



Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) for Arab States

WORKPLAN FOR SDG DATA TASKFORCE (DATA TF)

Background:

The role of the Data TF is to bring coordinated support to the Joint Working Group on the 2030 Agenda and related activities of RCM and UNDG members. The main statistics and data challenge for the 2030 Agenda is the resolution of issues created by developments in national, regional and global reporting contexts. The pace of national development significantly differs, with some countries producing Voluntary National Reports (VNRs) and setting SDG governance structures involving other national statistical offices, while other countries are just at the initial stages of defining their approach to the SDGs. The UN Country Teams are also at varying stages of incorporating SDGs into their development frameworks.

While the global indicators framework was adopted in March 2016 by the UN Statistical Commission, and subsequently adopted by the General Assembly (A/RES/71/313), there are currently 84 indicators in Tier III – indicators for which no internationally established methodologies or standards have been developed and/or tested. Moreover, according to the analysis undertaken in late 2016, it may currently be possible to establish baselines for only 59% of the indicators included in Tier I and Tier II. A more detailed and updated analysis of data availability is due to be completed by the end of 2017. Nevertheless, the national statistical systems and regional UN agencies in the Arab region face the challenge of increasing availability of data for the global framework of SDG indicators.

Finally, from the regional perspective, the UN regional agencies need to identify the core set of data reflecting the regional strategy. This process is to follow the work of the Joint Working Group on the 2030 Agenda. In the absence of a strategy, the Data TF members shall anticipate future data needs, and use the existing frameworks (such as ICPD lead indicators) to formulate SDG data strategies. In this respect, given the positive feedback from national statistical offices, the ICPD lead indicators initiative can serve as a model for addressing core sets of indicators in other subject-matter areas.

To resolve the diverse needs of national, regional and global reporting on SDG related indicators, it is important to focus on minimizing the burden on already over-stretched national statistical systems through identifying core sets of data, setting a data sharing platform and engaging in capacity development and technical cooperation.

Areas of statistics and data related work of the RCM / UNDG:

Within the existing mandates of the RCM and UNDG member agencies, the Data TF, which focuses on regional priorities and considers available resources, engages in the following joint activities:

a) Maintaining an Inventory of SDG data related activities of participating agencies

The Inventory takes the form of mapping the SDGs, associated Targets and Indicators of the Global Framework and the activities of participating agencies. Once the 2017 initial version of the Inventory is finalized, it shall be made available online. The following details will be included in the Inventory:

- Goal;
- Target;
- Global indicators;
- Global custodian agency;
- Partner agencies;
- List of activities by the RCM / UNDG participating agencies, with each activity classified as:
 - Data collection from countries;
 - Database;
 - Capacity development;
 - Reporting.

b) Coordinating initiatives on regional frameworks of indicators

The Global SDG Indicators Framework (A/RES/71/313) is considered as the principal guide for SDG data reporting. However, several purpose-made frameworks come from past global and regional conferences and initiatives, such as ICPD, CEDAW, WSIS, etc. Those processes are mandated, and the statistical monitoring should not be discontinued, but rather reconciled with the SDG requirements. With respect to keeping the reporting burden as low as possible and to prioritize the most important areas for regional development, regional initiatives should focus on linking such frameworks with the SDG indicators framework, identifying common points and the core data set to be collected. RCM members already cooperate on these initiative, for example:

- ICPD leading indicators: UNFPA (leader), ESCWA
- Environment related sustainable development indicators: LAS (leader), UNEP, ESCWA

Based on the Inventory referred to in a above, the draft and/or finalized indicator frameworks, coming from regional initiatives, should be made available on the RCM website and linked to the context of the global indicators framework.

The ICPD based set of SDG relevant indicators was discussed and accepted by national statistical offices at the 12th session of the ESCWA Statistical Committee, as well as at the Regional Forum in July 2017 in Amman. This serves as a model / good practice of cooperation between the agencies (under the UNFPA leadership) which can serve as a model for addressing core sets of indicators in other subject-matter areas.

c) Coordinating national statistical capacity development in the region

Statistical capacity development should not focus only on training. It has a much wider scope including building skills and knowledge, exchanging experiences, adapting institutional and legislative frameworks, and providing an institutional platform. The goal of capacity building is to enable national statistical offices (and other producers of official statistics) to put in place new and improved activities and processes of statistical data production.

The Data TF maintains a list of agencies and statistical subject-matter areas of interventions for each of the participating agencies, and the type of intervention (e.g. implementing capacity development programmes, bilateral technical assistance, funding and resource mobilisation, etc.). Moreover, based on the inventory of activities the Data TF identifies potential gaps and duplications.

It is important to keep in mind that production of sustainable development indicators depends on the basic capacity of national statistical systems to produce statistical data. Capacity development activities therefore cannot focus simply on indicators included in established framework, but must cover building and developing capacity for production of the underlying basic statistics.

d) Provide a data sharing platform for RCM and UNDG participating agencies

It is a key responsibility of the UN statistical system to provide all categories of users: policy makers, researchers and analysts, businesses and media, ordinary citizens with consistent and harmonized statistical data. Despite the existence of various coordination mechanisms, there is still a lot to do to achieve a data sharing platform. Moreover, the UN statistical systems face a legitimate criticism by national statistical offices about the large amount of data demanded from countries that are often duplicated from one agency to another.

