



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

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

**Work of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and
Development on measuring well-being and fostering the
progress of societies**

Note by the secretariat

The Executive Secretary has the honour to transmit to the Committee a report prepared by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Summary

The present document provides an update of the ongoing work by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on its Better Life Initiative and highlights how the Initiative can potentially improve the measurement of well-being, and shape the global development agenda and related post-2015 monitoring framework. The present document also outlines several steps that the Asia-Pacific region can take to participate in the global endeavour to measure well-being. The Committee on Statistics may wish to:

- (a) Express its views on the relevance of the Initiative for the region and for achieving the 2020 strategic goals of the Committee;
- (b) Express its view on the suggestion that the Committee play a role in promoting and coordinating efforts in the Asia-Pacific region in pursuing the work on measuring well-being;
- (c) Express its support for the proposal to establish a regional Wikiprogress network and provide guidance on the concrete steps to be taken to that end.

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Work of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on measuring well-being and fostering the progress of societies

I. Introduction

1. Governments around the world seek to improve the lives of their citizens. Historically, gross domestic product (GDP) growth has played a key role in assessing the success or failure of policies to improve the lives of people. However, it is now widely recognized that GDP growth is only a means to an end, rather than a goal in itself, and that improving the lives of people requires a multidimensional perspective that looks beyond the mere functioning of the economic system and includes quality-of-life indicators. Developing a multidimensional economic perspective of what makes for a good life is therefore essential. This requires not only identifying the various factors that shape people's well-being, but also assessing them in a cross-cutting way, as many of these factors are strongly interrelated.

2. Since 2003, OECD has been working on these issues, and the outputs from its large body of work might be useful to inform the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda, most notably with regard to the collection of more accurate data on well-being, the methods of measurement and the development of a holistic development strategy. In the aftermath of a succession of OECD World Forums — held in Palermo, Italy, in 2003, in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2007, and in Busan, Republic of Korea, in 2009 — much has been achieved on the statistical front. What was, in the past, only a statement of intent and good wishes for better measures of societal progress has now been translated into a tangible work programme at OECD — a programme that is guiding present activities and shaping future policies. Individual countries have launched national consultations and established consultative round tables and parliamentary commissions with a view to come up with better measurements of well-being. At the regional level, the statistical office of the European Union (Eurostat) has followed up on a series of recommendations made by the Commission of the European Communities on how to move beyond the standard measurement of GDP. Collectively, the recommendations, which are contained

in a report titled “GDP and beyond: Measuring progress in a changing world”,¹ call on the implementation of a comprehensive set of actions that will modify the European Statistical System during the period 2013-2017. Regional networks to manage knowledge, disseminate research and advocate for better measures have already been created in Latin America, Africa and Europe in cooperation with regional United Nations agencies and civil society organizations.

3. The present paper describes briefly some of the key features of recent OECD work on measuring well-being and societal progress (Section II). It then outlines how this work might inform new thinking on development and help shape the post-2015 development framework (Section III). Finally, the paper suggests some of the steps that could be taken in the Asia-Pacific region to contribute to the global endeavour to measure well-being.

II. The OECD better life initiative

4. For nearly ten years, OECD has worked to derive better measurements of well-being and societal progress. In 2011, when the OECD Secretary-General launched the Better Life Initiative,² a critical point was reached. The Initiative, announced during the fiftieth anniversary celebration of OECD, provided visibility at the highest political level to the role played by the Organization in this field; it was also a key element in the rebranding of the image of the Organization in the direction of “better policies for better lives”, which was the central theme topic of the fiftieth anniversary.³ It includes useful tools that target different audiences:

(a) The flagship report, *How's Life? Measuring Well-Being*,⁴ which includes the first set of comparable well-being indicators for benchmarking and monitoring performance across OECD and key partner countries;⁵

(b) The Better Life Index, which is an interactive tool that allows citizens to compare countries' average well-being based on the headline indicators contained in the Report, and on user-defined preferences on the relative importance of the different dimensions of human well-being;

(c) Wikiprogress.org,⁶ an open-access-interactive platform that encourages information sharing on progress-related activities among entities that

¹ European Commission, “GDP and beyond: Measuring progress in a changing world”, communication from the Council and European Parliament (Brussels, 2009). Available from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0433:FIN:EN:PDF>.

² www.oecd.org/statistics/betterlifeinitiativemeasuringwell-beingandprogress.htm.

