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Review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific and issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific: statistics

Whole-of-society approach to building agile statistical systems

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Governments in Asia and the Pacific have committed themselves to advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community (E/ESCAP/CST(5)1/Rev.1) and in the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind, which was endorsed by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific at its seventy-fifth session, in 2019 (see resolution 75/9).

National statistical offices are facing growing demands for real-time granular data on diverse topics, which is essential for monitoring national and global commitments, especially those set out in the 2030 Agenda, and the ambition to leave no one behind. Meeting these complex demands, which are by their very nature multifaceted, requires a multi-stakeholder approach.

In the present document, the secretariat emphasizes the need for a whole-of-society approach to building agile statistical systems and explores how statistical offices can engage a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that data collection, analysis and usage reflect the needs and perspectives of all sectors of society.

The Commission may wish to take note of the document and provide further guidance to the secretariat on the achievement of the shared vision.

I. Background

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets out an ambitious path to addressing critical global challenges while leaving no one behind. To achieve inclusive economic growth, environmental protection and social equity, Governments worldwide have pledged to track and review progress in

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a transparent and accountable manner. In Asia and the Pacific, Governments have committed themselves to advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda in the collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community (E/ESCAP/CST(5)/1/Rev.1) and in the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind, which was endorsed by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific at its seventy-fifth session, in 2019 (see resolution 75/9).

2. In 2023, at the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly (Sustainable Development Goals Summit), Member States committed themselves to taking bold, ambitious, accelerated, just and transformative actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. In particular, they pledged to take action to strengthen data systems efforts to collect high-quality, timely, relevant, disaggregated and reliable data for better monitoring and policymaking.[1] Also in 2023, in parallel to the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, the initiative on the power of data[2] was launched as one of 12 high-impact initiatives to help bring Goal solutions to scale.[3] The initiative seeks to tackle the data gap and strengthen national data systems to accelerate progress on the Goals. It recognizes the need for statistical systems to transform and become more agile and inclusive to provide the evidence needed to achieve the Goals for everyone, everywhere. To transform statistical systems, it is key: (a) to build strong political leadership; (b) to mobilize investment; and (c) to strengthen partnerships. This emphasis on strengthening partnerships is also at the heart of efforts to promote a whole-of-society approach to implementing the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind.

3. In its resolution 79/1 of 22 September 2024, the General Assembly adopted the Pact for the Future and its annexes, the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations. In the Global Digital Compact, data are recognized as assets for use in advancing the implementation of other actions. It was also noted in the Compact that safe and secure data systems and capacity were critical for evidence-based policymaking and the delivery of public services; that underinvestment in public data systems and statistical activities could hamper progress in achieving sustainable development; and that quality data were critical for tracking, targeting and accelerating progress across the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as responding effectively to crises. Member States committed themselves: (a) to strengthen international cooperation to close the existing serious gaps on data for development; (b) to increase the public availability of data; (c) to increase financing for data and statistics from all sources; (d) to strengthen efforts to collect, analyse and disseminate relevant, accurate, reliable and disaggregated data; and (e) to develop open and accessible data systems to support effective disaster early warning, early action and crisis response. Underpinning those commitments, Member States would promote and support interoperability between national, regional and international data policy frameworks and request that a working group be established to engage in a comprehensive and inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogue on data governance at all levels as relevant for development.[4] Throughout the Global Digital Compact and the Pact for the Future is a commitment to engage inclusively with multiple stakeholders, which is at the heart of the whole-of-society approach to advance statistics.

[1] General Assembly resolution 78/1, annex.

[2] See www.data4sdgs.org/initiatives/power-of-data-unlocking-data-dividend-sdgs.

[3] See www.un.org/en/sdg-summit-2023/page/transformative-action.

[4] General Assembly resolution 79/1, annex I, paras. 43–45 and 48.

