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Regional priorities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific

Overcoming the data hurdle to attain the Sustainable Development Goals: opportunities for Asia and the Pacific

Note by the secretariat**

Summary

The present document provides information on the role of data and statistics as a means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It presents the gist of past and ongoing intergovernmental deliberations on priorities and approaches to ensuring that data and statistics provide the needed evidence-base for effective follow-up and review at the national, regional and global levels.

Drawing on recent deliberations by the Committee on Statistics, and analysis of the current state of availability of statistics and existing capacity for producing statistics for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals by countries in the region, the document puts forward a number of areas through which follow-up and review can be strengthened through regional mechanisms, including the APFSD, the Commission, and the Committee on Statistics.

I. Introduction

1. The present document elaborates on the role of data and statistics as a critical means of implementation, as reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It provides an update on the global intergovernmental deliberations on priorities and approaches to ensuring that data and statistics provide the needed evidence-base for effective follow-up and review at the national, regional and global levels. Further, it presents the direction provided by the Committee on Statistics to members of the Asia-Pacific statistical community towards increased regional readiness to meet the demands for statistics presented by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the outcomes of recent regional consultations on data and statistics.

* E/ESCAP/FSD(3)/L.1.

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2. Drawing on the guidance provided by the Committee on Statistics and analysis of the current availability of statistics and existing capacity for producing statistics by countries in the region, while bearing in mind the proposals contained in the draft regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific,¹ the document outlines opportunities for strengthening follow-up and review through existing regional mechanisms, including the APFSD, the Commission and the Committee on Statistics.

II. Data and statistics as critical means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

3. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes commitments by Member States to provide for systematic follow-up and review to track progress in attaining the goals and targets of the Agenda.² The Agenda provides detailed guidance on the nature and qualities required for follow-up and review to be effective and inclusive.

A. Inclusive and effective national-level processes constitute the foundation for follow-up and review at the regional and global levels

4. The 2030 Agenda recognizes the importance of dialogue and review at the regional and sub-regional levels, with global level processes complementing national and regional reviews. Notwithstanding this, it is stressed that the lynchpin for follow-up and review will be at the national level, with the outcomes from national-level processes constituting the foundation for follow-up and review at the regional and global levels.

5. The Agenda specifies that a “robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review framework will make a vital contribution to implementation”.³ Such a framework will “promote accountability to citizens, support active international cooperation in achieving this Agenda and foster exchange of best practices and mutual learning.”⁴

6. For follow-up and review processes at subnational, national, regional and global levels to meet this requirement, they need to be “people-centred, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind”, as well as “open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and will support reporting by all relevant stakeholders.”⁵

B. Rigorous, evidence-based follow-up and review requires quality data

7. Quality data are needed for Governments and other stakeholders to validate achievements, to identify challenges, gaps and critical success factors and to make informed policy choices. Recognizing this, Member States committed to follow-up and review processes that “will be rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations and data which

¹ E/ESCAP/FSD(3)/2.

² Agenda 2030 (A/RES/70/1), para. 47

³ Ibid, para. 72

⁴ Ibid, para 73

⁵ Ibid, para 72-74

is high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.”⁶

8. Goal 17 of the Agenda and its two targets on data, monitoring and accountability stresses the role of data and statistics as a means of implementation and the importance of strengthening the capabilities of national statistical systems to meet the demands for data. This includes the capability for full engagement of national statistical offices and the broader national statistical system in the follow-up and review process, ranging from identifying priority indicators to analyzing data, assessing progress and evaluating policy options.

Coordination of production and dissemination of data and statistics for effective national processes: the role of national statistical offices

9. Country experiences in monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals revealed that engaging the statistical community in a coordinated manner improves data consistency and quality and maintains the rigor of data analysis. Such engagement will ensure that national indicators are technically sound and feasible for implementation, that statistical analysis methods are rigorous, and that data interpretation meets internationally agreed guidelines. Sound and transparent use of data will guarantee the credibility of the evidence and will ultimately contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

10. Good coordination among data producers is a key mechanism for assuring quality of statistics generated from a wide range of data sources. Assuring quality in conditions where official statistics are typically generated from data collected by a multitude of institutions is a critical and very real challenge. This challenge is taking on more complexity with a range of new data producers emerging and new types of data being generated, such as earth observation data and geospatial information. Within national public administrations, the national statistics office is well-positioned to lead the coordination of data production and dissemination for follow-up and review.