³ www.oecd.org/about/47747755.pdf.

⁴ OECD, *How's Life? Measuring Well-being* (Paris, 2011).

⁵ The Report was released on the occasion of a conference that was organized to take stock of the many initiatives; it followed the “Report by the Commission on the measurement of economic performance and social progress” convened by former French President Nicolas Sarkozy in February 2008 (Stiglitz, J.E., A. Sen and J.-P. Fitoussi “Report by the Commission on the measurement of economic performance and social progress”, Paris, 2009), which OECD made important contributions to. Available from www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/documents/rapport_anglais.pdf.

⁶ Wikiprogress is a global platform for sharing information in order to evaluate social, environmental and economic progress. It is open to all members and communities for contribution — students and researchers, civil society organizations, governmental and intergovernmental organizations, multilateral institutions, businesses, statistical offices, community organizations and individuals — and to anyone else who has an interest in the concept of “progress”. Wikiprogress was launched in beta on the 26th of October, 2009 at the OECD World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy in Busan, Korea.

are contributing to well-being initiatives around the world, such as civil society organizations, international and regional organizations, government agencies and academic researchers.

In addition, the Initiative set the tone for earlier forums and led to the organization of the upcoming OECD World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy, which was scheduled to be held in New Delhi from 16 to 19 October 2012.

A. How's Life?

5. Measuring well-being through a set of indicators requires looking at many aspects of people's lives, identifying how these aspects influence each other, and determining what shapes them. While there is no single definition of well-being, most people would agree that it requires meeting various human needs, some of which are essential, such as good health, as well as enabling all people to pursue their goals in order to thrive and feel satisfied with their lives. As well-being is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, assessing it requires a comprehensive framework that contains a sufficient number of dimensions that allow researchers to gauge how various dimensions of well-being interact to shape the lives of people.

6. The OECD approach to measuring well-being differs from the conventional approach that presently dominates policy discussions, in the following ways:

(a) The OECD approach places emphasis on households and individuals, rather than on the aggregate economic conditions for a country as a whole. This is important because as countries develop, large differences between changes in the country-wide economic situation and the conditions that are typically experienced by households and individuals may surface;⁷

(b) The OECD approach focuses on well-being outcomes, as this allows for the comparison of the overall performance of countries within a common set of domains. Measures of inputs, such as public spending, and outputs, such as volume of services delivered to citizens, are deemed as not pertinent for comparisons of performance, as drivers and policy levers used to achieve these outcomes will differ across countries and regions;

(c) The OECD approach places emphasis on the distribution of well-being across individuals, alongside averages. This is important when there are large disparities in achievements across population groups, when these disparities are correlated across dimensions, and when disparities are widening over time;

(d) The OECD approach pays attention to both objective and subjective aspects of well-being. People's achievements in objective dimensions of their life⁸ are obviously important, but so is subjective information on how people evaluate and feel about their lives, along with the factors that bear on it;

(e) A final distinguishing feature of the OECD approach to well-being is the emphasis on the sustainability of people's well-being. This requires

⁷ Some of the differences can be highlighted by comparing changes in GDP per capita and in other measures of household economic resources that are already part of the System of National Accounts, such as measures of household adjusted disposable income, expressed either per capita or per consumption unit.

⁸ These are aspects that can be reliably observed and measured by a third party, such as health status, nutrition or literacy.

looking beyond proximal, “here and now” well-being achievements to consider, first, whether these achievements can last over time, and, second, how policies and behaviours in a country might affect (favourably or unfavourably) conditions elsewhere. While measuring sustainability is much more difficult than measuring current well-being, statistical work in this area is presently being pursued in a variety of settings and is expected to lay the foundations for improved metrics in the future.⁹

7. The OECD approach to well-being and social progress has a number of features that distinguish it from other approaches in the field. The Human Development Index (HDI),¹⁰ provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is based on measures of economic conditions (gross national income per capita), health (life expectancy at birth) and education (mean and expected years of schooling). While the HDI has played a critical role in furthering the human development perspective around the world and focusing attention on the prevailing conditions in the least developed parts of the world, the range of dimensions considered by the HDI needs to be broadened if its goal is to capture issues that become more salient as countries develop, including in terms of their statistical capacities. To translate this perception into a concrete set of indicators, the Report articulates the concept of human well-being “here and now” by focusing on two main domains: material conditions¹¹ and quality of life.^{12, 13} The Report disaggregates the two domains as follows:

