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In focus

Without better evidence, the next development agenda will not be achieved

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As the post-2015 development agenda takes shape, the need to achieve ambitious reductions in global deprivation is drawing attention to the urgency of improving the measurement of development outcomes and establishing rigorous evidence of policy effectiveness. Moreover, there is growing consensus that reaching these goals requires defining responsibility among stakeholders for taking action, and establishing from the outset the expectation of accountability to the resulting development successes and failures. For accountability to be effective, countries will need to strengthen the institutions that generate the data and evidence they require.

In this emerging agenda, the role of a strong, public evidence-base in enabling accountability cannot be overstated. Making measurable progress towards development goals requires a strong national statistical system, led by an independent national statistical office, capable of measuring development outcomes through the collection of data on increasingly numerous environmental, economic and social issues. In this matter alone, the measurement gap is daunting: despite an ambitious post-2015 agenda, national statistical systems often still struggle to produce monitoring indicators for the 19 MDG targets. With the report of the High-Level Panel for the Post-2015 Development Agenda proposing 57 targets, and the zero draft of the Open Working Group on

the SDGs proposing no fewer than 169, the strengthening of national statistical offices has itself become a development imperative.

For accountability to be a catalyst for effective action, though, policy makers need more than better monitoring data. Accountability requires attributing actions to outcomes and confidently establishing causation—a complex task requiring rigorous empirical techniques in designing and implementing policies. Deciding between alternative programs requires strong evidence of whether or not—and, more challengingly, why—similar programs succeeded or failed in the past. Lacking this, even with excellent monitoring data, any proposed accountability mechanism cannot measure with confidence whether a particular policy contributed to or subtracted from the observed development outcome. Most alarmingly, despite the billions of dollars spent on development programs, rigorous evidence of this nature is sparse and policy makers often lack basic measures of program effectiveness.

Yet the data revolution promises to radically empower official statisticians to play a leading role in the production of both the monitoring data and the evidence required for effective policymaking. New technologies have led to a dramatic expansion of our ability to measure a wide range of development phenomena, which is opening the practice of development to the powerful forces of scientific, external

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observation. Decision-makers in public sector organizations are beginning to use well-designed policy experiments as tools for learning and designing effective legislation. New data sources open opportunities for national statistical offices to compile existing statistics with greater frequency and less cost. Taken together, these new technologies and methods provide an unprecedented opportunity for official statisticians to explore innovative ways of improving the statistics and evidence necessary for effective policymaking.

However, harnessing these new technologies and data sources presents challenges to national statistical systems. Setting global development goals requires comparable measures of development outcomes, as well as establishing common concepts and methodologies. Upgrading national statistical systems will require investing human and financial resources as part of a coherent strategy to meet the measurement needs of the next development agenda. Guided by its Committee on Statistics, ESCAP, as the most inclusive regional platform, is committed to facilitating regional dialogues and cooperation in the areas of new technologies, techniques, and data sources so that member States can benefit most from the global data revolution in their pursuit for sustainable development for all.

Announcements

New Director of ESCAP Statistics Division

Anisuzzaman Chowdhury joined as the Director of the Statistics Division on September 1. He holds a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Manitoba. Previously, he served as the Director of the Macroeconomic Policy and Development Division of ESCAP from July 2012 to August 2014. Prior to this, he was a Senior Economic Affairs Officer in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in the Office of the Under-Secretary General in New York. Before joining the UN, he was Professor of Economics at the University of Western Sydney (Australia) and taught at the University of New England (Australia), National University of Singapore and the University of Manitoba (Canada). He also often served as a consultant to the UNDP, ILO, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and the Islamic Development Bank. He was a visiting fellow at UNU-WIDER, the Reserve Bank of San Francisco and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore). Mr. Chowdhury has published nearly 100 scholarly publications and was the founding editor of the Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy. He is a regular contributor to the Development and the Crisis Debate on voxeu.org.

Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Asia and the Pacific

Co-organized by ESCAP, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, WHO, ADB and Plan International, [the Ministerial Conference](#) is taking place in Bangkok from 24 to 28 November 2014. The expected outcome is the adoption of a ground-breaking Ministerial Declaration and Regional Action Framework to initiate an Asian and Pacific CRVS Decade of action for 2015-2024.

Expert Group Meeting on Disaster Statistics

[The first meeting of an expert group on disaster-related statistics](#) is scheduled to take place from 27 to 29 October 2014 in Sendai, Japan.

International Conference on Big Data for Official Statistics, Beijing, China, 28 - 30 October 2014

[This global conference](#), organized by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and National Bureau of Statistics of China, aims to contribute to a better understanding of the issues surrounding big data and sharing of experiences. The purpose of the Conference is to give an overview of the ongoing initiatives of big data for official statistics at the international level; to work on concrete and practical examples of big data sources; and to share national experiences of building partnerships for big data projects. The Conference will be followed by the first meeting of Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics, which was established by the UN Statistical Commission in March 2014.

Committee on Statistics postponed until March

[The fourth session of the Committee on Statistics](#) (the Committee), originally scheduled to take place from 17-19 December, 2014, will now take place from 25-27 March, 2015.

The fourth session of the Committee is a unique and timely opportunity for heads of national statistical systems to influence regional action in preparation for implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. Moreover, increasing recognition of statistics as a vital component of development means that the range and complexity of issues requiring consideration has never been greater.

To assist the Committee in taking stock of these issues and the key messages emanating from the high-level events, thematic debates and interactive dialogues taking place in relation to the post-2015 development agenda, an [Expert Group Meeting \(EGM\)](#) will be convened to draw conclusions about their implications for statistics development in the region, and to put forward recommendations to the Committee for its consideration and decision at its fourth session.

The EGM will conclude on 10 December and will be followed on the 11-12 December by the tenth session of the Governing Council of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, which was previously scheduled to take place from 15-16 December.

Crime Statistics

UNODC, jointly with ESCAP Statistics Division, the Thai Institute of Justice (TIJ) and the Korean Institute of Criminology, is organizing a [regional meeting on crime statistics and victimization surveys](#) in Bangkok from 1 - 3 December at the Thai Institute of Justice. The meeting will bring together government representatives on crime and justice statistics with the objective of exchanging experience on methodological and institutional issues, discussing challenges to implementing victimization surveys, and assessing and identifying opportunities to address regional challenges regarding the quality, accuracy, accessibility, and international comparability of statistics on crime and justice, including inter alia those emerging from the post-2015 development agenda.

The 2015 Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) Global Conference

The conference will be hosted by ESCAP in Bangkok during 28-30 September, its first in the Asia-Pacific region. The Conference is a biennial global event that brings together over 200 high-level statisticians and experts involved in data exchange and dissemination. These conferences discuss the role that SDMX can play in modernizing official statistics. The organization of this conference is managed by nine partner organizations (ECB, BIS, Eurostat, IMF, OECD, UNSD, WB, and ESCAP) and the organization activities have already commenced.

Voices of the region

Interview with the Executive Secretary of ESCAP



Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, Executive Secretary of ESCAP, affirmed the central importance of [national statistical systems](#) in fostering good governance and implementing the post-2015 development agenda. She explained that the Commission's strategy to improve the production and dissemination of data, and to make production more adaptive and cost-effective, is squarely in line with the broader transformation needed in the post-2015 development context. In an interview with staff from the Statistics Division, Dr. Akhtar outlined her commitment to strengthening the use of development data in policy analysis, and to facilitating dialogues between the producers and users of development data, through the Commission's intergovernmental forums.

Dr. Akhtar highlighted the [data revolution](#) as an opportunity to transform the production and use of statistics for monitoring and accountability for development, with public-private partnerships bringing new potential data sources, higher frequency and more disaggregated data which allow for more carefully targeted policymaking.

