



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
6 November 2012

Original: English

## Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Committee on Statistics

### Third session

Bangkok, 12-14 December 2012

Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda\*

### Global initiatives: Monitoring the development agenda beyond 2015

## Advancing the global development agenda beyond 2015: Potential contributions by national statistical systems\*\*

### Note by the secretariat

#### Summary

The present document provides an overview of the ongoing processes of the United Nations system and national, regional and global consultations to define the global development agenda beyond 2015. Particular focus is placed on the role of statistics in progress monitoring.

It is highlighted that processes and consultations offer opportunities for the statistical community to contribute to the shaping of the global development agenda, ensuring that appropriate and practical measurements are developed for its monitoring. It underlines the need for the statistical community to be prepared to provide support to the implementation of the development agenda once defined by ensuring that statistics are available for monitoring progress towards its implementation.

The Committee may wish to comment on possible mechanisms to ensure the engagement of national statistical systems in shaping and monitoring the post-2015 development agenda, and the possible role of the Committee in this regard.

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\* E/ESCAP/CST(3)/L.1/Rev.1.

\*\* Late submission due to the timing of expert consultations.

## **I. Introduction**

1. The Millennium Development Goals have served as a shared framework for global action and cooperation on development since 2000. As the world approaches 2015, the overall target date for achieving the Goals, many discussions are taking place on how to advance the global development agenda beyond 2015.

2. At the September 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, Member States initiated steps towards advancing the development agenda beyond 2015, and are now leading a process of open, inclusive consultations. Civil society organizations from all over the world have also begun to engage in the post-2015 process, with academia and other research institutions, including think tanks, being particularly active.

3. The discussions held thus far indicate that statistics will play a prominent role in the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, as has been the case with the Millennium Development Goals. As such, it is critical for national statistical systems to engage themselves in the dialogue on shaping the post-2015 development agenda so that the choice of indicators, target setting, as well as the analysis of progress meet rigorous technical standards and take into consideration the capacities and challenges of national statistical systems. Such engagement will enable statisticians to fully understand the demands of users and hence be prepared to provide the necessary support.

4. The present document provides an overview of the ongoing processes of the United Nations system and national, regional and global consultations to define the global development agenda beyond 2015. Particular focus is placed on the role of statistics in monitoring progress. It is highlighted that processes and consultations offer opportunities for the statistical community to contribute to the shaping of the global development agenda and align the services of national statistical systems to support the implementation of the agenda.

## **II. Processes to advance the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015**

5. Broad consultations will continue through the fall of 2013 with the aim of reaching an intergovernmental consensus on the purpose and scope of the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. In the following step, negotiations will be centred on the identification of concrete goals and targets, with an open and inclusive process being maintained.

6. The consultations present opportunities for the national and international statistical communities to contribute to the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda.

### **A. Follow-up to the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development**

7. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012, issued an outcome document entitled "The future we want". In the document, which was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution

66/288, Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives renewed their political commitment to sustainable development and launched new initiatives to reduce poverty and social inequities while promoting economic growth and environmental sustainability.

8. The outcomes of Rio+20 highlighted the important role of statistical measurements and data in promoting sustainable development and recognized that goals, targets and indicators, including, when appropriate, gender-sensitive indicators, are valuable in measuring and accelerating progress towards the objectives of sustainable development. It is envisioned that timely, accurate and transparent statistics will play a key role in addressing such issues as food security, urban planning, population dynamics, informal settlements, health systems and health services, and decent work.

9. An important outcome of Rio+20 for the international statistical community was the recognition by meeting participants of the need for broader measures of progress to complement gross domestic product in order to better inform policy decisions. In this regard, Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives requested the Statistical Commission, in consultation with relevant United Nations system entities and other relevant organizations, to launch a programme of work in this area, building on existing initiatives.

10. In “The future we want”, Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives agreed to launch an inclusive intergovernmental process aimed at developing a set of sustainable development goals that should “incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development and their interlinkages” and “should be coherent with and integrated into the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015”. They recognized that progress towards the achievement of the sustainable development goals needs to be assessed and accompanied by targets and indicators. Building on the experience gained from the Millennium Development Framework, they agreed that the sustainable development goals “should be action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development”.

11. The process to develop a set of sustainable development goals is being spearheaded by a working group comprised of representatives nominated by member States from the five United Nations regional groups, with the aim of achieving balanced geographical representation. The process needs to be coordinated and coherent with the processes to consider the post-2015 development agenda. The Secretary-General is tasked with ensuring that all necessary inputs and support to this work from the United Nations system are provided, including by establishing an inter-agency technical support team and expert panels. The group is preparing a proposal on sustainable development goals for submission to the Assembly at its sixty-eighth session.