11. In summary, the commitments made to follow-up and review necessitate close involvement by the national statistics office in national coordination mechanisms for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in order to (a) support rigorous national monitoring by bringing about harmonized and consistent data across various sources, (b) providing professional advice on sound methodologies for data processing and analysis, and (c) identifying solutions to address gaps in data availability and quality for improved evidence.

C. Status of the global indicator framework for follow-up and review at the global level

12. Government statisticians agreed on a list of 230 indicators as a practical starting point for a global monitoring framework for the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, subject to future technical refinement, at the 47th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC), 8-11 March 2016 [reference to be inserted when available]. The monitoring framework was developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) consisting of 28 member States representing subregional groupings,

⁶ *ibid*, para 72-74

with inputs from a wide range of United Nations agencies, the academia and civil society organizations. The global monitoring framework will be submitted to the Economic and Social Council and subsequently to the General Assembly in September 2016 for adoption.

13. The UNSC emphasized that the indicators are intended for global follow-up and review for the Agenda and are not necessarily applicable to all national contexts; indicators for regional, national and subnational levels will be developed at the regional and national levels. The UNSC agreed that the compilation of global indicators will be based to the greatest extent possible on comparable and standardized national official statistics, provided by countries to the international statistical systems.

14. Commensurate with the vision of leaving no one behind as included in the 2030 Agenda, the UNSC agreed that improving data disaggregation is fundamental for the full implementation of the indicator framework. The IAEG-SDGs will launch further work on data disaggregation, including identifying necessary methodological developments and ways to strengthen statistical capacity and mobilize the resources necessary for the additional data production.

III. Setting priorities for regional statistics development

15. Producing data for the wide-ranging Sustainable Development Goals will be a challenge for all national statistical systems, including the more advanced. Sustainable Development Goal 17 positions statistics as a development issue in its own right and implies that statistics development should be an integral part of national implementation of the 2030 Agenda.⁷

16. The Committee on Statistics at its 4th session held during 25-27 March 2015 identified the following priority strategies to address implications of the (at that time emerging) 2030 Agenda on statistical development in Asia and the Pacific: i) coordination of regional capacity-building programmes developed under its guidance, ii) leveraging the data revolution to support national statistical systems, iii) monitoring statistical development in Asia and the Pacific, and iv) strengthening coordination and communication between and within international, regional and sub-regional organizations and statistics-related expert groups.

17. At an ESCAP regional meeting organized under the guidance of the Committee in September 2015, leaders and senior managers of 27 Asian and Pacific national statistical systems, as well as representatives from a number of sub-regional and international organizations considered the recommendations of the Committee on Statistics and on that background identified Asia-Pacific regional and sub-regional priorities for monitoring the SDGs.⁸ The meeting made the following key recommendations:

- Promote regional support for broadening stakeholder's engagement in monitoring SDGs, in particular localizing the SDGs in government planning and programmes
- Strengthen national statistical capacity in support of the 2030 Agenda, including establishing legal frameworks for producing

⁷ See the Annex to the present document for further information

⁸ www.unescap.org/events/monitoring-sustainable-development-goals-meeting-identify-asia-pacific-regional-and-sub

statistics, improving statistical leadership skills and strengthening regional and national training institutions

- Acknowledge the important role of sub-regional mechanisms such as ASEAN Community Statistical System in supporting the implementation of SDGs

18. The focus of the above recommendations falls well in line with the Committee's two overarching, strategic goals, which have governed regional collaboration on statistics development since their adoption in 2010, namely, (a) ensuring that all countries in the region by 2020 have the capability to provide an agreed basic range of population, economic, social and environmental statistics, and (b) creating a more adaptive and cost-effective information management environment for national statistical offices through stronger collaboration.⁹ To achieve these goals, the Committee has launched a number of regional capacity development initiatives anchored on regional core sets of statistics and monitoring indicators for regional action frameworks, led by steering and advisory groups, with significant partner coordination and communication. All of these place the region in a good position to tackle the ambitious 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

IV. Data readiness for the SDGs in Asia and the Pacific

19. The 2030 Agenda presents multiple challenges for the national statistical systems of the Asia-Pacific region. Priority barriers which will need to be addressed include limitations in current national statistical systems resulting in data gaps, low data quality, and lack of timely data, pointing towards limited institutional capacity.