Identifying sound [economic and social data](#) an "indispensable catalysts for regional integration," the Executive Secretary also underscored the role of ESCAP's regional statistical programmes as important platforms for collaboration, as countries and development partners build capacity to produce and disseminate comparable statistics on fundamental economic issues.

Dr. Akhtar also stressed the ongoing need to further develop civil [registration systems](#) in order to facilitate the compilation of the population and vital statistics that underpin many development indicators. She made the point that not only do civil registration systems constitute an important building block for forming inclusive societies and acquiring legal identities, they also facilitate more cost-effective collection of population and vital statistics, and have the potential to close a variety of development data gaps in areas such as maternal and infant health, gender and the leading causes of death.

Updates

Agriculture Statistics

Officials form training network supporting the regional strategy to improve agricultural and rural statistics

Twenty-one officials from government training, statistics and agriculture services met in Tsukuba, Japan on 2-4 September and established a [regional network of partners capable of supporting training needs as part of a global effort to improve agricultural and rural statistics](#). At the meeting organized by SIAP, the group agreed on recommendations regarding its role, functions and membership.

Developing a skills framework for agricultural and rural statisticians and training needs assessment tools

SIAP held [an expert group meeting on Skills Framework and Training Needs Assessment Tools](#) on 5 September 2014 in Tsukuba, Japan. Sixteen training and agricultural statistics experts from training organizations, universities and several international organizations recommended principles to guide the development of a skills framework for agricultural and rural statisticians and training needs assessment (TNA) tools and process implementation for assessing training needs for agricultural and rural statistics.

Economic Statistics

Vladivostok Outcome Statement calls for concerted action to implement international macroeconomic statistical frameworks

ESCAP in cooperation with the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation, IMF, UNSD and the National Research University Higher School of Economics organized the [High-level Meeting for Coordinated Implementation of International Standards for Macroeconomic Statistics](#) on 3-4 September in Vladivostok. The meeting brought together about fifty high-level officials from national statistical offices, central banks and ministries of finance of ten countries. The sessions focussed on the links between changing economic policy needs and economic statistics; the coherence among the macroeconomic statistical frameworks and; the recent updates to the standards on national accounts, balance of payments and government finance statistics. Country teams then discussed concrete mechanisms and strategies for mobilizing political and financial support for the implementation of the international standards and the draft Vladivostok Outcome Statement summarizing decisions and actions emanating from the deliberations. The Outcome Statement that was adopted at the end of the meeting will serve as reference at different international forums at the national level to guide the planning and implementation of the changeover to the up-to-date international standards.

Disaster-related statistics expert group formed

[ESCAP Resolution 70/2](#) mandated the formation of an Expert group on disaster-related statistics. The expert group consists of statisticians and disaster management experts from Governments, regional and international organizations as well as research institutes. They will begin to discuss and develop a basic range of disaster-related statistics at their first meeting in October 2014.

Gender statistics

Region-wide review of draft Core Set of Gender Indicators for Asia and the Pacific

National statistical offices in the region were invited to participate in, and coordinate at the national level, a region-wide review of a Core Set of Gender Indicators for Asia and the Pacific. The purpose of the region-wide review is to understand and ensure that the proposed regional core set of gender indicators adequately reflects the policy priorities in member States; and to gauge the preliminary status of data availability and national norms related to gender equality and women's empowerment at the national level. A survey questionnaire was circulated to heads of national statistical offices for the region-wide review, and they have been strongly encouraged to consult with relevant national stakeholders in responding to the review, so that the consolidated response from each country reflects the views of the entire national statistical system. The deadline for submission of the region-wide review was 25 September 2014.