(a) Material conditions is disaggregated into income and wealth, jobs and earnings, and housing. The reasons that justify this selection are relatively straightforward. Income and wealth capture people’s current and future consumption possibilities. The availability of jobs (and their quality) are relevant for material well-being, not only because they increase people’s command over resources, but also because having a job provides the opportunity to fulfil personal ambitions and build self-esteem. Finally, housing (and its quality) is essential not only to meet basic needs, but also to create a sense of security, privacy and personal space;

(b) Quality of life is disaggregated into health status, work and life balance, education and skills, civic engagement and governance, social connections, environmental quality, personal security, and subjective well-being. Again, the rationale for this selection is simple. Being healthy is important both in itself, but also for performing a range of activities relevant to well-being, including work. Similarly, becoming educated is not only a common aspiration of people around the world, but also an asset for raising the living standards of individuals and society. Being able to reconcile work and life is important for the well-being of those who value having both a job and a family. More generally, being able to spend time on non-remunerated activities (such as care, leisure time) helps individuals to remain healthy and productive. Civic engagement matters for well-being, as it allows people to have control over their lives, while institutions that are accountable and responsive to people’s demands are critical

⁹ The final report of the international task-force on measuring sustainable development, jointly organised by the Economic Commission for Europe, OECD and Eurostat, is expected to be discussed at the plenary session of the 2013 Conference of European Statisticians’, which will be held in Paris from 6 to 8 June.

¹⁰ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2011 – Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All*, United Nations Development Programme (New York, 2011). Available from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2011/>.

¹¹ Material conditions relate to people’s consumption possibilities, or command over commodities.

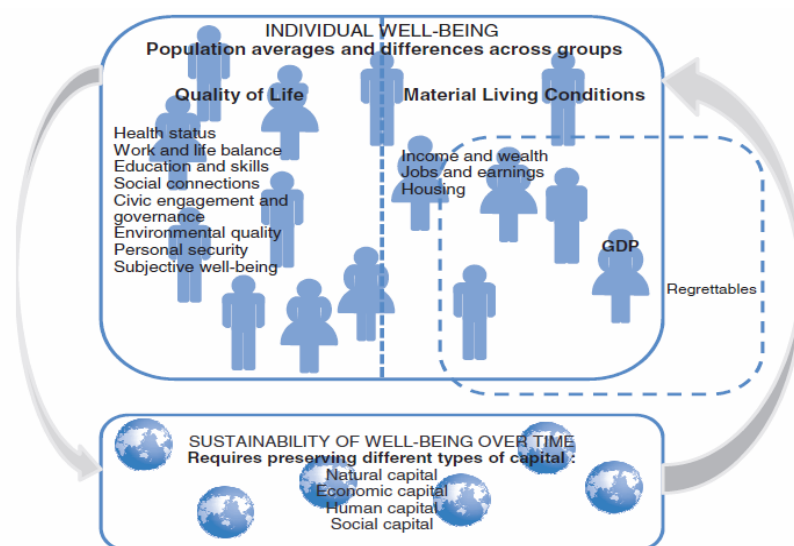
¹² Quality of life relates to those attributes of people that shape their “doings and beings”.

¹³ Amartya Sen (1999). *Development as Freedom* (New York, Knopf).

features of the good life. Social connectedness is a basic human need that also helps fulfil many other important goals, such as finding a job. The quality of the environment where people live affects their health and their ability to perform a number of essential activities. Likewise, a social environment where people feel secure and protected from all forms of violence is important to a good life. Finally, considering people's own evaluations and emotions is important for assessing whether they are satisfied with their lives as a whole, and if this is the result of objective circumstances or other factors.

8. Figure 1 provides a schematic presentation of the framework that is used by OECD for its analytical work. This framework is populated using a range of statistics that are already available for most OECD countries. The statistics are selected on the basis of policy relevance, data quality, comparability of concepts measured and survey questions used, and frequency of compilation. The selection of indicators is made in consultation with OECD experts and national statistical offices of OECD countries, and is conducted under the aegis of the OECD Committee on Statistics. While the chosen set of indicators represents — according to the OECD Secretariat — the best available proxy measures of outcomes within the different dimensions of well-being, not all of the selected indicators are equal in terms of meeting the above criteria. As a pragmatic solution, in the few cases in which the existing official data are not fully comparable across countries, the Report makes use of data from non-official sources, such as the Gallup World Poll,¹⁴ a survey conducted in about 150 countries around the world that is based on a common questionnaire, translated into the predominant languages of each country and designed by some of the leading global experts on well-being. Even though the indicators based on non-official sources are included in the Report as “space holders”, the OECD Committee on Statistics has initiated a range of activities that aim to further the statistical agenda in these fields and lay the foundation for more comparable official statistics in the future.