## **B. United Nations development agenda beyond 2015**

### **1. Progress monitoring in focus**

12. Through the discussions that have taken place following the above-mentioned High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly in

September 2010 on the development agenda beyond 2015, monitoring of progress and accountability for results have emerged as one of four broad areas of focus. Drawing on experiences and lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals Framework, these discussions have focused on various ways of measuring progress, such as ways of addressing inequalities, in part through the more effective use of disaggregated data.

13. The focus on progress monitoring and accountability presents both new challenges and opportunities for national and international statistical communities. Addressing inequalities and emerging challenges in human development will require statistics that go well beyond what has been required in the Millennium Development Goals Framework, which countries in this and other regions are still striving to fulfil. At the same time, it can serve as an opportunity for significant improvement of national statistical systems through investing in efforts to consolidate existing achievements and launching new areas of work.

14. The three other areas of focus are (a) the consultation process for the formulation of the post-2015 United Nations development agenda, (b) substantive themes for consideration, and (c) the format or design of the agenda.

15. There is consensus on the need for an open and inclusive consultation process that is led by Member States and engages all stakeholders. It is also agreed that support should be provided to least developed countries and poor or marginalized people to enable them to participate in the process. The importance of other intergovernmental processes informing the discussions has also been emphasized. Particular attention has been drawn to integrating the outcomes of Rio+20.

16. With regard to the substantive themes, support has been expressed for a post-2015 United Nations development agenda that builds on the Millennium Development Goals Framework and keeps the focus on human development, while addressing emerging challenges. The need not to overload the agenda is also being highlighted. Such a focus and format are also seen as critical for addressing issues of monitoring and accountability (see A/66/126).

## **2. Task Team on the post-2015 development agenda**

17. The United Nations Secretary-General has established the United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda to support the consultation process, coordinate system-wide preparations and define a system-wide vision and possible road map to support deliberations on a post-2015 development agenda. Launched in January 2011 and led by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Task Team brings together senior experts from more than 60 United Nations entities, including the secretariat and international organizations, to provide system-wide support to the post-2015 consultation process, including analytical input, expertise and outreach.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.un.org/millenniumgoals/beyond2015.shtml](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/beyond2015.shtml).

**(a) Task Team report: Realizing the Future We Want for All**

18. The Task Team submitted its first report, entitled *Realizing the Future We Want for All*,<sup>2</sup> to the Secretary-General in June 2012.<sup>3</sup> The report serves as a reference to (a) orient ongoing discussions and the broader consultation process taking place among governments, the United Nations system and other international organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector on the post-2015 United Nations development agenda, (b) inform the work of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons appointed by the Secretary-General to advise him on the post-2015 process and (c) provide technical inputs to the process for developing the sustainable development goals.

19. Reflecting on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals Framework, the Task Team has identified a number of lessons learned for the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. It has concluded that the format of concrete, precise and clear goals, targets and indicators should be retained, as it establishes a framework of accountability based on clear and easy-to-communicate goals, operational time-bound quantitative targets and measurable indicators.

20. The Task Team has emphasized that most of the Millennium Development Goal targets appeared realistic, which made them credible. This sense of realism should be retained, but balanced with the need to be more ambitious, especially in areas in which continuing along historical trends will not be sufficient.

21. In developing the monitoring framework for the post-2015 development agenda, the Task Team has suggested that a focus should be retained on the results, but the opportunity to address the issue of means — without being prescriptive — should not be missed. The new agenda might therefore include general guidelines for policy coherence without being prescriptive.

22. The Task Team also has emphasized that global goals that are universally applicable should allow for target settings at regional, national and subnational conditions in adherence with international frameworks, and

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations System Task Team on the Post 2015 United Nations Development Agenda, *Realizing the Future We Want for All*, June 2012. Available from [www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam\\_undf/index.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/index.shtml).

<sup>3</sup> The report was based on analytical work of working groups on: (a) critical assessment of the Millennium Development framework; (b) identification of emerging development challenges; (c) assessment of proposals and processes; (d) assessment of ongoing processes and area-specific development targets; (e) redefining the nature of the global partnership for development; and (f) assessment of possible formats for the post-2015 global development agenda. These groups prepared 18 comprehensive think pieces on issues related to: countries with special needs; culture; disaster risk and resilience; education and skills; employment; hunger and malnutrition; governance and development; health; human rights; inequalities; science, technology and innovation; macroeconomic stability, inclusive growth and employment; migration; peace and security; population dynamics; social protection; sustainable development; and sustainable urbanization. The secretariat participated in the work of groups (a), (b) and (e) and contributed to the think pieces on countries with special needs and inequalities. More information is available from [www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam\\_undf/them\\_tp.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/them_tp.shtml).

tracked with data disaggregated by sex, age and geography (including rural-urban location).

