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Advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda
for Sustainable Development: a collective vision
and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific
statistical community

Data and statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific: outcomes of subregional consultations on the collective vision and framework for action[**]

I. Introduction

1.   In Asia-Pacific, national and international statisticians and statistics development partners are crafting a vision and framework for collective action that seeks to accelerate a transformation of national statistical systems. The transformation envisions the organizations, processes, and people comprising the system as enabled and empowered to lead development of and to deliver innovative, trusted and timely products and services for the evolving statistical requirements of Agenda 2030.

2.   Collective actions would add value to ongoing and prospective national actions to hasten transformation of the relevant building blocks of the national statistical system in the form and substance called for by the vision. While building on existing commitments to statistics development at national, sub-regional, regional and global levels, these will serve as springboards for creating resources, designing activities and delivery mechanisms to attain the vision.

3.   Conceptualized under the guidance of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics, its Bureau and its subsidiary expert groups, as well as Asia-Pacific members of the IAEG-SDGs and HLG-PCCB[1], the collective vision and framework for action will be discussed at the 5th session of the Committee on Statistics in December 2016. It had been consulted and further elaborated during the Asia-Pacific Conference: Transforming Official Statistics for Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, held in Bangkok in August 2016. The Conference was part of a series of regional conferences that build on the outcome of the High-Level Global Conference on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics organized by UNSD and

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[*]   E/ESCAP/CST(5)/L.1.

[**]   The present report is being issued without formal editing.

[1]   High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Eurostat in January 2015 in New York, the recognition by the 46th session of the UN Statistical Commission of the emerging demands for high-quality statistics and the need for modernization of national, regional and international statistical systems.[2]

4.   Further, the ESCAP secretariat designed and organized sub-regional workshops on "Data and Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals". The workshops discussed national SDG readiness and options for integrating the SDG framework in national development plans and reviewed and provided recommendations and other inputs to the framework. The workshops have been developed to be conducted in five sub-regions throughout Asia and the Pacific, with countries grouped based on their working environment and how they are supported by sub-regional organizations and programmes.

5.   Thus far two such workshops have been conducted in (i) Greater Noida, India (5-9 September) and (ii) Almaty, Kazakhstan (26-30 September). A further three workshops will be conducted which will predominantly focus on South-East Asia, North and North-East Asia and the Pacific.

6.   The present document provides information on the design, delivery and outcomes of the subregional workshops.

II.   Objectives and design of the subregional workshops

A.   Participation

7.   Each country invited to the workshop was requested to send one senior official from the National Planning Commission/Ministry, who also serves on the steering committee for the Goals (where it exists) and is responsible for overseeing implementation of the Goals, and ii) a senior official from the National Statistical Office who leads the data work on the Goals. The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) of each country invited was also invited to send a representative from their office.

For the workshops conducted thus far, countries invited to each included:

Greater Noida, India	Afghanistan,[**] Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan,[**] Sri Lanka
Almaty, Kazakhstan	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran,[**] Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan,[**] Turkey, Turkmenistan,[**] Uzbekistan

[**]   unable to attend

B.   Workshop objectives

8.   The workshops have been designed to facilitate discussions and build capacity to translate into concrete terms the proposed regional vision and action areas into sub-regional and national level actions. Specifically, the workshops aimed to:

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[2]   The deliberations of the August Conference were further supplemented and confirmed by the "EECCA Conference on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics" co-organized by UNSD, ESCAP and other partners in Minsk in October 2016. All meeting documents are available at:
http://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/workshops/2016/eecca/lod.asp.

(i)   Provide participants with a clear understanding of the emerging SDG indicator architecture, data availability and links and implications to existing indicator-based monitoring frameworks[3] and build national statistical capacity to provide relevant data to monitor development progress;

(ii)   Facilitate consideration and formulation of national and sub-regional implementation strategies and actions of the proposed regional framework for action; and

(iii)   Support the development of appropriate indicator frameworks for SDG implementation by equipping participants with knowledge, skills and tools needed for a systematic identification of relevant indicators and assessment of data shortfalls due to inadequate disaggregation, reporting, resources and methodology.

9.   The workshop objectives were achieved by building on and sharing the results from the initiatives that have already been taken, to map availability of SDG data and indicators and assess national readiness for implementation of SDGs. In addition, the workshop provided an invaluable opportunity for countries to showcase their experiences on work progressed to implement SDGs, and thus learn from best practices to expedite the way forward.