4. In the Medellín Framework for Action on Data for Sustainable Development, an outcome document of the fifth United Nations World Data Forum, held in November 2024, it was recognized that advancing the role of data and statistics required a whole-of-society approach to spur innovation, use, trust and partnership from stakeholders in both global and local data ecosystems. Building on the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data, 12 new priorities and actions were introduced to advance data-driven sustainable development and were aligned with the Global Digital Compact. The actions are to be implemented by an open-ended group of stakeholders of the data ecosystem, including a diverse stakeholder group of Governments, academia and professional bodies, civil society, the private sector, donor and philanthropic bodies, international and regional agencies, the statistical and geospatial community and the media.[5]

5. At its ninth session, held in December 2024, the Committee on Statistics decided to promote a whole-of-society approach to advance the implementation of the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind and to advance the development of national data partnerships and the establishment of national data user advisory groups to advise chief statisticians and to support the development of strategic visions for data (ESCAP/CST(9)/6, decisions 1 and 2).

II. Advancing a whole-of-society approach

A. Introduction

6. Advancing statistics through a whole-of-society approach acknowledges the need to include other stakeholders across the entire data value chain, from identifying issues to data collection, analysis and dissemination. A diverse set of stakeholders can be engaged, including government agencies, private sector actors, civil society organizations, academia, the media, the parliament and citizens. Using an inclusive approach ensures that data reflect societal needs and priorities while fostering trust, ownership and a sense of relevance. The following sections include an examination of various issues: engaging stakeholders to identify issues to measure; leveraging new partnerships to fill data gaps; building the data literacy of all data users; and making data accessible to all data users. Examples from Asia and the Pacific that illustrate successful practices and offer insight into this comprehensive approach are provided.

B. Engaging stakeholders to identify issues to measure

7. The first step of a whole-of-society approach involves engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to identify the key issues that need to be measured. Engagement with diverse stakeholders is necessary to ensure that the data produced reflect societal needs and priorities.

8. Many countries in Asia and the Pacific conduct multi-stakeholder consultations to determine national data priorities.

9. Statistics New Zealand has embraced a whole-of-society approach by designing data products together with users. Their framework on data for well-

[5] United Nations, Statistics Division, “Medellín Framework for action on data for sustainable development”, 22 January 2025. Available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/hlg/Medellin%20Framework%20for%20action%20on%20data%20for%20sustainable%20development.pdf.

being directly incorporates input from different stakeholders to address societal challenges such as inequality and environmental sustainability. By listening to diverse perspectives, Statistics New Zealand ensures that the data they produce support decision-making that improves lives and addresses the most pressing societal issues.

10. In the Cook Islands, a 100-year vision of well-being was developed through a collective effort that included government officials, non-governmental organizations and the Cook Islands Religious Advisory Council. The vision is supported by a 25-year framework that spans a generation and a more detailed five-year strategy and scorecard. An annual indicator report provides an overview of progress made in the country towards achieving its goals and objectives, as well as identifying areas that require improvement.

11. By utilizing diverse data sources and involving diverse stakeholders, decisions made using this approach are more likely to be equitable, evidence-based and responsive to the needs of all segments of society.

12. The examples contained in the present document illustrate the importance of actively listening to stakeholders and aligning data-collection efforts with the existing and future needs of society. Doing so ensures that the collection of data serves a clear purpose: that is, to actively support decision-making at all levels, from communities to local governments to international bodies. By continually responding to evolving needs, national statistical offices ensure that the use of data remains a powerful tool for addressing society's biggest challenges, thereby benefiting and improving quality of life for everyone.

C. Leveraging new partnerships to fill data gaps

13. Addressing multifaceted data gaps requires innovative approaches to data collection and the production of statistics. Traditional surveys and censuses, while essential, are no longer sufficient to fully capture the complexities of today's societal realities. To complement these methods, national statistical offices need to make greater use of administrative data from government agencies, such as those in the areas of health, education, labour and social welfare. They can also make more use of alternative data sources such as satellite imagery for measuring crop production; social media data for monitoring tourism trends; mobile phone data for tracking migration patterns; and web-scraped data for generating real-time insights. By integrating diverse data sources, statistical systems can produce more detailed, timely and granular data, which is particularly valuable for addressing cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, well-being, happiness, social cohesion and sustainability.