23. In the report, the Task Team has identified a number of challenges that have become more pressing since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration and did not figure explicitly, or were not adequately reflected, in the Millennium Development Goals Framework, such as persistent inequalities, food and nutrition insecurity, knowledge challenge, shifting demographics (sustainable urbanization and ageing), growing environmental footprints, peace and security issues, governance and accountability deficits at the global, regional, national and subnational levels.

24. Looking at the possible shape of the post-2015 development agenda, *Realizing the Future We Want for All* has made a number of suggestions, while recognizing that various consultation processes need to run their course. The report suggests that future monitoring should have a limited set of global goals that are to be tailored and adapted to national and regional contexts and initial conditions. It also suggests a longer time horizon for the post-2015 agenda, possibly from 2015 to anywhere between 2030 and 2050. In terms of formulating targets for monitoring, the report suggests using a combination of absolute and relative terms that account for population dynamics and different demographic structures across countries and regions and within countries as well as for prevailing inequalities and sustainability aspects.

25. The report also highlights that national measures of progress should be complemented with disaggregated data and qualitative information in order to gain a better understanding of factors contributing to and impeding progress in improving peoples' lives, underscoring that these efforts can build on existing household survey programmes, while promoting community-led monitoring, wider access to information and communications technology (ICT) resources and the use of social media for development.

**(b) Future work of the Task Team**

26. In July 2012, following on the Rio+20 outcome document, the Secretary-General requested the Task Team to support the intergovernmental working group that would be working to develop a set of sustainable development goals (see para. 11). The Task Team's involvement would ensure that the proposal "be coherent with and integrated into the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015".

27. To advance thinking in areas that require further analytical work, two working groups have been created to support the work of the Task Team: (a) Working Group on Global Partnerships; and (b) Working Group on Monitoring and Target Setting. The latter group will coordinate with a team established by the Inter-agency and Expert Meeting on Millennium Development Goal Indicators (IAEG), which is reviewing the Millennium Development Goals monitoring framework to draw lessons for post-2015.

28. The regional commissions are participating in the working groups and technical support team. UNDP and the regional commissions are tasked with ensuring the full engagement of country and thematic consultations with the regional consultations and providing updates on these efforts to the Task Team.

### **3. Regional and national consultations**

#### **(a) Regional and subregional consultations**

29. The regional Millennium Development Goals partnership of ESCAP, the Asian Development Bank and UNDP, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in conjunction with the sixty-eighth session of the Commission in May 2012, is spearheading subregional and regional consultations on the post-2015 development agenda, culminating in the publication of the forthcoming MDG Report 2012/13.

30. The consultations include a series of subregional workshops. Two of them have already been held, one was in Almaty, Kazakhstan in September 2012 for North and Central Asia and the other took place in Nadi, Fiji, in October 2012 for the Pacific. Two additional workshops are planned, in Bangkok in November 2012 for South-East Asia and in Colombo in January 2013 for South and South-West Asia. In addition, the least developed countries of the region will be consulted on their perspectives on the post-2015 development agenda at a regional meeting on the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action in Siem Reap, Cambodia, in December 2012.

31. The workshops are designed to gather views of policymakers and other stakeholders on major issues under discussion globally, such as development objectives and priorities of a post-2015 development framework, strategies for achieving the objectives, financial and human resources required, potential risks and vulnerabilities, a minimum regional social protection floor and regional and global public goods.

32. The workshops also serve as platforms for obtaining inputs on the development of a monitoring framework. Participants explore questions, such as whether changes are needed to the Millennium Development Goals Framework and structure to better address the post-2015 development needs, whether there should be domestically set priorities keeping in mind global aspirations and whether there should be a special focus on least developed countries.

33. Questions explored in the workshops also include the possibility of a tier system for monitoring. For example, tier I would include country specific goals, tier II would contain a regional minimum floor for all Asians, and tier III would include goals for global public goods. Discussions also cover options for resolving inadequate data.

34. Results from the consultations will be contained in the *Asia-Pacific MDG Report 2012/13* which is planned for release at a regional conference in Bali, Indonesia, tentatively scheduled to take place in March 2013, with a view to contributing to the deliberations and discussions by high-level policymakers from the Asia-Pacific region. The final version of the report is slated to be launched at a side event during the General Assembly session in September 2013, bringing Asia-Pacific perspectives on the post-2015 development agenda to the attention of the global community.