20. Recent ESCAP studies have analyzed these challenges in more depth. The Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015¹⁰ identifies specific methodological challenges related to monitoring progress towards each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and also contains an overview of existing capacity gaps in the national statistical systems of countries in Asia and the Pacific. The findings of the Yearbook and ESCAP assessment studies are further explored and elaborated in the Annex to the present information document. Summary findings on data gaps and statistical capacity constraints in the Asia-Pacific region are:

- The scope of national statistical programmes does not capture the breadth of development issues captured in the Sustainable Development Goals. For example, health and well-being indicators are supported by long standing programmes, but regular data collection on inequality-or urbanization-related indicators are very limited.
- 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. For example, agricultural and economic surveys and censuses are not regularly conducted in many countries.
- Administrative data, such as those from management information systems for health and education, are vastly underused as a data

⁹ ESCAP, (2010) "Proposed strategic directions of the Committee on Statistics" E/ESCAP/CST(2)/2.

¹⁰ www.unescap.org/resources/statistical-yearbook-asia-and-pacific-2015.

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 captured in the Sustainable Development Goals are not governed by international statistical standards or guidance. These include intra-household distribution of resources, learning and development outcomes, disaster-related statistics and agricultural productivity.
- Current statistics on progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals are not available fast enough to provide timely information for decision-makers. Examples of these are data on international income poverty, skilled birth attendance, social protection floors, water use efficiency and population living in slums.
- 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.

V. Leveraging data and statistics to accelerate SDG implementation in Asia and the Pacific

21. The information provided in the previous sections of the present document points to two broad areas of action required to support rigorous and evidenced-based national follow-up and review: 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.

22. Actions that can be taken at the regional level to address these two issues, 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

23. ESCAP as an intergovernmental forum will advocate for policies that strengthen the mandate of national statistical offices to coordinate the national statistical systems. To guide policy formulation, ESCAP will provide models and options for setting up of national follow-up and review mechanisms that facilitate national statistical office coordination of data and statistics requirements, as well as institutional functioning of national statistical systems, such as the adherence to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, quality assurance frameworks, human management reform, and modernization of business and information management processes. Master plans or strategies for development of statistics will need to be integrated into plans for national SDG implementation to ensure political commitment and investment for sustained statistical capacity.

24. 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

25. ESCAP will prioritize its research and analysis work to underpin the delivery of technical assistance, training and norm-setting on matters related to national follow-up and review. ESCAP will provide a regional database as the basis for analyzing the progress in the region towards achieving the SDGs. It will provide technical guidelines on the use of data and indicators in assessing progress towards the Goals and targets of sustainable development. ESCAP will also facilitate the dialogue between data users and producers at sub-national, national and regional levels to identify priority areas for action to address the data needs for follow-up and review at these levels.

D. Lead norm-setting in areas of high and shared policy priority

26. ESCAP will seek and build the synergies in monitoring progress and data work between the various regional agendas and the SDGs. The regional policy agendas generated by the Commission that are priority areas of the 2030 Agenda include: the Asia-Pacific Energy Forum (Goal 7), the Make the Rights Real campaign (Goal 4, 10), the CRVS Decade (Goal 16, 17), the regional economic cooperation and integration (Goal 8), the long-standing Asian agreements on transport (Goal 11). ESCAP is also leading the way in establishing a basic range of disaster-related statistics and the associated statistical definitions and standards.

Influence global statistical methodological development work in support of regional priorities

27. ESCAP is engaged in the development of tools and methodologies at the global level in several areas, including the use of big data for official statistics, measurement of resource-based economies, recommendations and principles for the 2020 population and housing censuses, etc. ESCAP contributes regional experiences and perspectives to ensure that such tools and methodologies reflect and are applicable to the realities of the region. With the upcoming intensification of methodological development regarding the SDG indicators, ESCAP will mobilize the various working groups under the Committee on Statistics and support the voicing of regional experiences and perspectives in global methodological development in particular in areas that have been identified as regional priorities, such as rapid urbanization, trade and economic integration, rising incomes and changing consumption patterns, and rising environmental pressures.

