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## Discussion Paper

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# DATA AND STATISTICS: ROLE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MONITORING COMMITMENTS AND ACTIONS TO THE AAAA

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## Statistics Division, ESCAP



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## I. Introduction

The final chapter of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) highlights the importance of robust data for monitoring to advise the intergovernmental follow-up on progress and implementation gaps and to provide recommendations for corrective action. It stresses the need to link such a process to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its global monitoring framework.

This note summarizes the key commitments and actions relating to data and monitoring of the Addis Agenda as contained in the 2016 Inaugural Report of the Interagency Task Force on Monitoring Commitments and Actions in the Addis Ababa Agenda on Financing for Development (IATF)<sup>1</sup> and the related challenges faced by statistical systems in Asia and the Pacific. It provides examples of the synergies between SDGs monitoring and AAAA monitoring and illustrates that while the SDGs and its global monitoring framework cover many areas of the AAAA, monitoring the latter is a different exercise. The note concludes with an overview of the priorities of ESCAP for statistical capacity development in support of an overall urgent improvement of the data landscape in countries of the region.

## II. Data challenges implied by the commitments

The Addis Agenda commitments and related actions give importance to addressing well known key challenges in providing data for monitoring and follow-up and review. The overarching goal is to increase the *availability* and *accessibility* of high-quality, timely and reliable disaggregated data. *Data availability on issues specific to AAAA* including domestic resource mobilization, foreign direct investments, remittances and other private flows, official development assistance and other international public finance requires more attention. Towards this end, the strengthening of national statistical capacities through international cooperation, including technical and financial support is a commitment, with specific actions called for with emphasis on data *standardization* to facilitate analysis, use and sharing; *transparency* initiatives for publishing data and statistics on time and in an accessible language and format; and increasing *open* government data initiatives.

The Addis Agenda places official statistical systems in the central role of generating, disseminating and administering data for monitoring global commitments. At the same time, the Addis Agenda recognizes the need to supplement official data with data and analysis from civil society, academia and the private sector. For national statistical systems in Asia and the Pacific, there is already much to hurdle<sup>2</sup> in meeting the data requirements for the monitoring of progress of Agenda 2030 and its 17 goals and 169 targets. The important role of non-official data in monitoring the AAAA is well-reasoned in the Report; when held to the same standards of quality, interoperability and transparency, this alleviates the onus on the national statistical system.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Report\\_IATF-2016-full.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Report_IATF-2016-full.pdf). Accessed on 25 March 2016

<sup>2</sup> “Overcoming the data hurdle to attain the Sustainable Development Goals: opportunities for Asia and the Pacific”. [http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/INF5\\_Overcoming%20the%20data.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/INF5_Overcoming%20the%20data.pdf) Accessed on 27 March 2016

### **III. Monitoring commitments of the AAAA and the SDG Global Monitoring Framework: Close synergies but different**

The AAAA follow-up and review process is linked to the SDG process as it provides many of the means of implementation (MoI) for realizing sustainable development. Likewise, SDG targets relating to MoI reaffirm many of the commitments made in the AAAA. For example, the IATF Report details the specific data needs of the cross cutting issues contained in the AAAA and the related seven action agenda areas. The Report shows that many of the AAAA commitments are captured in the 169 SDG targets. These include financial resources and policy frameworks relating to the Means of Implementation (MoI) as well as social, gender equality, ocean health, R & D and data. The Report identifies the indicators for the global monitoring framework of the SDGs<sup>3</sup> that are relevant to quantitative assessments required for monitoring the AAAA.

While a large number of the SDG goals and targets are relevant to the AAAA, some of the SDG indicators, however, do not adequately capture elements for monitoring AAAA commitments. For example, total government revenue (by source) as a percentage GDP as an indicator of tax-related issues ignores issues of efficiency in tax collection and fails to track the causes of rising or falling tax revenue. The Report also shows that a number of the AAAA commitments are not covered by the SDG targets; these include domestic and international private business and finance, systemic issues and capacity building. Specific examples are data and indicators on domestic resource mobilization and illicit financial flows. Thus, *additional indicators for monitoring the AAAA* need to be developed.

In addition, the IATF highlights the importance of using qualitative measurements in areas where data is lacking. Take for example, monitoring actions to promote mechanisms to strengthen science, technology and innovation. Innovation funds, as a mechanism to strengthen STI, exist in a number of countries but assessing these initiatives is complex as they include very different practices with different implications for investment in innovation. Data are not readily available in many countries and lack of comparability complicates interpretation. The IATF suggests that assessments can draw on case studies, such as from the Asia Pacific region, where the ESCAP is monitoring national governments' efforts to nurture innovation and start-ups, and industry-academy partnerships.

In general, the Report encourages the use of databases and compilations of international agencies, barometers, perception surveys, monitoring reports of international commitments, case studies and private sector databases and opinion surveys to supplement the SDGs indicators and other quantitative measurements. For example, the Report notes that elements of the social compact are included in the SDGs focused on poverty, health, education, water and sanitation, energy, decent work and cities while building on three targets and the associated five indicators. However, it points out that these should be complemented by using data from other data sources such as the WB's ADePT, ILO's Social Protection database, Government Spending Watch, and the OECD's DAC Credit Reporting System. On infrastructure, identifying the infrastructure

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<sup>3</sup> At the conclusion of the 47th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission on 11 March 2016, government statisticians agreed on a list of 241 indicators (230 unique) as a practical starting point for a global monitoring framework for the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

gap by countries and sectors is particularly challenging as there is no universal database on infrastructure investment; the Report lists 17 databases, seven of which are not freely accessible, that cover different aspects of infrastructure investment.

