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RUSSIAN FEDERATION FEDERAL STATE STATISTICS SERVICE

NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

**Inception Workshop for the project Strengthening research and studies
for improved quality of SDG statistics in Central Asia**

8-10 May 2019

CR-4, United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok, Thailand

Report of the Workshop

I. Introduction

1. The inception workshop was held at the United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok, Thailand, from 8-10 May 2019. The workshop was organized by the Statistics Division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in collaboration with the Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) and the National Research University Higher School of Economics (NRU HSE).
2. The workshop was attended by senior officials involved in the monitoring of progress towards the SDGs from national statistical offices and planning ministries in Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) participated as resource persons.
3. The aim of the project, which was funded by the Russian Federation, was to strengthen the capacity of the countries of Central Asia to produce data for priority Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators through the development of training material, including in Russian, and the subsequent design and delivery of training courses through face-to-face and/or e-learning modalities. In this context, the objectives of the workshop were to agree on priorities for indicators and/or thematic areas, data sources, as well as training beneficiaries, levels and modalities. The workshop was divided into nine sessions over the course of three days.

II. Session 1 and 2: Opening and Introduction of the workshop

4. The workshop was opened with remarks by Ms. Gemma Van Halderen, Director, ESCAP Statistics Division, followed by opening remarks from Mr. Sergey Egorenko, Deputy Head, Rosstat, and Mr. Oleg A. Shamanov, Minister Counsellor and Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to ESCAP. The remarks were followed by a round of introductions of participants.

III. Session 3: Towards improved quality of SDG statistics in Central Asia

5. The session, chaired by Mr. Sergey Egorenko of Rosstat, reviewed the objective of the project and the context in which it had been developed. The session featured three presentations from the organizers of the workshop, namely Rosstat, ESCAP Statistics Division and NRU HSE.
6. The Rosstat presentation showed how the current project related to the assessment of progress towards the SDGs through the related global indicator framework, including the role of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDGs (IAEG-SDG), of which Russian Federation was a member as a representative of the countries of Eastern Europe. Other topics covered in the presentation included a brief review of the progress on the methodological development of tier III indicators; a review of some gaps in the data and/or metadata of tier I and tier II indicators; issues around the development of guidance for the compilation of disaggregated indicators; and the guiding principles for the 2020 comprehensive review of the global SDG indicator framework, including criteria for changes to the framework and timeline.
7. The presentation of ESCAP introduced the project rationale and its relation to the “Collective vision and framework for action”, adopted by the ESCAP Committee on Statistics in December 2016. The project specifically related to the action area “Having requisite skill sets”, which entailed the availability of guidance material and training, as well as a combined skill set of staff, capable management and sufficiency of human resources. The presentation elaborated on how the vision and framework for action are being implemented by ESCAP in form of capacity building, and analytical, normative and data work. The project funding and partners, project activities and objectives of the inception workshop were also presented.
8. NRU HSE introduced the Higher School of Economics as one of the top universities in the Russian Federation and one of the preeminent economics and social science universities in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. A partnership arrangement between ESCAP and the HSE had been signed in 2018 on training of official statisticians in Russian. The role of HSE included developing course design and material for training on data and statistics, translating teaching materials into Russian and delivering the developed courses through both in-class formats and online through HSE’s Distance Learning Management System (LMS) system, in partnership with SIAP and ESCAP.

