among statistical agencies is essential to achieve consistency and efficiency in the statistical system

30. At the international level, for each indicator one or more agencies are responsible for providing the data and metadata and for leading the methodological developments. These agencies receive data or impute when missing and in turn sends their data to UNSD MDG repository. In order to create an environment where data exchange is effective some agencies have already been submitting their data using SDMX initiative in reporting their data to UNSD, such as FAO, ILO, UNESCO, and the World Bank. Figure IV above provide an analysis of MDG data compilation processes.

31. The management of national databases in statistical fields related to demography, national accounts, trade, industry, energy, environment, gender, etc should be one of the pillars of the work of the NSOs and an integral part of its regular programme. NSOs have the responsibility that goes beyond own data processes by taking a lead role in supporting the subnational and national data flows. It should contribute to better coordination of data collection activities by line ministries to provide easy access to NSOs system data and to facilitate the exchange of experiences with respect to data dissemination policies and practices.

32. Having one repository for different data sets provided by different data providers at national level, based on the principle of federated databases, would provide users with access to original data and metadata with full source attribution. A central repository of databases has many advantages; it could contribute to the improvement of the data quality. By making it possible for users to retrieve data from a variety of sources at the same time from one source will increase the analytical potential to seek data consistency and exert pressure on data providers for better harmonization.

33. For effective coordination and reporting there are two requirements: the first is to develop a central repository of data system, and the second is to use a standard data exchange tool such as SDMX initiative in national statistical system offices and with regional and international agencies. Moreover, MDG focal points should be at the center of all these activities and aware of any developments and involved in the processes to follow up effectively among different stakeholders at the sub-national, national and international level.

34. A central MDG database should be flexible to store data and relevant metadata, produce charts, maps and cross-tabulations, import and export data and metadata, on-line data dissemination using SDMX import and export, open source database application, adaptable and can be customized to national needs. In this regard, ESCWA has been actively organizing workshops on open source UN application DevInfo for the Arab region since 2004. In addition, for the past two years ESCWA has been organizing meetings on SDMX for member countries.

35. Focus consultation with national MDG representatives with regard to current problems in coordination mechanism of National Statistical System included:

- Lack of legislations that organize and coordinates statistics related activities related in the statistical system;

- Challenges related to timeliness of data and periodicity of surveys and dissemination of information;

- Weak capacity of statisticians;

