



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS

IPS57: Enhancing multi-stakeholder cooperation as a means to boost SDGs progress measurement

Monitoring progress towards the SDG Targets: the perspective of a custodian agency



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Overarching strategies to improve multi-stakeholder cooperation on statistical capacity development

UN: System-wide Road Map (developed by the CCS-UN) for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics

Goal 3: Provide *coordinated and innovative support to Member States* in the area of data and statistics in order to overcome fragmentation, overlaps, gaps and donor-driven priorities

- The implementation of his goal foresees coordination activities at the national level (through UN Country teams), regional level and global level

FAO: Regional Roadmaps to accelerate country-level support on SDG Monitoring

Main objectives:

1. Strengthen the **capacity of UN country teams and FAO decentralized offices** to engage with national authorities on SDG monitoring and mainstream statistics and SDG monitoring support in UN country-level programming.
2. Scale-up **country-level technical collaboration** with national statistical authorities and relevant stakeholders.

FAO Regional Roadmaps: 6 areas to accelerate country support on SDG Monitoring

1. Build the capacity of decentralized staff to support SDG monitoring (in particular FAO country programme officers as well as UNCT data officers and economists)
 - Delivery of a **training programme targeting UNCT Data officers and FAO country offices** in collaboration with UN development agencies (CCS-UN) (First round of training to take place on May 11, May 16 & June 19)
 - **Communication plan** to keep UNCTs and FAO offices informed and engaged (e.g. regular update of toolkit)
 - Use the GlobalNetwork of data officers to share best practices and new developments
2. Make sure that statistics and data are seen as development outcomes and well mainstreamed in UNSDCF and REGIONAL initiatives
 - The provision of **easy-to use country data profiles** to inform the Common Country Assessments
 - the provision of **supplementary guidance** on mainstreaming SDG data and statistics in UNSDCF
 - Improved **review process** before CCA/UNSDCF validation
3. Support NATIONAL-level resources mobilization for SDG monitoring
 - Assist Decentralized Offices in **establishing country-level projects** and in supporting **resources mobilization** at national or regional level
 - Identify and share best practices in terms of **integrating/aligning SDG indicators in national projects** (e.g. M&E, data collection, use in project design and decision-making, ...)

FAO Regional Roadmaps: 6 areas to accelerate country support on SDG Monitoring

4. Promote NSO participation in capacity development programmes and activities that support SDG monitoring
 - Regular **call for expression of interest** to serve as a basis for annual training and TA programme plans
 - **Promotion of FAO CD programmes** in FAO Regional commissions and at national level
 - Provision of TA for the production & analysis of SDG indicators through **SDG-specific Statistical Development programmes** (including support to the preparation of VNRs)
5. Systematically encourage and support NSOs in collecting key SDG indicators in agricultural censuses and surveys
 - Systematically **promote the production of SDG farm-based indicators as part of agriculture census projects**
 - Ensure that **SDG farm-based indicators are produced through the 50x2030 initiative**
 - **Conduct targeted outreach to non-50x2030 countries** that have agricultural surveys
 - Systematically **promote the production of FIES data and SDG indicator 5.a.1 in national household surveys**
6. Leverage partnerships with REGIONAL organizations and initiatives, to increase SDG reporting and data use
 - Continue to **build on existing partnerships to deliver better coordinated support to countries and SDG knowledge products** (e.g. regional and global calendar of events, collaboration with UN Development agencies, Regional Commissions, AUC (Malabo Declaration monitoring), AFRISTAT, Development banks...)