E. Galvanize and enhance partnership support

28. 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, the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific, the Partners for Statistics Development in Asia and the Pacific, and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data. 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.

Annex^a

Attaining the Sustainable Development Goals: Data gaps and statistical capacity constraints in Asia and the Pacific

1. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development contains two targets regarding “data, monitoring and accountability” under Goal 17 “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.” These targets are:

17.18 By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts”.

17.19 By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries

The inclusion of these two targets reflects the acknowledgement by Governments of the existing data gaps and the importance of strengthening the capabilities of national statistical systems to meeting the demands for data presented by the Agenda.

To what extent is the Asia-Pacific region ready to produce and disseminate the data to support follow-up and review at regional as well as other levels? At the time of preparing this note, information on the definitions, calculation methods and data sources, or metadata, was available for fewer than half of the global indicators; a regional indicator set is yet to be defined. Thus full answers to this question are not yet possible. Thus, assessments on data availability are provided below on the basis of existing information using the global indicator set as a reference.

Overall, few countries in Asia and the Pacific at present are able to produce the data required for the broad range of indicators as contained in the global monitoring framework, even countries with the strongest statistical systems. For instance, Indonesia was considered to be “most ready” for 37% of the global indicators in terms of data availability and quality, and “not ready” for 36% of these indicators.^b On the other hand, a self-assessment by the Australian Bureau of Statistics concluded that although the country's statistical system had the capability to deliver the economic data against the illustrated goals, it lacked the capability to deliver environmental data. Australia was also able to deliver social and population data though with varying frequencies and with varying quality for disaggregation.^c

^a The present Annex draws and expands on the findings published in the *ESCAP Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015, facts and trends at the outset of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Available at www.unescap.org/resources/statistical-yearbook-asia-and-pacific-2015.

^b UNEP and UNDP (undated). Indicators and data mapping to measure sustainable development goals (SDGs) targets: Case of Indonesia 2015.

^c Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013). Report of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda – A measurement perspective by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Available at: www.unsiap.or.jp/programmes/ms_materials/ms11/Briefing_HLP_Post%202015_Report_ABS.pdf.

2. Breadth of existing statistical data collection programmes limited

Data gaps vary across countries and indicators. More data tend to be available where there are dedicated national government programmes and national official statistical systems have regular statistical surveys and administrative data systems. For instance, three-quarters or more countries in the region reported in October 2014 to compile data for indicators measuring targets related to health and well-being (Goal 3), largely due to relatively long tradition of government statistical programmes in this area.^d

On the other hand, 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),^e where governments are yet to put in place dedicated and regular data collection and dissemination programmes. Weakness in data availability in such key SDG areas as energy and infrastructure, governance and environment was reported in a study in Bangladesh in 2014.^f In contrast, a similar study concluded that data availability in Turkey was considered overall satisfactory.^g

In responding to an ESCAP survey in 2014 on availability of gender-responsive statistics, more than 80 per cent of the 36 countries reported to have not collected data in such domains as “Participation in unremunerated productive work”, “Environment”, “Refugees” and “Disaster risk reduction” indicated that they had not collected data (see Figure 1). In general, gaps in gender-sensitive data in the region are apparent in such key priority a large number of conventional areas such as child marriage, agriculture, informal employment, as well as in more emerging areas such as measuring violence against women, unpaid work, entrepreneurship, power and decision-making, information and communication technology and media, many of which are included in Goal 5 “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.”

^d ESCAP (2014) Data and statistics for the post-2015 development agenda: Strengthening regional collaboration in Asia and the Pacific, Available from: www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Report_EGM2014_Data%20and%20statistics%20for%20the%20post-2015%20development.pdf.