IV. Session 4: SDG statistics in the countries of Central Asia

9. The session, chaired by Mr. Steven Kapsos of ILO reviewed, through nine country presentations, the status of national SDG frameworks; main data sources and processes for data collection; indicator compilation and dissemination; main challenges and capacity gaps in formulating indicator concepts and definitions; indicator computation and disaggregation; data sources and data availability, as well as recent ongoing efforts to strengthen capacity, in project countries. The summary and highlights of the presentations were as follows:
10. In terms of the institutional arrangements, governance and coordination of SDG indicator frameworks, all countries had some form of National Council that was either established by decree or chaired by the head of government or deputy head of government. There were also various working arrangements in terms of coordinating groups that had been put in place to achieve the SDGs and for the development of national SDG indicator frameworks. Several countries had also worked on nationalizing their SDG indicator frameworks and linking them to their Voluntary National Reviews that some countries either had already presented or were going to present at the High-level Political Forum (including Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan).
11. Countries explained the approach they had followed in deciding which global SDG targets were relevant to their circumstances (Afghanistan, 111; Azerbaijan, 88; Kyrgyzstan, 93; Turkmenistan, 148; Uzbekistan, 129) and in adapting global targets to national conditions (Kyrgyzstan, 61; Turkmenistan, 27; Uzbekistan, 4). Countries had also been working on integrating the SDGs into their policies, strategies and national plans (Afghanistan and Azerbaijan), conducting gap analyses, and localizing the SDGs (Afghanistan). Several countries had been able to put a percentage on the integration of the SDGs that they had achieved in policy- and decision-making (Armenia, 70%, Kazakhstan 80% and Tajikistan 78%). The Russian Federation also spoke on the twelve directions from the Decree of the President on national goals and strategic objectives of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2024.
12. Countries also explained what they had done to determine the indicators to be monitored (Afghanistan, 178; Azerbaijan, 119; Kazakhstan, 256; Kyrgyzstan, 243; Russian Federation, 364; Turkmenistan, 175). In this context, countries presented approaches followed in deciding to adopt global indicators (Afghanistan, 168; Kazakhstan, 99; Kyrgyzstan, 101; Tajikistan, 232; Turkmenistan, 117); to add national indicators (Afghanistan 10; Kazakhstan, 35; Kyrgyzstan, 67; Turkmenistan, 14); to adopt global indicators with minor changes (Kazakhstan, 58; Turkmenistan, 14); to decide on indicators as alternative to global indicators (Kazakhstan, 40); and to formulate indicators as proxies for global indicators. Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian

Federation and Tajikistan explained the status of efforts to map indicators to both government entities responsible and specific data sources, including traditional sources such as censuses and surveys, as well as non-traditional sources such as administrative registers.

13. Several countries elaborated on internal capacity building efforts related to the development of national SDG indicator frameworks, including with respect to data dissemination. Armenia had developed a national SDG Innovation Lab; a Center for Open Data Enterprise, a web-based national reporting platform; and an open SDG community. The Russian Federation had developed an Unified Interdepartmental Statistical Information System (UNISIS); had translated the metadata of 185 global indicators into Russian, available on the Rosstat website; participated in many international pilot projects on data flows; and was in the process of making data flows Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) -compliant, an undertaking linked to the development of the digital analytical platform of the Russian Federation.
14. Countries expressed many diverse training and capacity building needs, including in the area of compilation of specific indicators (Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan); indicator disaggregation (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan), data and data sources (Armenia); development of new pilot surveys or introducing new modules in existing surveys (Armenia, Tajikistan); monitoring and reporting on progress (Azerbaijan); quality of administrative data or registers and their integration into statistical databases (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan); use of non-traditional data sources such as Big data and geospatial information (Armenia, Tajikistan); institutional infrastructure and statistical capacity (Armenia); integrated sustainable policy development (Afghanistan); data quality assessment (Afghanistan); development of meta data (Azerbaijan); issues related to databases and web technologies (Azerbaijan); and issues around the coordination between national statistical offices and other data producing entities in relation to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan).

V. Session 5: Training and related capacity strengthening for the compilation of specific SDG indicators of international agencies

15. The session, chaired by Mr. Kanat Kerimkulov, Government Office of the Kyrgyz Republic, invited selected international organizations, FAO, ILO, UNESCO, UN Women, as custodian agencies of specific SDG indicators, to present their training and related capacity strengthening efforts, with focus on ongoing and planned work in the countries of Central Asia and the availability of training material and/or courses in the Russian language.