#### **(b) Country consultations**

35. In addition to the regional consultations, members of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) are facilitating post-2015 consultations in at least 75 countries around the world. The objective of the

country consultations is to stimulate an inclusive debate on a post-2015 development agenda by providing an analytical base, inputs and ideas that (a) build a shared global vision on “The future we want”, with clear recommendations for governments, civil society and broad stakeholders, (b) amplify the voices of the poor and other marginalized groups in formal negotiation processes and (c) influence the intergovernmental processes so that they align with the aspirations of civil society for a post-2015 development agenda.<sup>4</sup>

36. The consultations will facilitate the inclusion of the voices of poor people and those who are vulnerable, although the modes of doing this will depend on the country context. The United Nations Resident Coordinators will provide the strategic direction and guidance in order to ensure and articulate the participation of all different stakeholders in consultation with governments and other stakeholders.

37. Countries in the Asia-Pacific region that have been identified for UNDG support are Armenia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Turkey and Viet Nam. As the aim is to facilitate the largest possible number of country consultations, this list does not preclude support to other countries.<sup>5</sup>

38. UNDG is also facilitating consultations with academia, media, private sector, employers and trade unions, civil society and other decision makers to discuss thematic and cross-cutting issues in the post-2015 global agenda. Such consultations have been initiated in the following areas: inequalities; nutrition and food security; governance; growth and employment; conflict prevention and resolution; health; education; environmental sustainability; population dynamics; energy; and water.<sup>6</sup>

39. Many of the agencies represented in the United Nations System Task Team are participating in the thematic consultations. The Task Team, in consultation with the lead agencies for each thematic consultation, will identify the themes that require further analytical work, building on the “think pieces” prepared by it.

**(c) Convergence of Rio+20 follow-up and the post-2015 development agenda**

40. Efforts are being made for a convergence of the United Nations follow-up to Rio+20 and the process to advance the post-2015 development agenda. These include simultaneous consultations on sustainable development goals and the post-2015 United Nations development agenda and close interaction within the United Nations Secretariat in support of the two processes.

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations Development Group, *Post-2015 Development Agenda Process: Guidelines for Country Dialogues* (New York, United Nations, 2012), p. 13. Available from [www.worldwewant2015.org/file/273539/download/296486](http://www.worldwewant2015.org/file/273539/download/296486).

<sup>5</sup> See [www.worldwewant2015.org](http://www.worldwewant2015.org) for up-to-date information.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



### **III. Issues for consideration**

#### **A. Summary**

41. The ongoing and upcoming dialogues on the global development agenda, particularly on the formulation and implementation of the monitoring framework, present new demands for statistical systems at national, regional and global levels. While this is no doubt an opportunity for advancing many frontiers of statistics development, the dialogues should also be based on in-depth understanding of the existing challenges the national statistical systems face. It is also incumbent upon full participation of the national statistical offices in the dialogues.

42. These dialogues require full engagement of the statistical community in order to ensure that their outcomes, particularly those regarding target setting and monitoring, are based on sound technical expertise and first-hand knowledge of the realities of statistical work in the national context. At the same time, they stand to help statisticians gain a full understanding of the intricacies of the needs of statistics users, which, in turn, would enable them to set priorities to meet the accompanying needs for statistics.

43. The Committee may wish to consider modalities for participation in the various processes at the national and regional levels. Discussions on the post-2015 development agenda have identified issues that cut across diverse themes, including but not limited to economic, social and environmental sectors. Coordination among different parts of national statistical systems is thus critical to ensuring that the national inputs provided to these processes are coherent and that follow-ups are effective and efficient. The national statistical office may lead such coordination.

44. Members of the Committee may also wish to consider formulating regional inputs and perspectives to be channelled to the Statistical Commission.

#### **B. Actions to be taken by the Committee**

45. The Committee may wish to discuss and decide on possible mechanisms that can ensure that national statistical systems are appropriately engaged in country, subregional and regional level discussion on the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. This includes effective and efficient coordination among various parts of the national statistical systems.

46. The Committee may further wish to discuss and decide on possible measures for formulating regional inputs and perspectives and channelling them to such global forums as the Statistical Commission.

47. The Committee may also wish to discuss the role it could play in response to the request made to the Statistical Commission in the Rio+20 outcome document, which was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 66/288, to launch a programme of work in the area of broader measures of progress to complement gross domestic product in order to better inform policy decisions, building on existing initiatives.