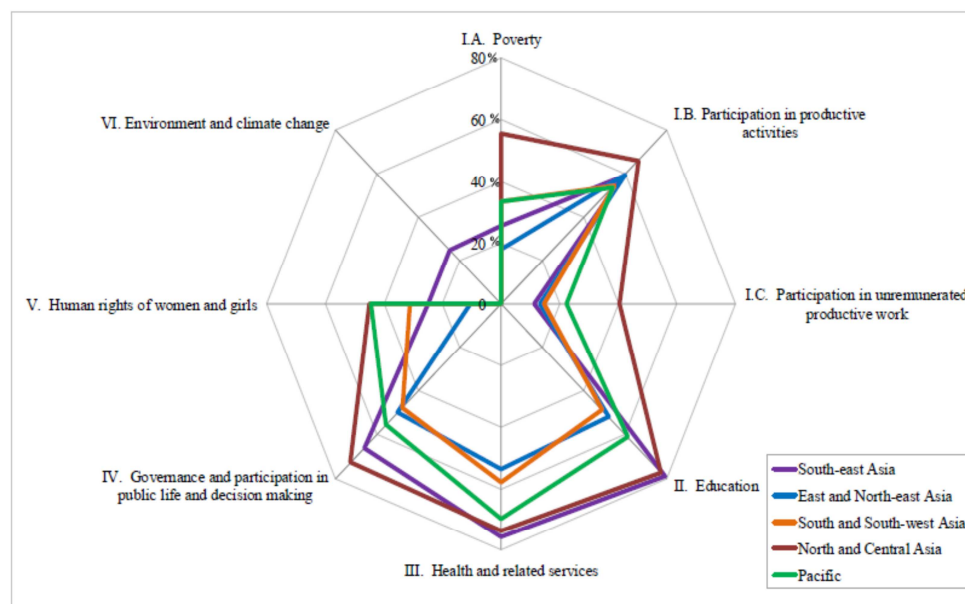
^e ESCAP (2014) Data and statistics for the post-2015 development agenda: Strengthening regional collaboration in Asia and the Pacific, Available from: www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Report_EGM2014_Data%20and%20statistics%20for%20the%20post-2015%20development.pdf.

^f Rahman, M et al (2015) Measuring for Monitoring: The State of Data for SDGs in Bangladesh, available from: <http://southernvoice-postmdg.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Bangladesh-Country-Report-Highlights.pdf>.

^g Arda, M et al (2015) Measuring Sustainable Development to 2030: A view from Turkey, Available from: www.post2015datatest.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Post2015_Data_Test_Turkey_HighLights.pdf.

Figure 1
Variation in data collection and indicator production, by domains and gender sensitive indicators and subregions

Percentage of 36 Asian-Pacific countries responding to the survey



Source: Serrao, S (2015). “Strengthening gender statistics and indicators in Asia and the Pacific: a key foundation for the sustainable development agenda beyond 2015”, ESCAP StatsBrief, Issue No. 11

Such data gaps point to the need to expand the coverage of official statistics programmes to include newer and emerging issues of development. This may include both launching new data collection programmes but also leveraging new data sources, such as big data and data collected by the civil society and academia.

3. Frequency and quality of data from surveys not up to standard

While statistical surveys (censuses and sample surveys) are expected to be a crucial data for many of the global SDG indicators, not all countries in the region conduct the key surveys however, making production of indicators relying on this as an only source not possible.

One example is the analysis of changes in poverty rates, which would require minimum two data points. In an assessment as recent as December 2015, it was found that there were two or more data points on international income poverty rate for only 35 countries in the region for the entire period of 2000-2014. For the period of 2010-2014, trend analysis of poverty rate changes was possible for only eight countries.^h The paucity of frequent poverty data results from infrequent collection of such data, currently through household income and expenditure surveys at present.

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

^h ESCAP (2015) Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific, SDG 1 (Poverty), p. 6.

these countries do not conduct sample labour force surveys or establishment surveys, both of which are key data sources for SDG indicator monitoring.

Table 2
Key statistical surveys conducted in Asia and the Pacific

Censuses	%	Sample Surveys	%
Population and Housing	98	Labour Force	84
Agriculture	72	Income and Expenditure	92
Economic	48	Establishment	78

Source: ESCAP Statistics Division.

In addition, the quality of information can also be highly questionable from these survey activities, especially in least developed countries and small island developing states (SIDS) where reliance on inexperienced field staff with little supervision is dependent of their success. For SIDS in particular, many NSOs operate with very few staff (10 or less) thus making it difficult to put the required effort in to conducting high quality survey products. The study on SDG data readiness in Bangladesh revealed that when SDG-related data were available, they often suffered from a lack of accuracy and reliability, timeliness and punctuality, accessibility and clarity, and, coherence and comparability.ⁱ At the same time, data quality in Turkey was considered to be undermined by restrictions that administrative bodies imposed on access to microdata.^j