16. FAO gave a brief overview of the 21 SDG indicators that are currently under FAO custodianship and its work on those indicators, coordinated by the Office of the Chief Statistician (OCS). At the global level FAO has e-learning courses for 12 SDG indicators, training-of-trainer's workshops and data gaps assessment and indicators alignment tools. At the regional level, FAO holds three-day awareness raising/training workshops on the nationalization/mapping process of SDG indicators and it assists countries, through various projects, in capacity development on for the compilation of specific indicators.
17. ILO presented its work on data reporting via its Microdata Repository Initiative and training opportunities for the 14 SDG labour market indicators. It was highlighted that the data production processes for these indicators of most Central Asian countries was not making its way yet into the ILO Microdata Repository. ILO stressed the importance of the coordination bodies in countries to be in frequent contact with it and other custodian agencies to provide them with data, especially microdata. ILO also suggested the possibility of organizing regional and/or national workshop(s) on enhancing SDG labour data reporting and training on deriving SDG labour indicators from household survey microdata.
18. UNESCO presented on the National Capacity Development in Monitoring SDG 4. SDG monitoring of education global priorities had become more complex, considering its broad scope across the life cycle, education quality and equity, hence there was a need for stronger partnership and collaboration among various data producers/providers. UNESCO had been working with 11 countries to develop National Strategies for Development of Education Statistics (NSDES) and had produced various tools, such as the International Standard Classification for Education; metadata for the SDG 4 indicators; for Data Quality Assessment (DQA); a Manual and Code of Practice; as well as data collection instruments.
19. UN Women presented on the recent and ongoing activities related to monitoring of SDG 5 and other gender-related indicators through its Europe and Central Asia (ECA) regional programme *Making Every Woman and Girl Count*. UN Women had been working on gender assessments of the national statistical systems and establishing the intergovernmental mechanism on gender statistics. In terms of support for data production, use and communication for tier I and tier II indicators, UN Women had been providing technical and financial support; developing a Gender Data Portal; organizing national and regional workshops; and developing and sharing knowledge products, including translating materials into Russian and adapting them to the regional context.

VI. Session 6: Regional assessment of progress towards the SDGs in the countries of Central Asia

20. The session, chaired by Mr. Giorgi Kvinikadze, FAO, focused on the results of ESCAP's most recent assessment on the progress of the countries of Asia and the Pacific towards the SDGs based on data sourced from the global SDG indicator database and custodian agencies. The session also featured a presentation on behalf of SIAP on training programmes conducted by SIAP for Central Asian countries.
21. ESCAP's presentation focused on answering two broad questions - *Where does the region stand for each of the goals?* and *How far we will be from targets by 2030?* Based on an ESCAP-constructed *Current Status Index*, the progress so far showed that the region was behind for every goal, and moving in the wrong direction for Goals 6, 8 and 12. An *Expected Achievement Index* showed that there was insufficient data for more than half of the targets to assess progress, highlighting the need accelerated investment in the production of the required data.
22. The presentation also addressed the measurement challenge emanating from the fact that out of the 169 targets, only 51 had specific target values, 96 clearly indicated the direction of needed change, and for 22 nothing had been specified. To address this challenge, ESCAP had adopted a *Champion Area Approach* to set regional targets based on criteria of data efficiency, objectivity, and aspiration with feasibility. With respect to data availability in the Asia-Pacific region, only 36% of the 232 indicators had sufficient data, while 23% did not have enough data and 41% had no data. It had been found that most of the indicators with sufficient data was sourced from administrative sources, while a large share of the indicators with insufficient data was sourced from surveys.
23. A presentation from SIAP briefed the workshop participants on the background of the institute and its training programmes conducted in the form of long-term training courses, regional, sub-regional, country and e-learning courses. Detailed information on past and ongoing courses with participation of Central Asian countries was also presented.

