

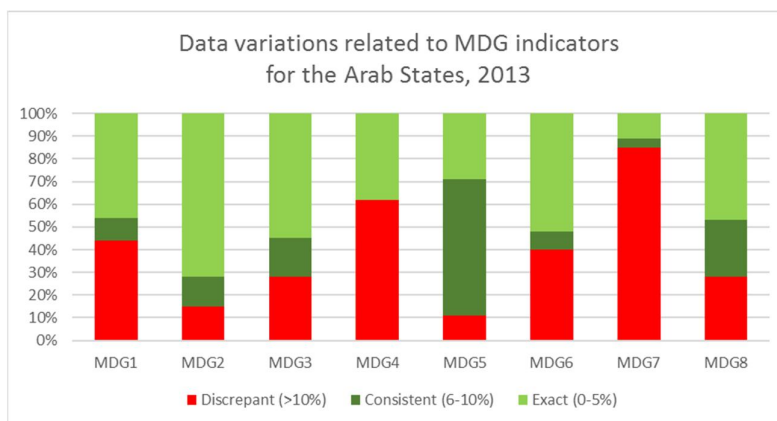
DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE WORKING GROUP ON SDG DATA (WG-SDG)

1. BACKGROUND

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by world leaders during the global Summit in New York in September 2015, calls for a solid evidence base. Lessons learned from the statistical monitoring of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) show more efforts should be put into work on defining indicators, sources and underlying data sets, and building partnerships among national, regional and global players. The SDG data sets point to major data gaps, and significant variations in data depending on the sources. These are visible principally as discrepancies between national and international data sets. However, discrepancies can also be found between MDG-related reports and studies prepared by agencies.

The following chart is based on the analysis of data variations (discrepancies) between the nationally reported data and data comprised in the UN MDG Database:



The situation documented by the chart just two years before the target date of the MDGs is far from desirable. Some reasons to explain this discrepancy may be the lack of ownership of the MDG indicators framework by national statistical systems and a largely uncoordinated approach by the UN agencies. Lack of national ownership clearly lies with the UN statistical system, absence of transparency (absence of consultation with national statistical systems prior to launching the MDG indicators framework).

Coordination efforts with respect to SDG data and indicators, therefore, aim at avoiding the failures of the MDG framework, and improving the quality of data (and ultimately of reports and studies

based on these data). There is a need for broad consensus on modalities of producing SDG related data and indicators that should include statistical components of the UN agencies – members of the RCM, national statistical systems and other regional and sub-regional statistical agencies.

2. GOAL

The goal of the Working Group on the SDG Data (WG-SDG) is to strategize reporting on SDGs through coordinating and harmonizing data generated by all parties reporting on SDGs and other relevant internationally endorsed frameworks.

3. FUNCTIONS AND SCOPE

The role of the Working Group on SDG Data (WG-SDG) is to bring a coordinated support to the Working Group on the 2030 Agenda and related activities of RCM members. Specific functions and scope of work of the WG-SDG include:

- i. **Regional framework of SDG indicators and other relevant internationally endorsed frameworks:** The WG-SDG shall select indicators that will inform regional studies and reports. Taking the Global SDG Indicators Framework as a starting point, the WG-SDG will consider the relevance of indicators to regional priorities, availability of data, and their importance for regional studies and reports. Primarily, the indicators should be based on national official statistics, further harmonized and aggregated as appropriate by the responsible RCM member agencies. However, some of the indicators (most typically indicators related to climate change, sea/ocean water, indicators on means of implementation and alike) shall be produced directly by the agencies. The underlying principle is to come up with indicators for which data can be collected soonest/with short deadlines.
- ii. **Sources and means of data collection:** Following up to the decisions by the 47th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, the compilation of the indicators will be based to the greatest extent possible on comparable and standardized national official statistics provided by the countries to the international statistical systems. However, in the interest of comparability of data and ensuring that these are produced according to standardized methodologies, the WG-SDG should precisely define specific surveys from which data shall be drawn and data processing methods. Furthermore, in the interest of coordination and harmonization of data, responsibilities of individual agencies in data collection shall be specified.
- iii. **Sharing of data:** The WG-SDG will agree on means of sharing of data, i.e. ensuring that all relevant data are made available to all agencies, regardless which of the agencies is the original custodian of data. A regional SDG indicators database should be the central point for data sharing.
- iv. **Liaison with the intergovernmental processes:** The WG-SDG shall, through its Secretariat (ESCWA Statistics Division) liaise with the Steering Committee of National Statistical Offices on SDG Indicators (SC-SDG) to be established by the ESCWA Statistical Committee. This should extend to the representatives of the Arab States in global groups, namely the Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDG) and the High Level Group on Partnership and Capacity Development (HLG). The inter-agency and the inter-governmental processes have distinct constituencies, however, it is important that ultimately there is consensus on indicators and modalities of collection and harmonization of data throughout the regional statistical system.

4. MEMBERSHIP, GOVERNANCE & ORGANIZATION

All members of the RCM with a substantive statistical component will be invited to nominate their focal points/statistical expert to the Working Group on SDG Data (WG-SDG). The level of representation should be the Chief Regional Statisticians of UN agencies or their equivalent.

Only RCM member entities that have competency and capacity in statistics may participate in the WG-SDG. This restriction of membership reflects that **the WG-SDG is a group of statistical data producers (primary or secondary)**, but not of data users, who are represented by the Working Group on the 2030 Agenda to which the WG-SDG has a reporting relationship.

The WG is chaired by ESCWA represented by the Director of the Statistics Division. The Chair will be supported by a Secretariat from the ESCWA Statistics Division.

The Chair, after consulting with the WG-SDG members, may invite statistical experts from non-RCM entities, if such participation is found relevant to the activities. This may include inviting experts from regional statistical organizations, such as the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS), or statistical offices of regions linked to the Arab region, such as GCC-STAT, Organization for Islamic Cooperation, Afristat, etc.

The Chair, with support from the Secretariat, will develop biennial workplans and budgets, and organize regular meetings with WG members. In consultation with other WG-SDG members, the Chair may also establish task teams in specific statistical subject-matter areas to support the deliberation on specific groups of indicators or other related matters. Members of the task teams will be, in a common consultation, selected from among members of the WG-SDG.

The Chair will organize at least one meeting of the WG every year complemented by several virtual meetings as appropriate. Meetings may also be organized on the sidelines of other regional statistical or SDG related events.

5. FINANCIAL AND IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS

All RCM member entities participating in the WG-SDG are expected to make contributions to the Group's work based on the established biennial workplan and budget. Contributions may be made in-cash or in-kind, such as through covering participant and staff travel, supporting consultancy costs, contributing to meeting costs, or providing staff time and resources, as well as contributing relevant data to the common regional pool/database. The size of the contribution and the modality of disbursement will be determined on an individual basis with each entity.

6. MONITORING AND REPORTING

The WG-SDG will regularly assess its progress against the biennial workplan and through consultations with members on lessons learned. The WG-SDG will prepare an annual report of progress, challenges and future plans to be submitted to the Working Group on the 2030 Agenda and subsequently to the meeting of the RCM.

Individual activities and outputs of the WG will be assessed on the basis of tangible deliverables, such as the Regional SDG Indicators Framework, efficiency of data sharing and the regional SDG database.