Modernization

Strategic Advisory Body for the Modernization of Statistical Production and Services in Asia and the Pacific ([SAB-AP](#)) met at its second meeting on the 16 July in Bangkok. The members discussed how to drive and support changes towards the modernization of statistical production and services in Asia-Pacific and agreed on a strategy and a work plan for 2014-16. The priority areas are to include developing an advocacy strategy for modernization, big data, and testing of components of the global common statistical production architecture. The members also agreed to establish a technical level working group with concrete tasks and dedicated time to work on the priority areas. The SAB-AP

further met at its third meeting on the 15 September over a video-conference. Two new members from Indonesia and Singapore joined the strategic body. The members discussed and sought comments on the draft SAB-AP report to the fourth session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics and the draft Modernization Working Group (MWG) questionnaire to gauge NSO modernization readiness.



Modernization Working Group on Production, Methods, and Standards (MWG) was established by the SAB-AP at its second meeting on 16 July 2014 to ensure a more efficient implementation of its regional strategy. The Group has four technical level experts with members from Australia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Viet Nam. The MWG was tasked by the SAB-AP to develop advocacy strategy and prepare advocacy material for the regional implementation and adaptation of the architectures, tools and standards needed to support modernization in statistical organizations. The MWG created a questionnaire to gauge where NSOs are on the modernization journey and prepared a regional case study example of an NSOs using modernization standards. The group meets every two weeks in a video-conference.

Regional workshop of the PARIS21 project "[Informing a Data Revolution](#)" took place during on 17-18 July 2014 at UNCC and was hosted by ESCAP. The participants discussed the regional aspects of the process in preparation of a road map for the data revolution and were introduced to preliminary results of the country studies, inventory of innovations, and the metabase tool.

Population and Social Statistics

Strengthening data for formulating and assessing public policies of social inclusion in South-East Asia

ESCAP, in partnership with UNESCO, Trinity College Dublin and Melbourne University, is to implement a project to enhance national capacity in formulating and assessing public policies to promote social inclusion in South-East Asia.

Developing policy in this area has particular relevance for statistics and as part of the project a workshop will take place from 20-21 November 2014 in Bangkok to review tools for formulating policies of social inclusion including associated data requirements.

ESCAP and UNODC are working together to improve capacity in the region to produce crime statistics

ESCAP and UNODC are organizing in partnership with the Thai Institute of Justice (TIJ) and the Korean Institute of Criminology (KIC) a regional meeting on crime statistics and victimisation surveys to be held in Bangkok from the 1 to 3 December, 2014 and hosted by the TIJ.

The meeting aims to assess the challenges of producing quality crime statistics, including those emerging from requirements of the post-2015 development agenda, and to identify opportunities for regional activities and programmes.

Training

Improving Capability in Producing Official Statistics relating to MDGs Indicators, 18 August - 19 December 2014

In collaboration with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), SIAP began the 4-month Training Course on [Improving Capability in Producing Official Statistics](#)



[Relating to MDGs Indicators](#) (ICPOS-2) with 18 junior-to-middle level government statisticians from 12 statistical offices on 18 August 2014 in Chiba, Japan.

Sub regional technical training on work statistics and labour migration statistics for the Pacific Islands Countries

SIAP conducted the [Sub regional technical training on work statistics and labour migration statistics for the Pacific Islands Countries](#), from 28 July to 1 August 2014 in Nadi, Fiji, co-organized by ILO and the ESCAP Pacific Office in partnership with Secretariat of the Pacific Community, University of the South Pacific and Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific.

Statistical capacity programme for Timor-Leste

SIAP conducted the Country Course on [Basic Data Analysis and Statistical Report Writing for the Timor-Leste GDS](#) in collaboration with Philippine Statistical Research and Training Institute (PSRTI) and Timor-Leste General Directorate of Statistics (GDS) from 28 July to 8 August 2014 in Dili, Timor-Leste. This course is the second country course under a SIAP and GDS collaborative agreement on a statistical training programme for 2014, following the Country Course on Basic Statistics and Basic MS Excel completed in May 2014. Twenty-two participants participated in the course, including participants in the first country course,

senior officials from GDS and participants from other ministries in the National statistical systems.