14. However, implementing innovative approaches to bridge these data gaps requires robust institutional and technical capacity, which remains limited in many national statistical offices. Addressing this challenge calls for the fostering of partnerships with private sector companies, technology providers, research institutions and local communities. Such collaborations provide access to data sources, advanced technologies and specialized expertise while ensuring that data privacy, security and ethical standards are upheld. Strengthening these partnerships will help national statistical offices to access new data sources and help to build the necessary capacity to process, analyse and disseminate high-quality statistics in a rapidly evolving data landscape.

15. In Indonesia, Statistics Indonesia has worked with a range of stakeholders to integrate earth observation data with ground truth data to

produce official statistics on rice production that better meet the needs of users and are more cost-effective relative to survey-based estimates. Training and capacity development support have been delivered by experts from academia and the private sector, together with the Commission and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. These experts conducted field visits to engage with farmers and rice paddy surveyors, gaining insights into the various growth phases of rice and into farming practices across Indonesia to further refine their statistical models for estimating rice production. The model has benefited from a whole-of-society approach.

16. Across the Asia-Pacific region, innovative approaches to community engagement and data collection are being used to address data gaps, strengthen the evidence base and improve Sustainable Development Goal monitoring. The importance of community engagement was recognized at the fifty-fifth session of the Statistical Commission, held in 2024. At that session, the Statistical Commission adopted its decision 55/117, in which it recognized the potential of citizen data to address data demands and bridge data gaps for Sustainable Development Goal monitoring and welcomed the draft Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data. The Statistical Commission requested the Statistics Division and the Collaborative on Citizen Data[6] to provide practical guidance and also requested the Collaborative to play a pivotal role in refining the Copenhagen Framework. The Statistical Commission also stressed the inclusivity of the Collaborative by welcoming members from diverse countries and stakeholder groups. This marks a significant step in embedding citizen data in national data ecosystems to ensure the inclusion of all groups in sustainable development efforts.

17. The *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2025*,[7] which is to be published in February 2025, contains several examples of leveraging community partnerships to leave no one behind, including the following:

(a) The Know Your City initiative[8] empowers residents of informal settlements to generate data, ensuring their needs are recognized in urban planning. This grass-roots approach enhances participation, advocacy and equitable infrastructure development;

(b) The Community Architects Network empowers Asia-Pacific communities to collect data for inclusive urban development through grass-roots participation, ensuring the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals and that no one is left behind.[9]

18. By partnering with local groups, these initiatives amplify the voices of vulnerable communities in decision-making and involve marginalized groups in data collection, which helps policymakers to address their needs. These partnerships have demonstrated tangible benefits for participants and their communities.

[6] Following the adoption by the Statistical Commission of its decision 54/102 (see E/2023/24–E/CN.3/2023/37), the Collaborative on Citizen Data was established to foster systematic collaboration among civil society, national statistical systems, academia and other relevant stakeholders to advance the sustainable coordination, production and use of citizen data to make an impact.

[7] For more information, see www.unescap.org/kp/2025/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2025.

[8] See https://sdinet.org/2018/10/know-city-process-platform-campaign/.

[9] See http://achr.net/upload/files/CAN%204%206%20REG%20Wkshp.pdf.

D. Building the data literacy of all data users

19. For a whole-of-society approach to succeed, it is crucial to build data literacy among data users and cultivate a data-driven mindset in all stakeholder institutions. Data literacy empowers policymakers, journalists, academics, citizens and other users with the skills to interpret data effectively, make informed decisions and formulate actionable questions that can lead to better policies and outcomes.

20. National statistical offices often have a wide range of initiatives aimed at schoolchildren, which include tailored workshops and educational programmes. Through these initiatives, students are introduced to basic statistical concepts, helping them, among others, to understand surveys, interpret data charts and recognize the importance of statistics in daily life. National statistical offices may also provide educational resources, including booklets, interactive games and digital content, to make learning about statistics engaging and accessible.

21. Furthermore, national statistical offices may organize contests where students can participate in projects involving data collection and analysis or in hackathons such as the United Nations Big Data Hackathon, held in 2022.

22. Some national statistical offices collaborate with media outlets to improve journalists' understanding of statistical data. Workshops and training sessions can help journalists accurately report on all areas of statistics, enhancing public understanding and trust in official data.