III.   Outcomes from the India and Kazakhstan Workshops

A.   Development of the "Collective Vision and Framework for Action" document

10.   The first two workshops discussed the implementation of the "Collective Vision and Framework for Action" document, which was initiated at the "Asia-Pacific Conference: Transforming Official Statistics for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" in August, with a final draft to be presented to the 5th session of the Committee on Statistics for endorsement.

11.   The workshops requested countries to identify major challenges faced in implementing the 2030 Agenda, seeking feedback from the different groups represented at the workshop separately; planners, statisticians and UN agencies. Below is a list of key issues identified in the workshops, which were aligned with the development of the five key Action Areas of the Collective Vision document.

Action Area A: User engagement and investment in statistics

- Lack of statistical literacy amongst users

- Lack of financing to produce additional SDG indicators

- Insufficient communication with decision makers

Action Area B: Stronger national statistical systems and quality assurance

- Lack of legal framework to support SDG implementation

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[3]   Including but not limited to national development plans, sub-regional frameworks (e.g., from ASEAN or SAARC), and regional frameworks (e.g. UNESCAP's Disability and CRVS initiatives).

- Lack of coordination between agencies of the national statistical systems (NSS)

- Timeliness of available data to better inform decision making

Action Area C: Integrating statistics and innovation

- Lack of data standards/definitions/methodologies for SDG indicators

Action Area D: Modernizing statistical business processes

- Lack of access to technology to support new approaches

Action Area E: Skills and human resources

- Lack of statistical capacity within the NSS to accommodate the significant operational changes expected by the 2030 Agenda

12. In addition to the feedback above, the lack of international guidance on what was needed to be done and how, was raised as a major obstacle encountered by countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and incorporating the SDG framework in to their national activities.

13. As can be seen from the country reports on SDG implementation, countries are addressing implementation of SDGs in many different ways around the region, when there should in fact be a more common approach adopted. A lot of the work thus far done in countries with UN support has been to undertake an SDG gap analysis, which whilst useful, is limited in how much it assists countries with SDG implementation. It was reported that more guidance from the UN would be helpful on what sort of decision making process countries should go through in order to start accommodating the SDG indicator framework in to their ongoing national planning.

B. Overview of SDG readiness activities

14. During the first day of each workshop, countries were required to present the work they had undertaken in tackling their preparations for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and how this work was being aligned with existing national development plans. As such, countries reported on both the status of their national development plans, and what organizational arrangements and activities had been undertaken to implement SDGs.

15. All countries reported they have national development plans in place, and in most cases these plans had been updated in cycles for many years. Whilst the size, structure and composition of the plans were noticeably different, most were split into sections which were identified as "themes", "priority areas", "sectors" etc, similar to the goals and targets of the SDG framework. Not all development plans had existing indicators, and where they did exist, descriptions were limited, with often very little metadata explaining their computation. Matching such indicators to those currently developed in the SDG indicator framework is thus challenging to do with any level of precision.

16. At the time of the workshops, not all countries had established a mechanism to coordinate SDG implementation, although at least a department within the government had been identified to lead the

nationalization of SDGs. The ministries/departments chosen to lead this work included the Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Environment and Energy, and even newly established ministries as in the case of Sri Lanka with the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Wildlife. National Statistics Offices were included in countries where SDG committees had been established, and often tasked with data responsibilities identified during deliberations.

17. Approaches countries have undertaken thus far in readying themselves for SDG implementation vary significantly from country to country. Some examples include:

Workshop 1

- Undertaken a Rapid Integrated Assessment including mapping National Key Result Areas against SDG goals (Bhutan)

- Mapping of SDG targets to National Development Framework to assess relevance (Sri Lanka)

- Conducted National SDG localization workshops (India & Maldives)

- Working with the UNDP, produced a SDG readiness report (Nepal)

- Undertaken preliminary gap analysis for monitoring SDG, assigning Ministries/Divisions to take the lead on respective SDG targets (Bangladesh)

- Commenced work on baselines for relevant SDG indicators (Afghanistan)

Workshop 2[4]

- Developed a roadmap for development of statistics to support SDGs (Russian Federation)

- Developed thematic working groups in line with UNDAF to tackle the SDGs (Uzbekistan)

- Developed a separate reporting mechanism outside of national planning for 14 of the 17 goals (Georgia)

- Undertaken a self-assessment of SDG indicator availability, and commenced development of agreements with line ministries for exchanging admin data (Armenia)

- Working with UN agencies to map SDGs to the national development plan and implement a road map for SDG monitoring (Kazakhstan)

- Integrating SDGs in to all national 2020 vision and UNAPF, including a special department within the NSO to address and report on the SDGs (Azerbaijan)

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[4] The discussions and the outcomes of the Subregional Workshop in Almay were compiled in a paper "Considerations in strengthening national statistical capacity and readiness for monitoring the SDGs in SPECA member States" which was submitted to the SPECA Economic Forum held in Azerbaijan in November 2016. SPECA Economic Forum documents are available at www.unescap.org/events/2016-speca-economic-forum.