E-learning courses on System of National Accounts (2008 SNA)

In collaboration with the Australia Bureau of Statistics, SIAP started the [Sixth Basic-Level e-learning course on the 2008 National Accounts](#) and the [Fourth Intermediate-Level e-learning course on the 2008 System of National Accounts](#) with approximately 200 participants registered. Both will run from 8 September to 7 November 2014.



Technical Assistance

The ESCAP Regional Advisor on Statistics has been working with the Laos Bureau of Statistics (LBS), providing assistance with the preparatory work for their upcoming 2015 Population and Housing Census, scheduled for March 1.

The LBS have just completed their household listing exercise for the entire country, and are currently preparing for their pilot test scheduled for mid-October. With nearly 30,000 field staff to be trained, a lot of work remains to be done before March 1, but with a committed team effort, all should be ready by census night.

News from the Pacific

The Third International Conference on Small Island and Developing States (SIDS) concluded on September 4, recognizing the importance of statistics for developing and monitoring policy. In its outcome document, the group called for strengthening statistical systems, enhancing data management, improving the application of international standards, and disseminating data disaggregated by sex, disability, and age. The group also called for developing enhanced measures of progress towards the SDGs to take into account the issue of vulnerability and resilience, issues critical to SIDS.

Calendar of forthcoming statistical meetings in Asia and the Pacific

Dates	Organizer	Meeting	Venue
27-29 October	ESCAP	The First Meeting of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific	Sendai, Japan
28-30 October	UNSD, National Bureau of Statistics of China	International Conference on Big Data for Official Statistics	Beijing
5-7 November	ESCAP, ECE, ESCWA	Inter-regional workshop on good practices in gender statistics (back to back with the Global Forum on Gender Statistics organised by UNSD (3-5 November 2014))	Aguascalientes, Mexico
20-21 November	ESCAP, UNESCO	Social Inclusion Policy and Data in Northern ASEAN http://www.unescap.org/our-work/statistics	Bangkok
24-28 November	ESCAP, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, WHO, ADB, Plan International	Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and http://www.getinthepicture.org	Bangkok
24-28 November	SIAP, CAPSA	Monitoring and Evaluation of Policy Options for Sustainable Agriculture, Poverty Alleviation and Food Security in the Post-2015 Development Agenda http://www.unsiap.or.jp	Bogor, Indonesia
25-26 November	SIAP, EU	(draft version) EU-India seminar on quality matters in national accounts http://www.unsiap.or.jp	Greater Noida, India
27-28 November	SIAP	Seventh Regional Workshop on Statistical Quality Management and Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics: National Quality Assurance Frameworks for National Accounts http://www.unsiap.or.jp	Greater Noida, India
1-3 December	ESCAP, UNODC, Thai Institute of Justice (TIJ), Korean Institute of Criminology (KIC)	Regional Meeting on Crime Statistics and Victimization Surveys	Bangkok
8-10 December	ESCAP	Statistics and data for the post-2015 development agenda: Implications for regional collaboration in Asia and the Pacific	Bangkok
9-12 December	SIAP, PARIS21	(draft version) Training on National Strategy of the Development of Statistics (NSDS) http://www.unsiap.or.jp	Chiba, Japan
11-12 December	SIAP	10th session of SIAP Governing Council http://www.unsiap.or.jp	Bangkok
14 - 18 December	SIAP	(draft version) Regional Workshop on Building Training Resources for Improving Agricultural and Rural Statistics: Survey Methods for Agricultural Statistics - Current Practices and International Recommendations http://www.unsiap.or.jp	Tehran
26 - 30 January 2015	SIAP	Regional Course on Statistical Business Registers: Making a Business Case for an Operational Statistical Business Register http://www.unsiap.or.jp	Perak, Malaysia
25-27 March 2015	ESCAP	Committee on Statistics, Fourth session	Bangkok