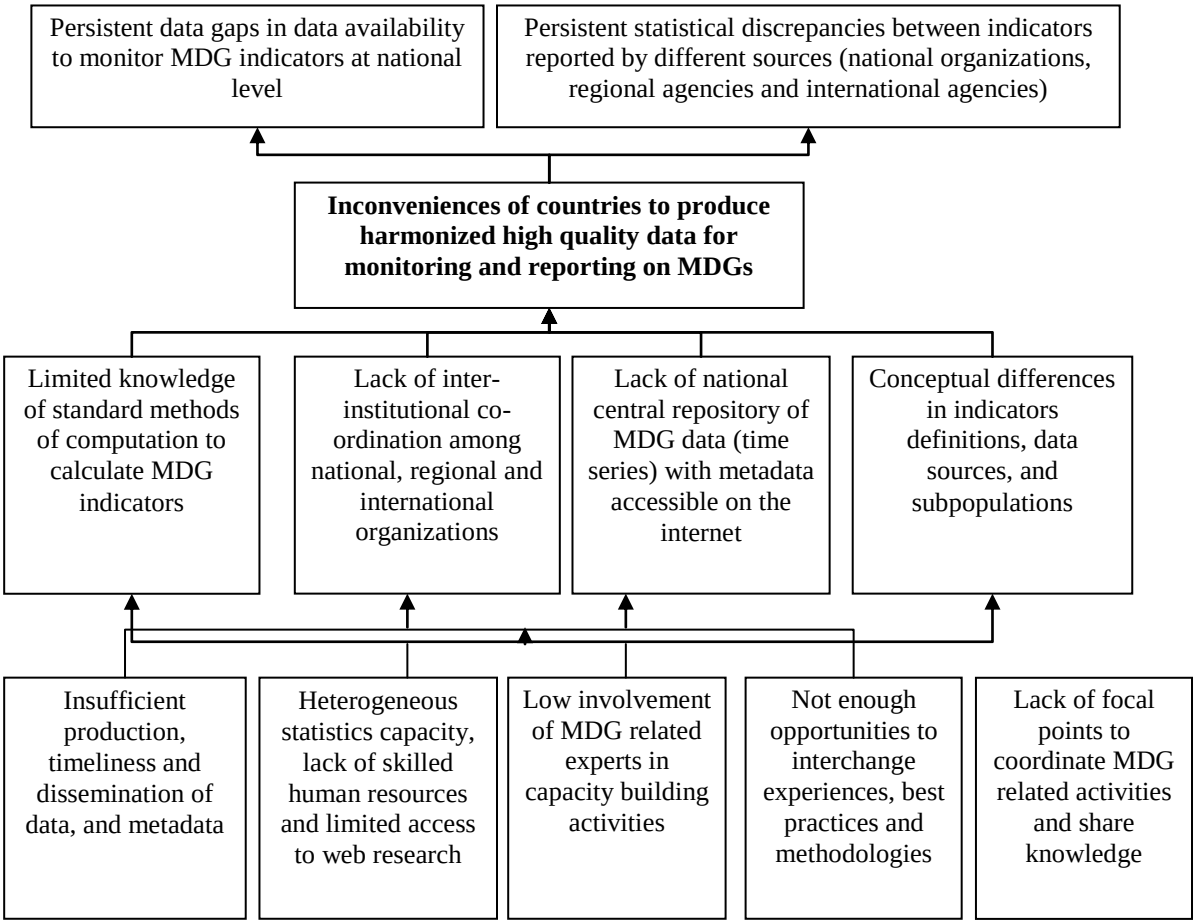
- Limited financial resources dedicated for statistics especially at the sub national level and in governorates statistical offices;

- Inconsistency of statistical concepts, methodologies and classifications between the national statistical system components which generates inconsistent national data;

- Incompleteness of administrative records.

36. Moreover, discussions revealed that although most NSOs had the authority to coordinate the reporting of data used for MDG national reports produced by various national agencies including verification of quality of data, a number of NSOs were not mandated to coordinate among data producers by a statistical law, they neither had the authority to make changes related to the presentation of data and metadata in the MDG reports. Most countries did not have a central repository of data; single set of data on MDG indicators, with metadata and available on the internet. Most countries did not have focal points centralizing requests received by agencies. Figure V illustrates the regional problem tree (cause and effect)

Figure V. Regional problem tree
(Cause-effect)



37. There is a general need to move from data dissemination to data communication and therefore countries will have to develop comprehensive data communication strategies.

C. MDG DATA QUALITY

38. Discrepancies in data values between national and international sources emanate from one or more components related to the quality of metadata of each indicator as discussed above, including definition, methods of calculation, targeted population and subpopulations, sources of data, units used, and estimation methods.