Figure
The “How’s Life?” framework for measuring well-being and progress



Source: OECD, *How's Life? Measuring Well-being* (Paris, 2011).

¹⁴ www.gallup.com/poll/world.aspx.

9. The second edition of the Report is expected to be released in the summer of 2013. OECD plans to use this and future editions of the Report as a vehicle for providing regular updates of the evidence on the various dimensions of well-being, reporting on the progress achieved in advancing the statistical agenda identified in the 2011 edition of the Report, and analysing in more depth specific aspects of well-being, or the achievements of specific groups. To achieve these goals, the first part of the 2013 edition of the Report will update the information available on outcomes in different dimensions of people's lives in various countries by looking at average patterns, trends and inequalities in the dimensions of well-being. The second part will look at more cross-cutting issues. In addition, three special chapters that focus on quality of employment, gender disparities and sustainability are planned for inclusion in the 2013 edition of the Report. Efforts are also being made to improve the selection of indicators and to expand their coverage to OECD partner countries, namely Brazil, India, Indonesia, China, the Russian Federation and South Africa. Also under consideration, is the possibility of conducting country-specific reports on well-being.

B. Your Better Life Index

10. To accompany the Report, OECD has developed Your Better Life Index, an online instrument that attempts to engage ordinary citizens. The Index is based on an interactive web platform that allows people to compare average well-being outcomes across countries, and includes the 11 dimensions listed in the figure.¹⁵ Through this application, users can rate the importance of each dimension, creating a personal lens through which to measure and compare well-being across countries. The resulting visualization provides a unique view of how countries perform according to the priorities set by each person. Further exploration of the topic and country pages provides an overall description of life in each country, and a point of entry to OECD reports for those who want to learn more about social and economic policies in their country. In 2011, the Index profiled the 34 OECD member countries. It builds on OECD strengths — measurement, analysis and comparison — and uses cutting-edge technology to give new life to the work of OECD; it also represents one of the first moves made by international organizations in terms of meeting public demands of growing engagement in this field. In addition, feedback received from Index users provides a fresh perspective from which to evaluate public policy and its implementation.

11. In its first year of operation, the Index website attracted more than 850,000 visitors from almost every country in the world (184), with more than 1.9 million pages viewed.¹⁶ The large traffic generated from new visitors who accessed the Index platform in 2012 (approximately 79 per cent of all users) and from non-OECD countries highlighted the enduring global interest in the Index platform, and the need to develop its reach beyond OECD countries. Usage statistics suggest that all of the 11 dimensions used to measure well-being (see Figure) resonate with virtually all users. Differences in the importance attributed to each of the 11 well-being dimensions are small when compared across

¹⁵ The Index platform allows users to rate the importance of each of the 11 well-being dimensions from 0 to 5. For each dimension, the Index platform uses information on the 22 headline indicators of average country achievements that are included in the Report. All of the indicators are first normalized between 0 and 1 and then combined for each dimension through a simple average.

¹⁶ As of 19 June 2012, the Index website was visited more than one million times. Geographically, most visitors were from OECD countries: Australia (40,000); Canada (65,000); France (86,000); Germany (61,000); Italy (43,000); Japan (27,000); Spain (29,000); Switzerland (24,000); United Kingdom (56,000); and United States (202,000).

countries, while they are larger when comparing women and men, and, to a larger degree, different age groups.¹⁷

12. The Index has undergone further development since its launch in May 2011. A new version of the Index, which aims to improve functionality and ease of use by visitors, and includes up-to-date and supplemental content, was presented a year later. In the development of the revised Index, emphasis was placed on improving the ability of users to share their preferences on what makes for a better life. To accommodate this, the following new features were added: the complete Index site is now available in French; data by gender have now been incorporated, allowing users to compare well-being outcomes between men and women; users can now compare their own choices of weights attached to the 11 dimensions to those of others by age, gender and country, and give feedback on their priorities through an extended survey; a Better Life blog, which emphasizes internal and external initiatives on measuring well-being; and country coverage was expanded with the addition of Brazil and the Russian Federation. Also five more indicators were added to the Index, others were modified and some were removed. Among those modified was the indicator pertaining to the cognitive skills of students, which was previously based on reading skills and now refers to skills in reading, maths and sciences. Among those removed was the indicator on the employment rate of women with children as information on this topic has been incorporated in the gender information in the employment data.