#### **IV. Acting on data for monitoring AAAA in Asia and the Pacific**

##### **A. Data readiness is far from ready**

The SDG indicators have been classified according to their level of methodological development and overall data availability, for purposes of prioritizing further work on the indicators as well as capacity building. Initial applications of a 3-tiered classification show that 96 (40 percent) of the indicators are so-called Tier I indicators; i.e., indicators with an established methodology exists and data are already widely available. Of these, around 57 are available in the ESCAP database. These low numbers are indicative of a general availability issue in the region.

Findings of an ESCAP study on data gaps and statistical capacity constraints in Asia and the Pacific<sup>4</sup> in relation to SDG data requirements show that around 30 percent of the indicators can be produced by countries. The capacity constraints identified in the study are relevant to the AAAA. These may be summarized, as follows:

- The scope of national statistical programmes does not capture the breadth of development issues captured in the SDGs. For instance, cross-nationally comparable data are very limited for most of the indicators measuring water and sanitation (Goal 6), inequality (Goal 10), urbanization (Goal 11), sustainable consumption and production (Goal 12), climate change (Goal 13), marine resources (Goal 14) and peace and justice (Goal 16), where governments are yet to put in place dedicated and regular data collection and dissemination programmes.
- Current statistical surveys do not generate data with sufficient frequency, and the reliability of survey findings have been found by several studies to be questionable. More specifically, in a survey conducted in 2013, while 49 of the 50 countries reported to conduct the decennial population and housing censuses, only 36 reported to conduct agricultural censuses and 24, or less than half, conducted economic censuses. At the same time, about one-fifth of these countries do not conduct sample labour force surveys or establishment surveys.
- Administrative data, such as those from management information systems for taxation and business registration, are vastly underused as a data source for statistics production. And civil registration systems are dysfunctional or inadequate in a large number of countries.
- Statistics to capture a significant number of development issues are not governed by international statistical standards or guidance. These include intra-household distribution of resources, disaster-related statistics and agricultural productivity.
- Current statistics are not available fast enough to provide timely information for decision-makers. For example, a 2013 survey of 49 ESCAP member

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<sup>4</sup> “Overcoming the data hurdle to attain the Sustainable Development Goals: opportunities for Asia and the Pacific”. [http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/INF5\\_Overcoming%20the%20data.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/INF5_Overcoming%20the%20data.pdf) Accessed on 27 March 2016

States reveal that only 20 countries produce quarterly GDP, 10 countries produce monthly commodity price indexes and 15 countries produce annual productivity measures.

- Living up to the promise of “leaving no one behind” is severely constrained by the inability to provide data across relevant indicators on distinct vulnerable groups including indigenous populations, persons with disabilities, migrants, etc.

## **B. The road to readiness: ESCAP Commitments**

ESCAP is committed to two broad areas of action to support rigorous and evidenced-based follow-up and review of international commitments, including the AAAA: a) engaging the statistical community in a coordinated manner to ensure sound and consistent use of data, and b) integrating statistics development in national SDG implementation strategies for political commitment and investment required for sustained statistical capacity.

Making use of existing regional mechanisms such as the APFSD, the Commission, and the Committee on Statistics, include the following:

- **Advocacy for strong political commitment to and sustained investment for statistical capacity of national statistical offices.** ESCAP will continue to support the conduct of country assessments and applications of tools for estimating costs of statistical data collection programmes to be implemented under national statistical development strategies. ESCAP will work with the regional statistical bodies, including ASEAN, the Pacific Community and SAARC in policy advocacy and to adopt a harmonized approach to capacity building for statistics and data on the SDGs.
- **Promote increased use of data and statistics and regional knowledge exchange for follow-up and review.** ESCAP will prioritize its research and analysis work to underpin the delivery of technical assistance, training and norm-setting on matters related to follow-up and review. ESCAP will provide a regional database as the basis for analyzing the progress in the region towards achieving the SDGs and monitoring AAAA commitments. It will provide technical guidelines on the use of data and indicators in assessing progress. To promote increased use of data ESCAP will advocate for open government data and the application of transparency initiatives.
- **Lead norm-setting in areas of high and shared policy priority.** ESCAP will seek and build the synergies in monitoring progress and data work between the various regional agendas and the SDGs and the SDGS and the AAAA.
- **Galvanize and enhance partnership support.** ESCAP will capitalize on existing and upcoming networks and partnerships to broker and coordinate technical support to countries. These partnerships include the Thematic Working Group on Statistics under the Regional Coordination Mechanism. Focus will be given to finding solutions to data gaps in areas where these are most needed, including through the integration of new data sources such as big data and geo-spatial information.

## **About Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)**

ESCAP is the regional development arm of the United Nations and serves as the main economic and social development centre for the United Nations in Asia and the Pacific. Its mandate is to foster cooperation between its 53 members and 9 associate members. ESCAP provides the strategic link between global and country-level programmes and issues. It supports Government of countries in the region in consolidation regional positions and advocates regional approaches to meeting the region's unique socio-economic challenges in a globalizing world. The ESCAP office is located in Bangkok, Thailand.

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