Measurements of disability have been plagued by lack of reliable and comparable data, impeding the formulation of evidence-based disability-inclusive policies and programmes. For instance, governments across Asia and the Pacific reported disability prevalence to ranges from 1% to 18.5% (average 4.6%), in contrast to a level of 15% as estimated by World Health Survey. As a result, the monitoring framework of the “Incheon Strategy to ‘Make the Right Real’ for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific” includes a goal to “Improve the reliability and comparability of disability data.”^k

4. Administrative data sources below standard

Along with surveys, administrative data will form a crucial source of data for producing many of the SGD indicators. Key administrative data sources include Education Management Information Systems and Health Management Information Systems. Whilst many member States have such systems in place, collecting crucial information in a range of sectors, due to the complexities of maintaining these systems, covering remote geographies

ⁱ Rahman, M et al (2015) Measuring for Monitoring: The State of Data for SDGs in Bangladesh, available from: <http://southernvoice-postmdg.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Bangladesh-Country-Report-Highlights.pdf>.

^j Arda, M et al (2015) Measuring Sustainable Development to 2030: A view from Turkey, Available from: www.post2015datatest.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Post2015_Data_Test_Turkey_HighLights.pdf.

^k ESCAP (2012) *Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific*, available from: www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Incheon%20Strategy%20%28English%29.pdf.

with limited technical expertise, data from these sources is often of a poor standard.

Administrative data based on complete registration of vital events, such as births and deaths, is essential for monitoring health outcomes and population dynamics. According to assessments of civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems conducted in 47 Asian and Pacific countries between 2010 and 2012, only 11 were categorized as satisfactory, while 36 were found to be dysfunctional, weak or inadequate.¹ The region has ramped up efforts to improve CRVS systems, which involves addressing barriers to reporting births and deaths, cooperation between key agencies, and shortfalls in how the data are recorded and managed.^m The task is complex, expensive and will take significant time and effort to resolve.

As mentioned earlier, less developed countries are more likely to rely on statistical surveys to collect information which otherwise could be more accurately generated from a well-functioning administrative data source. Whilst sample surveys can compensate for administrative data source deficiencies in such a way, their limitations become more prominent in producing estimates for smaller population groups with acceptable precision, which is key for meeting data needs to address inequalities in the SDG agenda. Improving the administrative data systems in many of these scenarios is therefore a preferred solution.

5. Some indicators are new and still in the development stage

The production of the global list of SDG indicators has seen the introduction of new indicators which had not previously been a focus for their respective sectors. One such example is the measurement of income poverty, which was at the household level under the Millennium Development Goals. However, the relevant targets in the 2030 Agenda require income poverty rates to be measured and monitored separately by sex, age, employment status and geographic location. This new requirement means that measurement of income poverty now need to take into consideration intra-household distribution of resources, which are yet to be developed.

Similarly, five of the 11 indicators for the targets under Goal 4 (education) measure the learning and development outcomes of children and adults, for which international agreed statistical guidelines are under development. The same is the case with the global indicators measuring agricultural productivity and food production systems under Goal 2 (agriculture).ⁿ

In some areas, work is already underway to develop measurement standards. These include disaster-related statistics, where ESCAP has spearheaded the development of methodologies to adequately and

¹ Mikkelsen, L. 2012. Improving civil registration and vital statistics systems: Lessons learnt from the application of health information tools in Asia and the Pacific. Working Paper Number 24. Health Information Systems Knowledge Hub.

^m ESCAP (2014) “Ministerial declaration to “Get everyone in the picture” in Asia and the Pacific” and “Regional action framework on civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific”, both available from: www.unescap.org/events/ministerial-conference-civil-registration-and-vital-statistics-asia-and-pacific.

ⁿ Such indicators include 2.3.1 “Volume of production per labour unit by classes of farming/pastoral/forestry enterprise size” and 2.4.1 “Percentage of agricultural area under sustainable agricultural practices.”

consistently collect and report such basic statistics as disaster occurrences and impacts.^o

The international statistical community has a long tradition of collaborating to produce solutions to measurement challenges. The upcoming establishing of a tier system of the global indicators by the IAEG-SDGs will guide such endeavours so as to develop adequate methodologies for the SDG indicators.