C. Regional conferences and the fourth OECD World Forum

13. The Initiative influenced the organization of a series of regional events, which were convened in association with a number of national and regional organizations and designed to feed into the fourth OECD World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy, which will be held in New Delhi, from 16 to 19 October 2012. The Forum, which is based on the theme “measuring well-being for development and policy making” aims to promote further discussion on the measurement outcomes on the different aspects that make for a good life today, in the future and around the world, and aims to promote the use of new measures of well-being for more effective and accountable policymaking. It is expected that the Forum will contribute to the discussion on the post-2015 development agenda.

¹⁷ Overall, life satisfaction, health and education are the three topics receiving the highest rank by users in all countries. On the other hand, community, income and governance are given the lower ranks. Differences in weights by country of users are, however, small, and may depend on the specific OECD indicators. For example, users may give a lower importance to governance not because they regard it as less important, but because the indicators used by OECD are deemed to be imperfect proxy measures of the variable of interest. Men and women vary only slightly in their preferences: men tend to give greater weight to civic engagement, income and health, whereas women weigh community, housing, work-life balance and life satisfaction slightly higher. Differences in users' weights are more significant when looking at their age: younger users (15-34) place more emphasis on work-life balance, income and jobs, while older users (over 65) weigh health and environment more. Findings also show that life satisfaction is the most important topic for users aged between 15 and 44 years, and health for users aged above 45 years. The 15-34 age group represents more than 55 per cent of the index survey responders.

14. OECD, in collaboration with the Partnership in Statistics Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21),¹⁸ has organized four regional conferences on measuring well-being and fostering the progress of societies over the past two years. They are as follows:

(a) The Latin-American Conference, which was held in Mexico City from 11 to 13 May 2011, was organized jointly with Mexico's statistical office (the National Institute of Statistics and Geography) and the Scientific and Technological Consultative Forum of Mexico, in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean;

(b) The Asia-Pacific Conference, which was held in Tokyo on 5 and 6 December 2011, was organized jointly with the Asian Development Bank, the Economic and Social Research Institute of Japan, Statistics Korea and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP);

(c) The African Conference, which was held in Rabat from 19 to 21 April 2012, was jointly organized with the OECD Development Centre and the High Commission of Planning of Morocco, in collaboration with the African Development Bank, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa;

(d) The European Conference, which was held in Paris from 26 to 28 June 2012, was jointly organized by OECD, the Italian National Institute of Statistic and Statistics Netherlands, in collaboration with Eurostat and the European Statistical System.¹⁹

The upcoming Forum agenda reflects the conclusions of the previous regional conferences on measuring well-being and fostering the progress of societies.

15. The fourth OECD World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy is expected to gather around 1,000 participants from all over the world, including policymakers, representatives from international organizations, national statistical offices, government agencies, academia and civil society. It will include a combination of keynote speeches, round tables, and themed sessions and be based on four session themes, namely, material conditions; quality of life; gender, life course and societal groups; and sustainability. The themes will be organized around parallel sessions involving speakers from different fields, such as policy analysts, statisticians, representatives from civil society and continents. The selection of the themes for the parallel sessions was derived from the conclusions of the various regional conferences. Discussions will be based on issue papers prepared by the Secretariat. It is hoped that, beyond advancing the discussion on the measurement side, the discussions in New Delhi will help deepen the debate on how better well-being metrics can be used in the policy process.

D. Wikiprogress and regional networks

16. Wikiprogress.org was launched following the conclusion of the third OECD World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy, which was held in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 27 to 30 October 2009, as a global platform for sharing information on well-being and progress. Its goal is to create a

¹⁸ PARIS21 is a global partnership of national, regional and international statisticians, analysts, policymakers, development professionals and users of statistics. It was founded in November 1999 by the United Nations with the aim to promote the development of statistical capacity and the better use of statistics among strategic players worldwide.