- Undertaken an SDG gap analysis of the data which can be provided by NSO (Kyrgyzstan)

- Undertaken an SDG gap analysis, and now looking to integrate SDGs into the national development plan (Turkmenistan)

18.   Given the status of the SDG indicator framework at the moment, in particular the large number of Tier III indicators which still have methodology issues to address, some countries are opting to integrate the SDGs in to the national development plans in a step-by-step process. This process will see them initially tackling those indicators of highest policy priority, which have been clearly defined with available data, with other indicators being added to the process as they become further developed.

19.   ESCAP Statistics Division undertook its own SDG gap analysis for those countries invited to the first two workshops, based on the statistical database managed by ESCAP. The results of this analysis can be found in Appendix A.

C.   Outcomes of the mapping activities between National Development Plans and SDG Framework

20.   In order to assist countries develop a national indicator framework which incorporates the SDG framework in to their existing National Development Plans (NDPs), a two-stage approach was introduced to map the log frames of the two together, covering the following:

Stage 1:   Developing/enhancing the coverage of their NDP by mapping SDGs on national policy priorities

Stage 2:   Developing a National Indicator Framework for the new NDP by mapping SDG indicators against the existing NDP indicator framework

21.   The reasoning behind this approach was that the mapping of the SDG Goals/Targets against the National Development Plan thematic areas provided a good opportunity for countries to assess and strengthen the current coverage of their existing plan. This would determine if additional areas needed to be added or further developed to enhance the current coverage of the nationally identified policy priorities, and also assist with the process of global monitoring.

22.   For the second stage, mapping the SDG indicators to National Development Plan indicators was only possible in the cases where countries had indicator frameworks to accompany their plans. When this was the case, countries were required to identify SDG goals of significance in their existing national development plan, and map the SDG indicators to the indicators in their plan. Additional exercises were then undertaken to expose participants to the thought process of what needs to be considered when the various matching scenarios arose, which included:

1)   Exact matches between the NDP indicator and SDG indicator

2)   Similar but not exact matches between the NDP indicator and SDG indicator

3)   Indicators existing in the SDG framework but not covered at all in the NDP

4) Indicators existing in the NDP, but not covered at all in the SDG framework

23. When no national indicator framework existed, countries were requested to map SDG indicators on the enhanced NDP, and adopt the relevant SDG indicators, or a variation of them, as appropriate to the countries priorities.

24. Some of the key findings to come out of this component of the workshop are summarized as follows:

Stage 1: Mapping of SDG Goals/Targets:

- Many SDG goals are not covered at all in national plans, which may be understandable in some instances, but a good opportunity of using the SDGs to identify possible areas of improvement in national plans.

Stage 2: Mapping of SDG Indicators:

- Lack of sufficient metadata for national indicators made identification of a suitable corresponding indicator within the SDG framework difficult

  o Metadata for national indicator frameworks supporting national plans need far greater development

- Disaggregation requirements for both the SDGs and national indicators need far greater clarification

- When examined closely (including the study of accompanying metadata where it exists), very few indicators match exactly between national plans and SDGs

25. The ADAPT tool developed by PARIS21 was used for this section of the workshop. Details on the ADAPT tool can be found in Appendix B of this document.

IV.   Recommendations

26. Based on the outcomes of the first two workshops, the following key recommendations have been identified.

27. Future assistance to countries with SDG implementation:

- There is a strong need for clear guidelines to be developed by the UN, which present a simple step-by-step set of recommendations on how countries can best incorporate SDGs into their national development plans.

- National development plans should form the platform of future work undertaken to implement the SDGs.

- To simplify the process of monitoring progress against a range of indicators from various frameworks at different levels, countries should aim to produce just one national indicator list, which clearly identifies which framework/s each indicator fits in, and

monitor progress against all frameworks (including SDGs) using this list.

- As a pragmatic measure and given pending methodological guidance for particularly Tier III indicators, countries can use the tier classification of the SDG indicators and data availability in further prioritizing their SDG implementation once policy priorities are set.