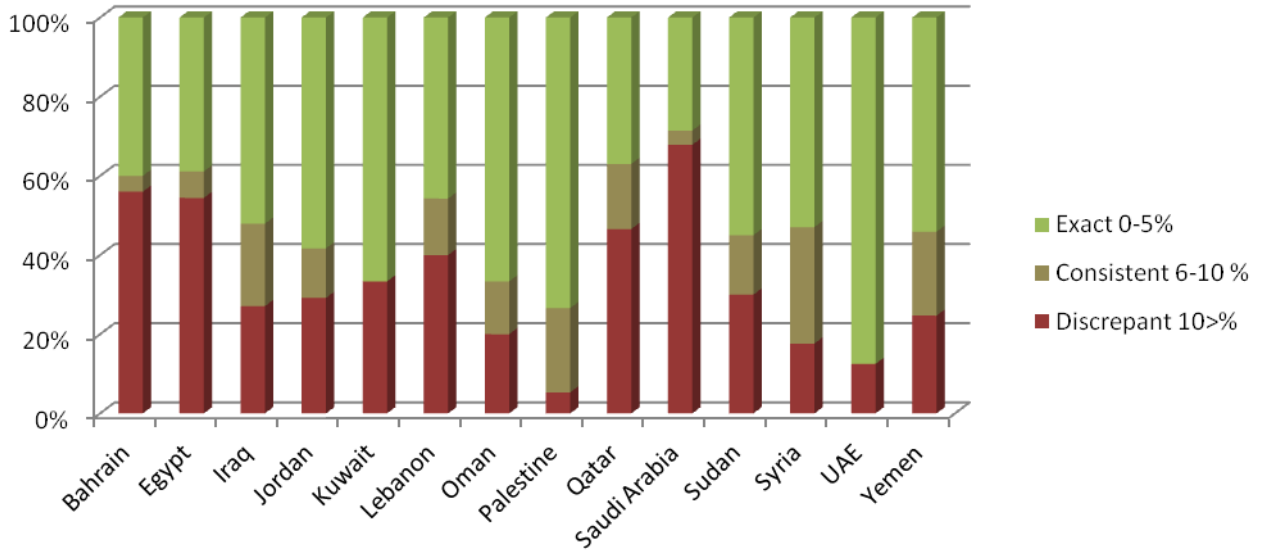
Example (8): The use of different definitions of "Literate" for indicator 2.3 also leads to data discrepancies. UIS does not consider every person finishing primary education as being literate. (2009 Workshop).

39. Assessment of level of consistency in data value between national and international sources[6], for the same indicators at exact data points reveal that the median average is 54 per cent of the national data are exact, and 14 per cent are consistent with international sources. While there are around 30 per cent discrepant values in data point matches between both sources.

Example (9): At the international level, indicator 3.1 (ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education) is calculated by dividing the gross enrolment ratio (GER) of girls by the GER of boys. Some countries use the absolute numbers of pupils enrolled rather than the GERs thus obtaining different values for the indicator (2009 Workshop).

[6] Exact (margin difference of 0-5%), or consistent (margin of difference is 6-10%), or discrepant (more than 10% difference).

Figure VI. Discrepancy level between national and UNSD sources for available data points by country, 2012



40. Figure V illustrates the level of consistency in value between national and international data for each country in 2012. This information for countries to review the methodologies of the current indicators. Moreover, this information is important for the secretariat to provide technical advisory mission to countries upon request to investigate and resolve these issues including building the capacities of member countries.

III. TOWARDS A REGIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING PLAN

41. Analysis of major discrepancies in data values between national and international sources at the goal level provide the secretariat with vital information on statistical policy areas that require further capacity building efforts. Moreover, assessing availability of data[7] provide information on the capacity of each country to monitor the MDGs. Both assessments are important to draw a regional capacity building strategy and plan for country technical missions. Moreover,

42. Earlier comparative assessments implemented and presented in 8th and 9th sessions of the Statistical Committee show significant improvement in terms of quality and quantity, (the increase in availability of data/ indicator, in addition to decrease in the number of discrepant values for each indicator in the higher echelons of discrepancy levels).

43. The present assessment in level of consistency in data value between national and international sources[8], for the same indicators at exact data points, reveal that there are major discrepancies (over 30%) in four out of eight goals. These four goals listed from highest discrepancy to lowest are:

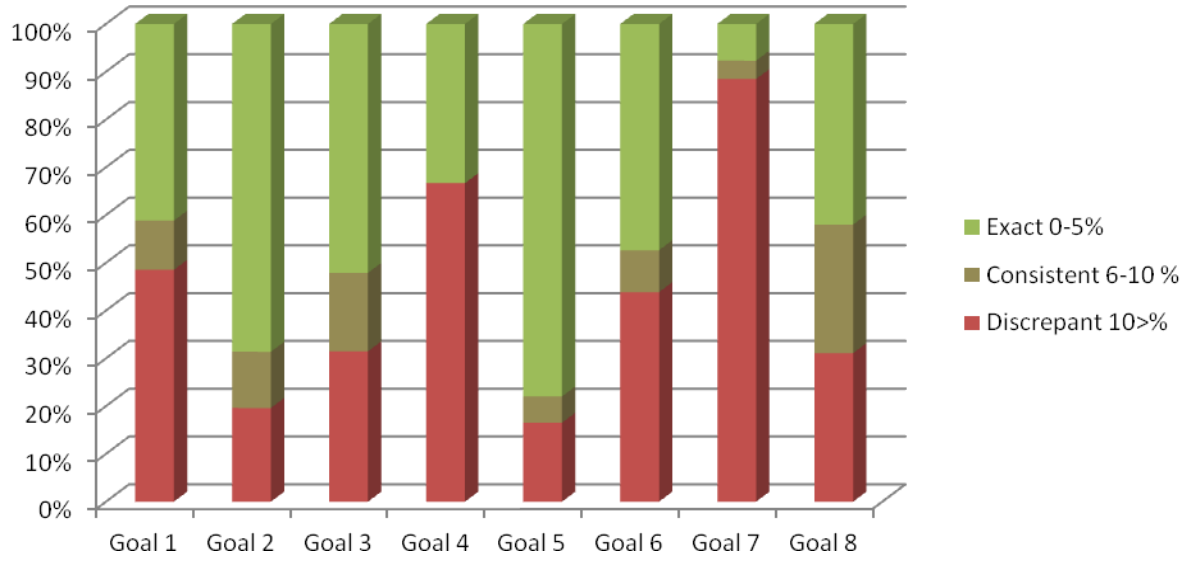
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability;
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality;
- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

44. Figure VI illustrates the level of consistency in value between national and international data by goal in 2012.

[7] Based on UNSD MDG database accessed in July 2012.

[8] Exact (margin difference of 0-5%), or consistent (margin of difference is 6-10%), or discrepant (more than 10% difference).

Figure VII. Discrepancy level between national and UNSD sources for available data points by Goal, 2012



45. Assessment of data availability by indicator/goal in international MDG database shows weak national capacity[9] to produce quality statistics in policy areas related mainly to: poverty, employment, literacy, maternal health, tuberculosis, water resources, and slum population as detailed below with number of countries not producing related indicators:

	Related Indicators (# countries)
- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	poverty (12) employment (10-12)
- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education	literacy (10)
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women	employment-women in non-agr. (9)
- Goal 5: Improve maternal mortality	birth attendance (9) contraceptives use (9)
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	tuberculosis (14)
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability	slum population (12) water resources (14)

46. Most countries do not report on some indicators which are considered not relevant to national context, such as indicators related to HIV/AIDS and malaria. Moreover, some indicators can only be measured by specialized agencies in collaboration with countries; such as access to essential drugs, consumption of ozone-depleting substances, and carbon dioxide emissions (CO2).

Example (10): A major cause of discrepancies in the Western Asia region is the use of the tanker truck delivered water category, which is not considered an improved source of drinking water at the international level because no information on the actual source of water is provided. (2009 Workshop).

[9] Capacity of member countries to produce relevant MDG indicators is measured by having 4 or more data points during the period 1990-2011.

47. It is worth noting that although some indicators are being produced by countries and reported on by international agencies, however, latest assessments made by some specialized agencies revealed that there is a need to improve national capacities in compilation and computation methods of some indicators, such as access to improved water and sanitation.

48. Moreover, specialized agencies resort to produce estimates and modeling based on different national sources, such as those related to UNICEF indicators related to infant and child mortality and their immunization.