¹⁹ This conference was undertaken as a part of the European Framework for Measuring Progress project, funded under the European Commission Socio-Economic Sciences and Humanities Seventh Framework Programme.

web-community around a shared vision of the requirements for genuine societal progress. This goal is being pursued by creating a place where data and research articles can be loaded, visualized and analysed so that productive decisions about societies can be made at the local, national and international levels. The creation of Wikiprogress responds to a specific need and context. In fact, the discussion on the need to move beyond GDP is not new. What is new is that this discussion has moved beyond the realm of specialists and academics to involve policymakers, civil society and citizens at large. Wikiprogress has largely achieved its goal to leverage this bottom-up interest. Since its launch two and a half years ago, Wikiprogress has become the global online hub for discussions on measuring well-being and societal progress.²⁰

III. OECD work on development and the discussion on the post-2015 development agenda

17. The OECD work on well-being and societal progress described above may usefully contribute to the ongoing discussions on the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals agenda. Indeed, a number of voices have pleaded, in recent months, for putting the broad notion of well-being at the core of the post-2015 development agenda. This point was legitimized in General Assembly resolution 65/309, adopted unanimously in July 2011.^{21, 22} In the aftermath of resolution 65/309, a follow-up high-level meeting on “Happiness and Well-being: Defining the New Economic Paradigm” was held at United Nations Headquarters in New York in April of 2012. At that meeting, participants suggested a number of steps that could be taken to advance this perspective and the measurement agenda associated with it.^{23, 24}

²⁰ The beta version of Wikiprogress was launched on 26 October, 2009. Wikiprogress has more than 3,000 international editors and 60,000 unique visitors per month. It uses a variety of outreach mediums including monthly Wikiprogress eBriefs, a bi-weekly ProgBlog, Facebook, Twitter, daily Media Review and monthly discussions forums. The number of correspondents, content partners and Wiki friends is continuously growing. Its global scope, with local involvement around the world and key regional partnerships. Thanks to its new Regional Networks – currently operational for Africa, Europe and Latin America – Wikiprogress allows participants to manage the knowledge created in the form of data and research conducted in the region as well as to conduct activities with regional partners.

²¹ General Assembly resolution 65/309 acknowledges the need to promote sustainable development and achieve the Millennium Development Goals and, inter alia, invites Member States to pursue the elaboration of additional measures that better capture the importance of the pursuit of happiness and well-being in development with a view to guiding their public policies; invites those Member States that have taken initiatives to develop new indicators, and other initiatives, to share information thereon with the Secretary-General as a contribution to the United Nations development agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals; invites the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States and relevant regional and international organizations on the pursuit of happiness and well-being and to communicate such views to the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session.

²² In a similar spirit, paragraph 38 of the outcome document of the Rio+20 Summit, held in July 2012 (see General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex), invites the Statistical Commission to launch a programme of work in the area of “broader measures of progress to complement gross domestic product”.

²³ At the meeting, held in New York, the Secretary-General argued that GDP “fails to take into account the social and environmental costs of so-called progress” and stressed: “We need a new economic paradigm that recognizes the parity between the three pillars of sustainable development. Social, economic and environmental wellbeing are indivisible. Together they define gross global happiness”. Available from www.2apr.gov.bt/images/BhutanReport_WEB_F.pdf.

²⁴ Royal Government of Bhutan (2012). The Report of the High-Level Meeting on Wellbeing and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm. New York: The Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations. Thimphu: Office of the Prime Minister.

18. At the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting 2011, in which leaders and ministers assembled to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the organization, the ministers endorsed a new vision that stressed the role of OECD in contributing to better policies for better lives through, among other things, the implementation of a comprehensive approach to development and a move towards more inclusive policy-sharing. The ministers also reaffirmed their commitment to global development and endorsed a strategic framework, which outlines a broader development strategy for the Organization.²⁵ The OECD Strategy on Development,²⁶ which was endorsed by the Ministers in May 2012, is consistent with the Organization's founding goal: to promote development within and beyond its membership.

19. Measuring progress and well-being for development is an integral part of the OECD Strategy on Development. Implementation of the strategy will involve the undertaking of new activities in 2013 and 2014, in particular, the launch of a new type of multidimensional country reviews, under the helm of the OECD Development Centre. These reviews will analyse, among other things, performance on the key dimensions identified in the Report that are critical for the development of the reviewed countries. These key dimensions will be selected to reflect the priorities of countries.