E. Making data accessible to all data users

23. Alongside building data literacy, national statistical offices are also making data more accessible for all data users.

24. Many national statistical offices are offering interactive dashboards that allow policymakers to visualize economic, social and demographic trends. These dashboards can provide real-time data and customizable visualizations, enabling quick and informed decision-making. Data visualization is critical for communicating complex information in a way that is accessible and actionable for different stakeholders. Effective visualization techniques vary depending on the needs of policymakers, businesses, citizens and researchers.

25. National statistical offices are enhancing data accessibility by providing information in open, machine-readable formats, such as through application programming interfaces, which allow users to seamlessly connect to data sets, facilitating automated data retrieval and integration into various applications and platforms. Alongside the data, national statistical offices also ensure that comprehensive metadata is included. Metadata provides essential information about the origin, definitions and limitations of the data, as well as the collection methods used, helping users to understand the context and reliability of the data.

26. The use of application programming interfaces allows developers, researchers and policymakers to access data sets in real time and integrate them into analytical tools or dashboards. This approach not only improves transparency but also empowers users to explore and use data effectively for evidence-based decision-making. By adopting these practices, national statistical offices are fostering a whole-of-society approach and improving the usefulness of data.

27. Many national statistical offices are also ensuring that key statistics are available in mobile-friendly formats. Simple charts and graphs that can be shared via social media make data accessible to the wider population, including those who rely on mobile technology for information. National statistical offices are also using mobile applications to make data accessible, user-friendly and actionable. These applications allow a wide range of users, from policymakers to citizens, to access and visualize data, helping to track progress and identify areas requiring intervention.

28. Some national statistical offices are exploring artificial intelligence-powered tools, such as StatGPT, to enhance user engagement and improve data accessibility. For instance, the national statistical office of Mongolia is piloting an artificial intelligence chatbot that helps users quickly find and interpret statistical data. The tool simplifies complex data sets by providing instant, easy-to-understand responses, thereby making official statistics more accessible to a broader audience. By leveraging artificial intelligence, national statistical offices can offer more personalized and responsive support to data users, enhancing the overall user experience.

29. By tailoring data visualization to different audiences, national statistical offices can ensure that data are both comprehensible and actionable, supporting better decision-making across society while also building the trust of different stakeholders.

F. Inclusive data management frameworks

30. The use of new sources of data requires strong data governance and data management frameworks, including clear legal mandates and robust practices, as well as quality assurance mechanisms.

31. The importance of a whole-of-society approach to developing equitable and interoperable data governance was recognized in the Global Digital Compact, which includes the commitment to promote and support interoperability between national, regional and international data policy frameworks and to establish a dedicated working group to engage in a comprehensive and inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogue on data governance at all levels as relevant for development. The benefits of sharing data and the need to facilitate safe, secure and trusted data flows are also recognized in the Compact.[10]

32. It is essential that inclusive data management frameworks adhere to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics in order to ensure data quality, reliability and public trust. The Fundamental Principles mandate transparency, impartiality and ethical conduct in data collection, whether the sources are administrative records, surveys, geospatial data or private sector contributions. This approach helps to protect against biases or political interference, ensuring the credibility and accuracy of official statistics.

III. Issues for consideration by the Commission

33. The examples contained in the present document illustrate the importance of engaging the whole of society at all stages, from the identification of issues through to data collection and data use. Actively listening to stakeholders and aligning data collection efforts with the existing and future needs of society ensures that the collection of data serves a clear

[10] General Assembly resolution 79/1, annex, para. 48.

purpose: that is, to actively support decision-making at all levels, from communities to local governments to international bodies. The examples contained herein highlight the importance of national statistical offices being agile and responsive to evolving needs. They also underscore the need to leverage emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, to ensure that official statistics are both inclusive and useful for improving quality of life.

34. By engaging diverse stakeholders across the entire data value chain and all components of the statistical system, a whole-of-society approach ensures that decisions and actions are equitable, evidence-based and responsive to the needs of all segments of society.

35. The Commission may wish to take note of the present document and give further guidance to the secretariat on the implementation of a whole-of-society approach to better bridge policy and data for inclusive and sustainable development.