49. It is essential for countries to compile, produce and disseminate disaggregated statistics including sex-disaggregated and rural/ urban data to enable policy makers to formulate effective strategies and monitor their implementation. The Division maintains a detailed list of available data points for each country by goals/indicators essential for a national plan to improve the production and a regional plan to provide country technical missions.

Example (11): Discrepancies are sometimes due to use of different units of measure. Such as some countries were reporting on indicators 7.8 and 7.9: The proportion of population using an improved drinking water source and the proportion of population using an improved sanitation facility, urban and rural, where the country was using percentage of households while JMP uses percentage of population. (2009 Workshop).

Example (12): A major cause of discrepancy in Indicator 3.2: Share of Women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector because some countries use erroneously the total number of women employed as a denominator different from that used by the international agency which is total employed population. (2009 Workshop)

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

50. It is essential for NSOs to be the official source of national data at the country level and, therefore, should be the national custodian for official statistics that lead the management of national databases. In order to do this effectively NSOs have to support data flows at sub-national and national level to the repository of databases under its custody, and enhance efficient transmission of data produces at the national level to a variety of national and global users through a well established data communication strategy.

51. The report addresses issues related to quality of data; mainly metadata and coordination. It also attempts to provide concrete recommendations on four main issues:

(a) Reconcile national and international data;
(b) Increase data production;
(c) Enhance coordination mechanisms;
(d) Improve reporting mechanism.

A. RECONCILIATION OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DATA

52. Reconciliation of data between national and international sources starts by reviewing current methodologies for imputations of MDG indicators to ensure harmonization with international standards. Those methodologies should be made available to all stakeholder providing a comprehensive description of definitions used, sub populations targeted, unit of measures and methods of calculation. It should also specify and refer to the original source of each statistics.

53. Publishing metadata with relevant indicators is essential to improve transparency, quality and dissemination practices in line with international standards. Moreover, development of national central repository of data along with metadata, user-accessible and friendly, would facilitate harmonization at the subnational level and like-wise at the international level.

54. Organizing workshops and/or producing handbooks and guidelines to improve the production and transparency of indicators and methodologies, and providing direction on recommended consultation

mechanisms, with a view to bringing the least-tracked indicators, in particular, into line with international standards.

B. INCREASE DATA PRODUCTION AND AVAILABILITY

55. Increasing data production and availability necessitate first and foremost carrying out the required surveys and censuses, and improving administrative registers for the periodic production of data on MDG indicators, other development data and country-specific indicators. In cases where countries do not have the resources or capacities to implement independent surveys, countries can supplement main surveys with modules, such as supplementing the Labour force surveys by household expenditure module. Or alternatively add module on employment in the household expenditure survey.

56. In selecting source of data when multiple sources exist, selection of best source should be the first criteria, and source with most available data should be the second criteria. When indicators are not available selection of proxy indicators available would be an alternative method of boosting production and availability.

57. Time series need to be completed for all missing indicators with available data, and publish latest data on regular basis in absolute figures along with indicators. Providing disaggregated data, where applicable, by age, educational attainment, geographical area, ethnic group, urban/rural and both nationals and total population would enhance the national data set and make it more valuable for policy makers.

C. ENHANCE COORDINATION MECHANISMS

58. To enhance coordination mechanisms among major stakeholder member countries need to enhance and coordinate data dissemination to and from specialized agencies and request concerned agencies to provide them with feedback on data adjustments made and final computations of indicators.

59. Establishing MDG focal points for better networking and improve the flow of information at the sectoral, national, regional and global levels.

60. Countries' cooperation is critical to make UN agencies efforts successful with regard to: (a) enhance the national statistical capacity of countries to produce the data needed for estimating the indicator; (b) develop national analytical capacity to produce good quality imputed country values for use by countries in their monitoring of the MDGs and other development programmes; and (c) ensure that all data available at national level are collected in a way that will be of least burden to countries.

61. Countries need to move from data dissemination to data communication and therefore there is an urgent need to develop comprehensive communication strategies.