20. Debate is also ongoing on the possible contributions to the post Millennium Development Goals. The OECD played a pivotal role in defining the Millennium Development Goals through the Development Assistance Committee, especially through its publication *Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Co-operation*,²⁷ which laid the groundwork for the international agreement on the Millennium Development Goals. While all international efforts should be activated to help countries meet the Millennium Development Goals deadline, it should be recognized that the context of development policies has changed tremendously since the Millennium Development Goals were established in 2000. The change in context of development policies can be traced to three factors:

(a) A shift of the centre of economic and political power away from OECD countries, and the corresponding ascendancy of the global South in an increasingly multi-polar world;

(b) The emergence of new global challenges, including among others, the need to develop a new growth paradigm for dealing with climate change and overuse of natural resources, to find appropriate answers to the new geography of poverty in an increasingly heterogeneous developing world, and to restore financial stability, deliver essential public goods and ensure better global governance;

(c) The need for setting global goals and standards that are fully compatible with country needs and priorities.

21. Several conclusions that arise from the ongoing work of OECD are relevant in this context. First, the distinction that is made between developed and developing countries is to a large extent the heritage of a bygone era. In its recent work on social cohesion and inequality, OECD has demonstrated that policies can make a difference in terms of providing equal opportunities for all

²⁵ www.oecd.org/newsroom/oecdministerialcouncilmeeting2011chairssummary.htm.

²⁶ OECD, *OECD Strategy on Development* (Paris, 2012).

²⁷ Available from www.oecd.org/dac/2508761.pdf.

citizens in society, which is an essential concern worldwide. Second, development is more than growth coupled with poverty reduction. While development policy should continue to have poverty reduction at its core, a holistic approach should take into account other aspects that make life decent and worth living, and should focus on the attributes of each individual as well as on how people relate to each other and live together within communities. It should recognize the importance not only of average achievements within each country but also of inequalities in each life dimension, and in particular, the plight of those who cumulate several disadvantages at the same time. Finally, it should recognize the importance of looking both at current conditions and at the sustainability of these conditions in the future, which is the focus of the OECD work on well-being.

22. One important consideration that follows from these points is the possibility to adopt a multi-level approach to goal setting. At the higher level could be a few goals addressing high-profile global public goods, such as climate and biodiversity, which all countries are collectively committed to deliver. These global goals need to take into account the varying starting points of each individual country. They should be flexible enough to adapt to specific contexts (especially for countries affected by conflict and fragility which experience the greatest difficulties to achieve the Millennium Development Goals), and they should address the responsibilities and capacities of different groups of countries. At the lower level are country goals to be defined at the national level (reflecting specified contexts, needs and priorities of different countries). The common element of these country goals are that they relate to outcomes, rather than specific ways of achieving them and to the common dimensions of a comprehensive framework. Indicators pertaining to goals will need to be complimented by other measures relating to the policy instruments used by each country, that is, the ways and means to achieve the agreed goals. A multi-level approach of this kind would provide maximum policy space for country ownership and the possibility of formulating additional/specific goals and targets for certain countries or groups of countries, such as fragile States.

23. The considerations made above are closely aligned with the thinking of the task team set up to support the 2015 United Nations Development Agenda. The team's report, which was issued in June 2012, advocated a more holistic approach to development and a global agenda with shared responsibilities among all countries.²⁸ Guided by the United Nations, the OECD stands ready to contribute to the process by highlighting its vision and potential contributions through its experience to promote "better policies for better lives" globally.

IV. Measuring and monitoring well-being in the Asia-Pacific region

24. The Asia-Pacific region can play a significant role in the global debate on measuring and monitoring well-being. Furthering this role was the main objective of the Asia-Pacific Conference on Measuring Well-being and Fostering Progress of Societies, which was held in Tokyo on 5 and 6 December 2011. The Conference was attended by 180 policymakers, statisticians, academics and other stakeholders from 30 countries across the Asia-Pacific region, as well as representatives from Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It highlighted a clear demand from participants for a new development framework with the notion of well-being at its core, and stressed the importance for the official statistical community to

²⁸ United Nations, *Realizing the Future We Want for All: Report to the Secretary-General* (New York, 2012). Available from www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post_2015_UNTTreport.pdf.

respond to this demand. The main conclusions, which are detailed in the final report of the Conference,²⁹ recognized the following:

(a) The global drive to move “beyond GDP”, highlighted by the recent United Nations resolution (sponsored by Bhutan and adopted by consensus) and by a number of country-specific initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region;

(b) The demand for a new development framework based on the notion of well-being, the need for the official statistical community to respond to this demand, and its possible implications for post-Millennium Development Goals discussions;

(c) The measurement of well-being goes beyond money income, requiring the consideration of both objective and subjective dimensions, starting from individuals but considering societal well-being as its final goal;

(d) The importance that the Asia-Pacific regional voice in the field of measuring well-being be conveyed to the fourth World Forum in New Delhi in October 2012, with proposals for specific outputs and future activities.