28. Future sub-regional SDG workshop activities:

- In order to have a concrete example of a National Indicator Framework, support the development of such a framework in/by a Southeast Asian country that will participate in the next subregional workshop on Data and Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals in Bangkok.
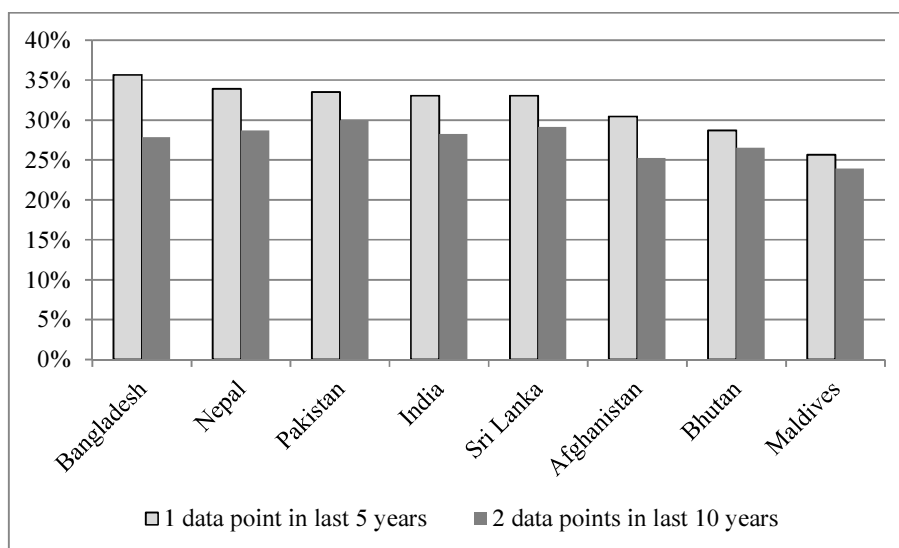
Appendix A
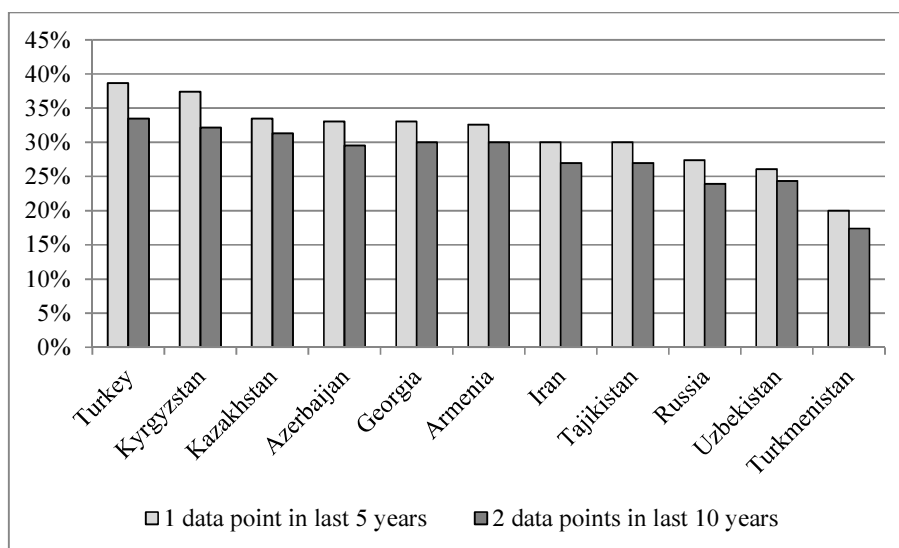
SDG GAP ANALYSIS

Percentage of the 230 SDG Indicators for which indicators are available, by country