D. IMPROVE REPORTING MECHANISMS

62. Actions to improve reporting mechanisms from national statistical systems to international agencies includes the following:

(a) To involve the regional commissions more extensively in data checking (discrepancies between national and international data series) and in channeling and following up on specific queries on data and metadata between national statistical systems and international agencies;

(b) To identify an MDG focal point inside the national statistical system for the coordination of official statistics on MDGs;

(c) To improve data sharing at the international level and better identify the leading agency and its specific data requirements for each substantive topic; and

(d) To establish a national statistical system website and database, thereby providing a single set of data (after reconciliation of all possible data sources in the country, including administrative records) and a calendar for dissemination of official statistics.

63. Taking this step would facilitate the use of official statistics in the international community and reduce issues of discrepancy between countries and international agencies.

E. REGIONAL ACTIVITIES: WAY FOREWARD

64. At the regional level, the secretariat will continue to implement the following initiatives in 2012-2015:

(a) Review and identify regional priorities and propose ways of improving the production and analysis of MDGs, including development indicators;

(b) Propose future courses of action, particularly in terms of recommending areas and modalities for technical cooperation and statistical capacity-building;

(c) Develop and maintain a regional central database derived from national databases and publications aimed at monitoring availability, tracking progress and planning capacity-building activities in focused statistical areas;

(d) Review and discuss mechanisms available to agencies for gathering data from countries, their methods of compilation of international data series and the imputation techniques used to calculate regional and global estimates for MDG indicators;

(e) Identify ways of improving compilation of regional data series by improving reporting mechanisms from national statistical systems to international agencies;

(f) Compile and review national metadata published in national central databases and make recommendations on ways of improving them;

(g) Review current methodologies for imputations and consultation mechanisms with member countries and recommend methods to improve methodologies, transparency and consultation mechanisms, both within countries and with international agencies.

65. The secretariat will also continue its work in performing data-quality checks, organizing workshops on MDG monitoring and providing access to methodological handbooks, including the translation of the handbook on MDG indicators and other related documents. The replication of these efforts at the national and subnational levels is also urgently required.

66. A regional plan for capacity building activities will be implemented in the following policy areas:

- Ensure environmental sustainability;
- Reduce child mortality;
- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

67. The regional plan will specifically address shortcomings in producing quality and quantity data for indicators related to:

- Poverty;
- Employment;
- Literacy;
- Maternal and child mortality;
- Diseases;
- Water and sanitation.

V. ACTION REQUIRED OF THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE

68. Members of the Committee are invited to review the present report, and to express their positions on issues raised, namely:

(a) Reconciliation of national and international data, including past and present activities by ESCWA and other organization and recommendations for the future;

(b) Role of the UN regional commissions (and notably ESCWA) in coordination and improving the reporting mechanisms;

(c) Review and make recommendations on the proposed way forward with respect to regional activities.

Annex I

DISCREPANCY IN MDG DATA BY COUNTRY

	Discrepancy level		
	Discrepant 10>%	Consistent 5-10 %	Exact 0-5%
Bahrain	56%	4%	40%
Egypt	54%	7%	39%
Iraq	27%	21%	52%
Jordan	29%	13%	58%
Kuwait	33%	0%	67%
Lebanon	40%	14%	46%
Oman	20%	13%	67%
Palestine	5%	21%	73%
Qatar	47%	16%	37%
Saudi Arabia	68%	4%	29%
Sudan	30%	15%	55%
Syria	18%	29%	53%
UAE	13%	0%	88%
Yemen	25%	21%	54%

Annex II

DISCREPANCY IN MDG DATA BY GOAL

	Discrepant 10>%	Consistent 5-10 %	Exact 0-5%
Goal 1	15%	8%	8%
Goal 2	5%	7%	10%
Goal 3	31%	38%	33%
Goal 4	1%	0%	0%
Goal 5	8%	7%	25%
Goal 6	12%	5%	8%
Goal 7	11%	1%	1%
Goal 8	17%	35%	15%