6. Timeliness of data still a concern

Even when data for indicators is available, the timeliness of some of these indicators tends to be less than desirable. Take the earlier example regarding data on international income poverty again, any data (e.g. one data point) was available was for only 17 countries for 2010-2014, thus hampering the timely assessment of progress in reducing income poverty.^p

Another example is data for some health indicators, i.g. rate of skilled birth attendance, which are available for about three-quarters of member States of ESCAP, but the information is becoming dated, the most recent being 2010 for more than one-third of the countries. Similarly, most recent data on indicators to measure social protection floors, water use efficiency and population living in slums tend to be prior to 2010 on average and thus are quite out-dated.

The challenge to produce timely statistics is not limited to the social sector. According to an assessment conducted by ESCAP in 2013, only half of the 49 countries reported to be producing a core range of economic statistics with the recommended frequencies, pointing to gaps in producing timely economic statistics in the region (see Table 3).

Table 3
Limitations in producing timely products for economic statistics

	Number	%
Produce quarterly GDP	20	41
Produce monthly commodity price index	10	20
Produce annual productivity measures	15	31
Produce annual integrated national accounts	28	57
Are able to produce annual indicators related to natural resources	7	14

Source: ESCAP Statistics Division.

Note: Responses for 49 member States of ESCAP, 2013

^o See “Report of the Second Meeting of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific”, Available from: www.unescap.org/resources/report-second-meeting-expert-group-disaster-related-statistics-asia-and-pacific.

^p ESCAP (2015) Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific, Chapter 1 No Poverty, p. 6.

7. Adequate data disaggregation a challenge

The 2030 Agenda enshrines the ambitious vision of leaving no one behind to “free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet.” In implementing this vision, the global monitoring framework must reflect the opportunities and development outcomes for the population groups that are left behind. This has been done by including indicators that measure the nine targets under Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda which focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, as well as disaggregating data for these and other indicators to identify the population groups who might be at varying levels of attaining the relevant targets.

Studies have demonstrated that efforts to reduce mortality and improve health resulted in different paces of progress for different population groups, leaving many of the poorest and most vulnerable behind.^q For this reason, the Expert Group agreed that it is the responsibility of the statistical community to meet the level of ambition in the 2030 Agenda of leaving no one behind and agreed on the following overarching principle of data disaggregation to accompany the list of indicators: “Sustainable Development Goal indicators should be disaggregated, where relevant, by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location, or other characteristics, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.”^r

Many of these indicators can be currently disaggregated by commonly collected information in administrative data sources and surveys such as age, sex and location. Demand is increasing however for more disaggregation of data covering income status, disability and migratory status to name a few.

In Asia and the Pacific, marginalized populations groups often also include the indigenous populations, slum dwellers, children with disabilities, those infected with HIV as well as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons.^s These population groups are generally “invisible” in statistical measurements. For instance, the SDG data readiness study in Turkey revealed that a major data gap in the country is data disaggregation regarding ethnicity since official statistical collection does not identify ethnic groups.^t

To address this, additional data collection will be required, either through in administrative database systems or statistical surveys or non-conventional data sources to ensure all required disaggregation’s are being met. Having adequate data to identify these and other population groups will be crucial to inform the follow-up and review for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific to ensure that these and other marginalized population groups are visible in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies.

^q Save the Children (2010). *A Fair Chance At Life: Why Equity Matters for Child Mortality*. Save the Children: London, UK; Wirth, ME et al (2006). “Setting the stage for equity-sensitive monitoring of the maternal and child health MDGs.” *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 84 (7), p 519–27; Borooah, VK (2004). *Gender bias among children in India in their diet and immunization against disease.* *Social Science & Medicine* 58:9, p 1719–31;

^r See E/CN.3/2016/2, para 26-28.

^s See (E/ESCAP/ FSD(3)/INF/6)

^t Arda, M et al (2015) *Measuring Sustainable Development to 2030: A view from Turkey*, Available from: www.post2015datatest.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Post2015_Data_Test_Turkey_HighLights.pdf.

