

Key Messages from a Methodology Workshop on Unpacking the Data Revolution at the Country Level

Issue Brief for the SDG Open Working Group Informal Meeting on Measuring Progress

INTRODUCING AN INITIATIVE TO ASSESS MEASURING PROGRESS AT COUNTRY LEVEL IN POST-2015

Broad consensus exists that the post-2015 framework should include goals, targets and indicators, as do the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). But in contrast to the MDGs, the framework will likely be universal, applying to all countries, including developed countries, and afford them greater space to determine their own post-2015 targets, and the corresponding indicators by which they measure progress. To better understand how progress is distributed within society, the post-2015 goals also are to be measured in a disaggregated way.

To support this post-2015 framework, participants in the discussion have called for a “data revolution.” The revolution, it is hoped, will enhance the quality, quantity and accessibility of information available to monitor economic, social and environmental performance at the national and global levels. This should enable governments and decision makers to better track development progress and make more informed policy decisions, as well as equip people with the information and evidence they need to hold their governments to account.

To contribute to this effort, the *Centre for Policy Dialogue* (Dhaka) and *The North-South Institute*, (Ottawa) in association with the network *Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals*, are leading an initiative that will unpack the data revolution at the country level through an early examination of candidate post-2015 goals, targets and indicators. The initiative will **apply a select set of possible post-2015 goals, targets and indicators** to a number of low, middle and high income countries. In doing so, it will **assess the adequacy of data available for measuring post-2015 progress at the country level**, seeking to inform debates and decisions on the architecture and priorities of the data revolution. Researchers will also identify **opportunities and challenges that may arise from a universal, country-relevant post-2015 framework**. Furthermore, we hope to enhance the capacity of Southern think-tanks – who will conduct **country studies for Bangladesh, Peru, Senegal and Tanzania, and potentially others** – to contribute to the global policy processes shaping the post-2015 agenda, while also ensuring that the global processes are informed by country-level realities.

KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED BY THE INITIATIVE

Data adequacy, including disaggregated data , for measuring post-2015 progress at the country level;
Feasibility and relevance of selected candidate “zero” or “global minimum standard” targets in different country contexts;
Challenges of implementing a universal but country-relevant post-2015 framework , particularly from a measurement perspective;
Improvements in data quality, accessibility and transparency at country level and their drivers;
Potential of technology-enabled and non-traditional modes of data collection to support measurement of the post-2015 agenda; and
Different stakeholders’ expectations for the “data revolution,” including likely opportunities and constraints.

METHODOLOGY WORKSHOP

Plans for the initiative were discussed at a methodology and planning workshop in New York in November 2013. Supported by the *United Nations Foundation* and the *Hewlett Foundation*, the workshop was attended by statistical, research and policy experts from statistical authorities, think-tanks, UN agencies, universities, diplomatic missions and philanthropic foundations from around the

world. Participants provided detailed feedback on how to situate the initiative within the broader post-2015 and data revolution discussions, refine the methodology and maximize policy usefulness and impact. In particular, participants discussed data collection methods; selection of country cases and candidate post-2015 goals, targets and indicators; methods for examining baselines, data adequacy, and target feasibility; political economy dimensions of the data availability – transparency–accountability nexus; and the initiative’s implementation plan. A number of key messages arose.

KEY MESSAGES FOR MEASURING PROGRESS ON POST-2015
Goals, targets and indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of goals, targets and indicators should inform their selection. Though targets and indicators can be used to serve multiple ends – improvements to policies and planning, support for advocacy, public communication, global and national monitoring and generating greater accountability, for example – some are much better suited to particular purposes than others. • Global goals should be relevant and practical within specific country contexts. It is still unclear whether this means having the same targets for all countries, but different levels of ambition; or allowing countries to select their own, (additional) targets (and indicators) to reflect national priorities under a given goal area. • Traditional and emerging drivers of change should inform the selection of targets and indicators. Factors that have led to policy changes, better planning and impact on the ground in the past should inform the post-2015 measurement framework. • Technical criteria are needed for target and indicator selection. In addition to reflecting policy priorities, targets should be clear, well-defined and measurable with a view to driving change.
Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National priorities and data needs. Targets and indicators at country level should reflect national priorities as the primary criteria for their inclusion – not data availability. Indicator selection can drive data collection. • Global comparability matters for global monitoring, but may constrain national monitoring. Policymakers should be careful about the emphasis placed on comparability across national data sets. The post-2015 framework could provide space for national level data tailored to national monitoring efforts. • Consider what “good enough” data looks like. What is the minimum standard for the data that will inform the post-2015 monitoring process, given resource constraints?
Technology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need to unpack how technological innovations can play a role in measuring progress on post-2015. While it has a role to play, the collection of data through technological innovations, such as cell devices, is not a substitute for greater statistical capacity at country level.
Transparency and accountability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who drives the agenda on data collection and statistical capacity at country-level? Who funds the collection of data and what is the role of national statistical offices? These issues have important implications for building institutional capacity and for the types of data collected. It will be critical that global monitoring efforts on the post-2015 framework do not undermine national efforts (and incentives at the country level) for improved statistical capacity to measure progress on national priorities. • Consider how to generate use of and demand for better data. How can data be harnessed in the service of people? Citizens, civil society groups, journalists, academics and the private sector play an important role in completing the accountability cycle in the context of the data revolution by making use of available data to hold governments and relevant global entities to account. However, these groups may not be aware that data is available, or data that is available may not be accessible, and groups may not know how to effectively interpret it. • Disaggregate data collection is a political challenge. Generation of disaggregate data, particularly for excluded populations, may be a difficult exercise given the potential policy changes it will necessitate, and their implications. • Data and information as transparency and accountability tools. Improved and real time data will enable individuals and institutions not only to monitor the implementation of the post-2015, but also effectively hold relevant national and international entities responsible.