25. The Conference conclusions also highlighted a number of cross-cutting issues that are especially relevant to the Asia-Pacific region, such as:

(a) The importance of taking into account different spatial units (urban/rural, regions, cities);

(b) Recognizing cultural differences;

(c) Undertaking further research in a number of dimensions (subjective well-being, governance, social ties);

(d) Taking into account the large differences in statistical capacities across the region;

(e) The special role that the ESCAP Committee on Statistics will play to promote and coordinate efforts in the region;

(f) The roles of both official and non-official statistics, and of private/public partnerships;

(g) The active contribution from the scientific and business communities in the region, such as by creating a regional research network and a blog hosted by Wikiprogress;

(h) The need to engage and communicate with the public.

26. Given the current state of the statistical capacity in the Asia-Pacific region, implementing this agenda will inevitably take a long time, therefore efforts must start now and momentum must be maintained. The Conference conclusions imply a clear call to develop statistical standards in areas where they do not currently exist, and to undertake recurrent and timely data collections to support the implementation of evidenced-based policies. The initiative by the Committee on Statistics to develop a core set of population and social statistics, and to build capacities of all countries in the region to produce them by the year 2020, are a step in this direction. As the field is very large and statistical resources are limited, regional partners will need to leverage all information that

²⁹ www.oecd.org/std/Tokyo%20Final%20Report%20Generic.pdf.

exists, including information produced outside the boundaries of official statistics, making an investment to increase their quality as well. OECD stands ready to support this initiative, drawing on its areas of expertise and based on the priorities of the Committee on Statistics.

27. The Conference also recognized that one way to address some of the key measurement issues in the Asia-Pacific region would be the creation of a network, similar to those that already exist in other regions. One of the goals of this network would be to coordinate the integration of new measures of progress and well-being into official statistical systems. One of the outcomes of the regional conferences that were organized by OECD in Europe, Africa and Latin America was the establishment of such networks in the context of Wikiprogress.

28. With regard to establishing such a network in the Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP could take the lead in association with the OECD Development Centre and the OECD Statistics Directorate. The experience of OECD in this field suggests that best results are achieved by selecting, during the initial phase, a small number of key players who can participate in the network.

V. Conclusions and points for discussion

29. OECD has made unique contributions to the establishment of the tools, standards and monitoring mechanisms relevant to the measurement of development and well-being, and has generated ideas that have led to collective action at the global level. Consequently, OECD can usefully contribute to the call by the General Assembly for a more holistic approach to development through the Report's "well-being framework". While this framework has been developed to map the most important concerns confronting people living in developed countries and in key OECD partner countries, the feedback provided by participants to the regional conferences leading the way to the fourth OECD World Forum is that the dimensions identified in the framework appeal to people around the world, whatever the level of socio-economic development of the country where they live. While the key dimensions and specific aspects and supporting indicators pertaining to each dimension will differ across countries and regions (for example, ranging in the case of education, from basic literacy, to competences of students in compulsory education, to higher educational attainment and life-long learning), the framework provides a common language for well-being initiatives around the world, while respecting the unique aspirations of each country and region. A framework that is flexible should help all countries to address issues relating to the choice of indicators, selection criteria and other measurement issues that are specific to each region.

30. This stream of work provides OECD with a basis for contributing to post-2015 discussion. The global landscape has changed fundamentally since 2000, the year when the Millennium Development Goals were officially adopted, and with it our own understanding of the development process. With the 2015 deadline approaching, there is a need to reflect a new understanding of the development process into more suitable indicators, and to assess their suitability as explicit policy targets. The notion of well-being and progress provide a solid base for achieving these goals.

31. On this background, the Committee on Statistics may wish to:
- (a) Express its views on the relevance of the Initiative for the region and for achieving the 2020 strategic goals of the Committee;
 - (b) Express its view on the suggestion that the Committee play a role in promoting and coordinating efforts in the Asia-Pacific region in pursuing work on measuring well-being;
 - (c) Express its support to the proposal of establishing a regional Wikiprogress network, and provide guidance on the concrete steps to be taken to that end.
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