VII. Session 7: Priorities for a training programme on SDG statistics for countries in Central Asia

24. The session allowed participants to break into groups to discuss the priorities for a training programme on specific indicators and/or thematic areas, data sources, as well as training beneficiaries, levels and modalities.

VIII. Session 8 and 9: Way forward and next steps and Conclusion and closing of the workshop

25. The final two sessions, chaired by Mr. Jan Smit, Statistics Division, ESCAP, summarized, based on the outcome of the group discussions during the previous session, the way forward for the development of a training programme on SDG statistics for participating countries. The highlights of the discussion were as follows:
26. It was noted that the countries participating in the workshop were roughly at the same level in terms of their SDG indicator frameworks, with exception to Afghanistan. Due to the situation of conflict from which the country was arising, no population census had been conducted between 1979 and 2006. Afghanistan was in the process of conducting various household, living conditions, demographic and economic surveys, as well as making use of remote sensing and geographical information system tools, to update its sampling frames and compile baseline data for its SDG indicators. Afghanistan needed a national programme to develop its national statistical system that would also enable it to assess progress towards the SDGs. This would entail basic, among others, capacity building at the national statistical office and better cooperation between different departments and agencies within the government.
27. It was agreed that the training needs of the participating countries were wide-ranging, including specifically the indicators for Goals 1-3, 5, 6 and 11-17. The indicators relating to the environment, good governance, poverty and education were identified as especially difficult to compile. It was noted that training related to environment and climate change statistics needed to encompass the use specific technical issues, such as the use of measurement equipment and technology. The need for training related to the use of non-traditional data sources, such as geospatial information and big data, and on issues around data disaggregation, was also stressed.
28. It was suggested that a table of specific problematic indicators be established to pinpoint the exact common training needs for the nine countries. The table could include columns for the country, indicator, training needs, level of training, government entity responsible for the indicator, whether the country produced the indicator already, specific data source(s) for the indicator, and the periodicity at which the indicator was produced.
29. It was noted that some countries did not have systems in place to train official statisticians, which could include bachelor's degree programmes in statistics; refresher courses; access to foreign/international training courses; and in-house training programmes, both for recent university graduates and more experienced staff. In this context, the importance of training trainers was highlighted.

30. It was recommended that national statistical offices revisit their current training curricula to ensure alignment with the requirements for data and statistics emanating from the 2030 Agenda, including national SDG indicator frameworks.
31. Sharing of training materials and experiences by countries in the region and custodian agencies would be very useful. The Russian Federation, for instance, could share its experience in piloting the use of SDMX in facilitating data flows. FAO also had good online software such as the Collect Earth software, which could be used by countries to collect data for indicator 15.4.2.
32. In terms of the forms of training, all forms were deemed beneficial and should be harmoniously and simultaneously developed based on specific needs. In this context it was suggested that, for instance, training for young professionals could be done online; training for experienced officers could be done in the form of study tours/visits; and training on methodological development could be conducted by international experts assisting national experts on methodology and coordinators. It was stressed that all training should focus on quality, as fruitful training was preferred to formal training, resulting in more reliable data and better-quality statistics.
33. The number of participants to attend the trainings would depend on the availability of funds. It was proposed to group indicators and invite the staff members responsible for their compilation. In this context, the importance of countries having a complete overview of which staff members/ministries were responsible for which indicators was stressed.
34. FAO already had a good set of interactive courses on many indicators, which would be good for statisticians involved in methodology development to take. FAO would look into the possibility of translating the courses into Russian. It was recommended that these e-learning courses would be followed by face-to-face training. UN Women also had experience in training and would communicate the topics and indicators it could provide training for.
35. The workshop was closed by Mr. Sergey Egorenko, Rosstat, informing participants that ESCAP, Rosstat and HSE would come up with plan for the remainder of the project, to include an online training course, a workshop in Kazakhstan and a final closing event in the Russian Federation.