Voluntary National Reviews - Overview

- [Voluntary national reviews](#) (VNRs) serve as key input to the annual deliberations of the High-Level Political Forum (**HLPF**), the main intergovernmental body for the **follow-up and review** of the SDGs.
- VNRs are voluntary, country-led, and underpin the 2030 Agenda's follow up and review process based on the principle of **mutual accountability**. While being policy documents, the VNRs should be methodologically rigorous, evidence-based and informed by national data that are reliable, timely, accessible and sufficiently disaggregated.
- Key document for regularly assessing countries' progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda, to facilitate the **sharing of experiences**, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the achievement of the SDGs.
- Countries are requested to prepare a **minimum of two VNRs** in the period 2016-2030 of their SDG implementation. In 2022, 3 countries will submit their 3rd, and 2 countries will submit their 4th VNR. Between 2016 and 2021, **247 VNRs** have been submitted to the HLPF.
- UN tools to help countries to prepare VNRs: a) SG Guidelines; b) DESA Handbook
- 3 key critical areas for preparing a comprehensive and well-informed VNR (FAO provides technical support to countries in all 3 areas):
 - Selection of the list of SDG indicators
 - **Assess progress towards the SDG targets**
 - Assess inequalities between geographical areas and population groups

SDG Progress Assessment in countries' VNRs

- In order to provide **internationally comparable assessments**, countries preparing VNRs are encouraged to provide analysis based on **global SDG indicators** and **harmonized statistical methods**.
- However, many VNRs do not use internationally agreed SDG indicators, but rather available proxy indicators. Moreover, most VNRs do not contain progress assessments, and when they do, methods are not standardized.
- FAO assessed 27 of the 42 VNRs submitted to the HLPF in 2021 in English (the remaining 15 have been submitted in national languages and could not be reviewed).
- Only 14 of the reviewed documents included a quantitative assessment of the distance from the target. However, very often the assessment was not based on SDG indicators but rather on national proxies. In addition, in very few cases the statistical approach used for the 'current status assessment' was properly documented.
- Only 6 countries included a quantitative trend assessment of 'progress over time' that – in most cases - was not based on standardized methodologies.

Monitoring Progress towards SDG targets at country-level

Seven years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, assessing whether and when the SDG Targets and Goals will be achieved, while leaving no one behind (LNOB), is becoming a pressing issue.

Two are the main questions to be addressed:



How far do countries, regions and the world stand from SDG Targets?



How fast are countries, regions and the world progressing towards SDG Targets?



Relevant stakeholders

Answering these two questions is relevant for:

- **International Organizations:**

- Each SDG Indicator has been assigned to the custodianship of an international organization – e.g. FAO is the custodian of 21 indicators.
- One of the main responsibilities of a custodian agency is that of monitoring SDG progress at national, regional and global levels.

- **Countries:**

- They are the ultimate owners of the SDGs (UNGA has decided goals & targets; UNSC the global indicator framework) and are responsible for their implementation.
- Monitoring SDG progress at the national and sub-national level, and by relevant population groups, allows governments to identify appropriate interventions and take sound policy decisions towards the achievement of SDG Targets.

Two measurement objectives

- The two questions translate into two distinct **measurement objectives**:
 - Assessing the **current status** of an indicator as described by the latest available SDG data (i.e. measuring the “distance to the target”);
 - Forecasting the **future status**, whether the SDG target will be reached by 2030 (i.e. forecasting “progress over time”).
- Leading regional/international agencies (e.g. ESCAP, Eurostat, FAO, OECD, SDSN) have developed and adopted different assessment approaches to address these two statistical problems, often leading to inconsistent or contradictory results and recommendations.
- Too little has been done so far to build countries capacity to produce sound statistical SDG progress assessments to be used in preparing Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and for guiding policy interventions.

Main challenges to assess SDG current status and progress

- Only a **minority of targets** (about the 30%) have a **clear numerical benchmark. Problem:** How to produce a numerical assessment of progress in other cases?
- Many **SDG indicators are new**: low quality and/or scarcity of baseline data. Time series with very few data points.
- Many targets combine **multiple and complementary policy objectives**: impossible to monitor them effectively with 1 or 2 indicators only.
- **Aggregation issues**: after assessing the current status and trend by indicator and at the national level, should results be aggregated at target and goal level and how?