The following two analyses show the percentage of indicators for which countries had "at least 1 data point over the last 5 years" and "at least 2 data points over the last 10 years". The analysis shows that countries were more likely to have the one data point in the last 5 years and this varied from 36 per cent in Bangladesh to 26 per cent in Maldives for the Workshop 1, and from 39 per cent in Turkey to 20 per cent in Turkmenistan in Workshop 2.
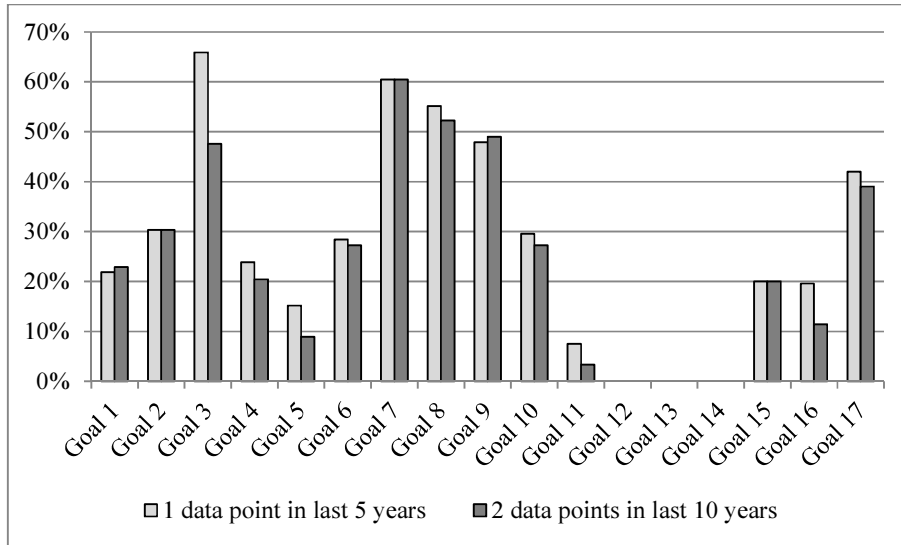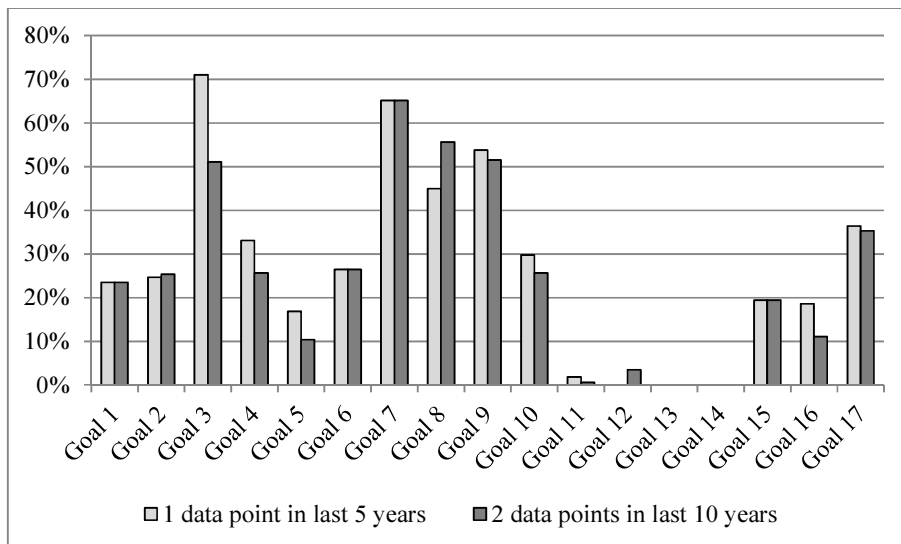
Workshop 1

Workshop 2

Percentage of available indicators for each goal (average across countries)

The following two analyses show the average percentage of indicators by goal for the first 2 workshops separately, for which countries had "at least 1 data point over the last 5 years" and "at least 2 data points over the last 10 years". As can be seen from this analysis, there is a major difference in the percentage of available indicators for each goal, with Goals 3, 7, 8 and 9 having the most indicators available, and Goals 11-14 having very little available.

Workshop 1

Workshop 2

Appendix B

THE "ADAPT" TOOL BY PARIS21

To facilitate discussions on SDG implementation with respect to mapping SDG indicators to national plans, the workshop introduced the newly developed PARIS21 tool, Advanced Data Planning Tool (ADAPT). The aim of ADAPT is to help data producers in the national statistical system consult, cost and chart their indicators as defined by the national development plan. The tool is aimed at target countries trying to meet the demands of global agencies monitoring the SDGs and put these in context with their own national priorities.

ADAPT is a web-based planning tool developed and supported by PARIS21. It is a consultative tool that brings development stakeholders together defining the measurement context within an indicator framework for monitoring development such as the SDGs, regional initiatives and national, sectoral and sub-national development plans. The tool allows for the identification of gaps in data, reporting, financing and disaggregation. Its completed form will also contain planning and costing modules that facilitate the planning of data collection and help advocating for better financing of statistics.

Whilst the tool has many useful features, it was only the aspect of creating an environment for storing and mapping indicators across a range of frameworks which was focused on during the workshops. These frameworks would naturally include the SDGs and indicator frameworks from national development plans, but also address regional indicator frameworks and sub-national indicator frameworks.

Countries were very supportive of the tool, and could clearly see significant benefits of a tool such as ADAPT assisting with identifying and summarizing all indicator requirements from the range of frameworks endorsed by countries at different levels. The countries also supported the mapping feature which enables simple identification of common requirements across these frameworks, and assist in the process of modifying indicator descriptions, where appropriate, to promote greater synergies.

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