8. Limitations in national statistical capacity

Gaps in the coverage and quality of data to measure SDGs reflect insufficiency in various aspects of the capacity of national statistical systems that span institutional and resources factors. A well-functioning national statistical system must be underpinned by a strong and effective legal framework that stipulates clearly and enforces the mandates of national statistical office and other government or non-government agencies responsible for official statistics. Such a framework should provide the basis for policies on access to data enshrining the “right to information” and ensuring that data are not only available but also useable and cost effective. In particular, it should serve as a guarantee for the effective coordination of the various parts of the national statistical system and the professional independence and integrity of official statistics. Essential elements of a well-functioning statistical system include frequent and meaningful engagement between data producers and users, robust and sustained data sources (particularly data from administrative sources that are compiled and maintained by other government agencies), application of existing statistical guidelines and standards, as well as skilled and motivated staff members.

According to an assessment on the production of agricultural and rural statistics in 2011-12, subregions across ESCAP reported varying levels of 15 constraints spanning staffing and resource adequacy to political support and demand for agricultural statistics. While countries in South-East Asia on average reported that funds for field-oriented activities and well as up-to-date ICT hardware and software were major constraints, in South and South-West Asia, the main constraints were reported to be about implementing sound methodologies and having enough office space. On the other hand, lack of appreciation at the policy level and low levels of demand were considered the major constraints for developing agricultural statistics in the Pacific (see table 4).

Table 4
Main constraints in agricultural statistics, 2011-12

	South-East Asia	South & South-West Asia	North & Central Asia	East Asia	Pacific	Developed
Number of professional staff at headquarters	3.0	3.3	2.7	3.0	3.4	1.0
Number of support staff at headquarters for	2.8	1.7	2.2	3.0	3.0	1.0
Technical skills of the available statistical staff	2.0	2.5	2.2	3.0	3.1	1.0
Turnover of professional staff	2.2	3.3	2.5	3.0	3.2	1.0
Number of field workers	2.7	2.8	3.5	3.3	2.9	1.0
Number of professional staff in the field	2.8	2.7	3.5	3.0	2.9	1.0
Transport equipment for field activities	2.5	3.5	2.3	3.0	3.0	1.0
Funds for field-oriented statistical activities	3.5	2.8	3.0	3.3	3.0	1.0
Up-to-date information technology hardware	3.5	2.5	2.0	2.7	2.6	1.0
Up-to-date information technology software	3.2	2.3	2.2	2.7	2.9	1.0
Sound methodology implemented	2.5	3.7	3.2	2.3	3.2	1.0
Building space for office	2.7	3.5	3.0	2.7	3.0	1.0
Appreciation of statistics at the policy-making level	2.8	2.0	2.5	2.0	3.7	1.0
Support of statistics at political level in the Government	3.2	2.5	2.3	2.7	3.4	1.0
Level of demand for statistics	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.7	4.0	1.5

Note: Responses from 38 countries. 1=No constraint; 2=Little constraint; 3=Relative constraint; 4=Significant constraint; 5=Dominant constraint; Averages refer to an arithmetic average of countries within each subregional group.

Assessments conducted by the World Bank show that the capacity of national statistical systems in the region has gradually improved over the last decade. However, there is enormous variation within Asia and the Pacific (Table 4). Overall, in 2014, statistical capacity was rated with a score of 67 out of a possible 100, putting the region ahead of the Middle East and North Africa, but behind Latin America and the Caribbean. On the other hand, all of ESCAP's four subregions, except the Pacific, were considered to have higher statistical capacity on average than each of the world's other three developing regions. Member States in the Pacific, due to their unique challenges associated with being geographically isolated small island developing states, faces significant barriers to building statistical capacity across all social, environmental and economic domains.

Table 5

Varying levels of statistical capacity

Average scores of statistical capacity of developing countries, by region and sub-region

	2005	2010	2015
Asia and the Pacific	65.9	66.9	67.2
South-East Asia	71.7	70.0	72.2
South and South-West Asia	69.6	71.7	70.7
North and Central Asia	76.0	78.2	73.5
Pacific	41.8	42.4	44.5
Europe	79.5	80.6	80.3
Latin America & Caribbean	73.4	76.3	77.3
Middle East & North Africa	63.4	61.3	64.4
Sub-Saharan Africa	56.4	58.8	59.9

Note: The statistical capacity indicator is a composite measure based on a diagnostic framework that assesses methodology, data sources, and periodicity and timeliness. The score can range from from 0 (low capacity) to 100 (high capacity). The average scores for Asia and the Pacific and its subregions are calculated by ESCAP staff for 40 countries.

Source: Country data from World Bank Statistical Capacity Indicators database. Accessed in march 2016.