Different ways to address these challenges have different statistical and logical implications

Towards a harmonized approach

- For all these reasons, the FAO has devoted great efforts to **develop and implement a standardized and sound statistical methodology** to assess the current status and trend of SDG indicators.
- The proposed approach is used to produce the annual **FAO SDG Progress Assessment Report**, which includes a statistical progress assessment and a statistical technical annex.
- The FAO has also led the **IAEG-SDG task force on the SDG Progress Chart**, with the aim of improving the consistency among progress assessment approaches proposed by different International Organizations. As a result, the FAO approach (with some exceptions) is now used to produce the SDG progress chart.
- FAO can support countries in adopting the proposed methodology to **monitor SDG progress at the national and sub-national level**, and to produce **VNRs** including a statistical analysis of SDG indicators' current status and trend.

A snapshot of FAO's methodology: measuring the current status

Objective: how close to the target is the latest available SDG indicator value.

- FAO suggests adopting a **normalized distance to the target** d_{it} , with respect to the maximum distance. Approach partially adopted also for the **UN SDG Progress Chart**.
- Data needs:
 - x_{it} : value of a generic SDG indicator in country i and year t
 - x_i^* : target value for the indicator in country i ($x_i^* = x^*$ for absolute targets)
- The values of d_{it} are then assigned to current status categories, indicating the degree of closeness to the target.

A snapshot of FAO's methodology: measuring the current status (2)

Limitation: the proposed approach can only be applied when a numerical target x^* exists (about 30% of SDG indicators)

What can be done in other cases?

- Leading international agencies (e.g. the OECD) have suggested methodologies to set “statistical” targets based on the assessment of the overall distribution of indicators (e.g. by looking at best or worst performing countries).
- **FAO's position:**
 - Setting targets towards development objectives is the role of policy-makers (not that of statisticians). Hence, the FAO, unlike other international/regional organizations, does not set statistical targets for its progress assessment report. On the other hand, countries can set their own targets and policy priorities based on their decision making processes.
 - Requesting all countries to perform as the best performers, completely disregards countries' specificities and situation with regard to the specific SDG indicator under consideration.
 - FAO proposes to estimate the empirical distribution of the current status for the relevant SDG indicator and assign to each country the corresponding position in the distribution (quintile)

A snapshot of FAO's methodology: forecasting the future status

Objective: assessing the likelihood – given the observed trend - that a country or a region will achieve the SDG targets by 2030.

- **Main issue:** the type of SDG data and the limited length of time series restricts the range of applicable methods (that need to be applied consistently across all SDG indicators), forces custodian agencies to adopt rather simple methodological approaches.
- The FAO, Eurostat, and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) assess the trend by comparing the actual growth shown by SDG indicators since the baseline year with the required growth to reach the target by 2030:

$$R = \frac{\textit{Actual Growth}}{\textit{Required Growth}}$$




A snapshot of FAO's methodology: forecasting the future status (2)

- **SDSN**= the trend is estimated by considering a linear growth model, which is often not adequate to describe the dynamic of complex phenomena over time.
- **FAO and Eurostat**= consider a geometric (or exponential) growth over time:

$$R = \frac{\text{Actual Growth}}{\text{Required Growth}} = \frac{CAGR_{Ai}}{CAGR_{Ri}} = \frac{\left(\frac{x_{it}}{x_{it_0}}\right)^{\frac{1}{t-t_0}} - 1}{\left(\frac{x_i^*}{x_{it_0}}\right)^{\frac{1}{2030-t_0}} - 1}$$

t_0 = baseline year (2015) and
 t = current year

Values of R close to 1  the country is on track to reach the target. These values are then categorized into classes indicating the degree of progress towards or deterioration from the target.

NB: comparing the actual growth with the required growth is only possible when a numeric yardstick for the target is available. Targets without a numerical benchmark  the only component that can be computed is the $CAGR_{Ai}$ which can be assessed against the normative direction of the indicator (increase or decrease).

Thank you!

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