The risk of having multiple uncoordinated channels of data collection through different formats of questionnaires sent out by various agencies at various times, is that the UN statistical system is getting too many versions (revisions) of data – in other words, the figures for the same indicators show an undesirable variation. This may be confusing to the users, who expect the UN to work as one, and to disseminate consistent information. The users may be lost due to the variation in data, as they face a dilemma which of the UN data to choose.

The solution is two-fold:

1. Respecting the mandates and roles of custodian agencies, who lead the data collection pertaining to specific indicators; and
2. Sharing the data collected among agencies.

The data sharing platform should not be seen just as an IT tool. The data sharing platform should bring with it:

- a) The infrastructure – The Data TF should choose the most appropriate (pragmatic and sustainable) option, for example a centralised database maintained by one agency or a portal linking to combined databases maintained by individual agencies
- b) A firm commitment by RCM and UNDG participating agencies with set principles and responsibilities for each agency detailing the type of data and the frequency it is shared, ensuring complementarity among agencies.
- c) A review and coordination process that will periodically identify new data challenges, and update the pattern of data flows.
- d) Multi-dimensional communication and coordination between each of the regional offices and its respective headquarters, between offices present in the region, with national statistical systems and with agencies outside the RCM and UNDG framework.
- e) Data quality framework based on the best practices.

The above data sharing platform is to serve the needs of RCM and UNDG participating agencies as well as providing a platform for individual agencies to share data with their headquarters. This also requires internal communication between the statistical units and policy areas within each agency.

An additional issue is how the data is to be presented to users? Each of the agencies can present/disseminate the data according to its mandates and work programme – while crediting the original sources. A question is, whether the Joint RCM and UNDG Working Group wants to maintain a public data portal, such as the Arab Development Portal recently developed by the UNDP regional office?

e) Establishing communication with the national statistical systems, including advocacy at the national level

The RCM Working Group on SDG Data which is the direct predecessor of the Data TF agreed to use the ESCWA Statistical Committee as the platform for communication with the heads of national statistical offices. The 12th session of the Statistical Committee in April 2017 was attended by representatives of the majority of RCM and UNDG participating agencies. A proposed Regional Action Plan (building on regions specifics and on the Global Action Plan) was discussed at the session. The Statistical Committee also welcomed/adopted a set of 89 population related indicators based on the ICPD and tailored to the SDGs needs. In addition to these two formal agenda items, the session also allowed representatives of the RCM and UNDG agencies to interact on specific aspects of statistical programmes with representatives of national statistical offices assembled in one place. The session was followed by a workshop on the implementation of the SDG indicators framework with the same participants.

ESCWA maintains regular contacts with the leadership, as well as with experts, of the national statistical offices in between the sessions of the Statistical Committee. However, a similar committee's work under the auspices of other RCM and UNDG members, and the Data TF will develop its communication strategy based on the character and timing of these other committees. The Board of the Arab Institute for Training and Research of Statistics (AITRS) can be also used for advocacy on specific issues.

An option was also to establish a joint high level working group involving RCM and UNDG agencies along with national statistical offices. The first feedback on this idea received through informal consultations with national statistical offices was that there are already too many existing committees, and we should get a better use of those.

Progress:

The following table summarises the expected accomplishments and progress made by the Data TF:

Expected Accomplishments	Activity	Progress Made
EA 1: A coordination tool in the form of inventory of activities put in place and regularly updated.	Inventory of SDG data related activities of participating agencies	Initial questionnaire distributed to participating agencies

<p>EA 2: Collection of indicators of frameworks [linked with the global framework of indicators] serving as reference to agencies, as well as national statistical systems.</p>	<p>Coordinating Initiatives on Regional Framework of Indicators</p>	<p>ICPD leading indicators completed, presented to national statistical offices in March 2017, included in the database of 89 indicators and periodically updated.</p> <p>A regional forum was completed in July 2017 (Amman) to create a national mechanism to collect data on the 39 priority ICPD-based SDG indicators and reaffirm the commitment of NSOs on annual reporting/update.</p> <p>Draft framework of environmental indicators</p>
<p>EA 3: List of statistical subject-matter areas of intervention in statistical capacity building/development by agency and type of activity/initiative</p> <p>EA 4: Calendar of regional statistical events sponsored/co-sponsored by RCM and UNDG participating agencies.</p> <p>EA 5: Annual report on statistical capacity development in the Arab region</p>	<p>Coordinating national capacity development in the region</p>	<p>Working group on population and housing censuses: ESCWA (leader), UNFPA</p> <p>Regional implementation of the Global Strategy on Agriculture and Rural Development Statistics: FAO (leader), ECA, (ESCWA)</p>
<p>EA 6: Data sharing platform for the RCM and UNDG members for the Arab states is established, maintained and used by the participating agencies.</p> <p>EA 7: Improved public dissemination of quality SDG data and statistics on the Arab region.</p>	<p>Provide a data sharing platform for RCM and UNDG participating agencies</p>	<p>First version of the Arab Development Portal</p>

EA 8: The ESCWA Statistical Committee is used for a dialogue and communication between RCM and UNDG agencies and national statistical offices during the sessions of the Committee, but also in between the sessions.	Establishing communication with a national statistical system, including advocacy at the regional level	Active participation by RCM and UNDG agencies in the 12 th session of the ESCWA Statistical Committee.
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Governance mechanism

The Data TF is Co-Chaired by UNFPA and ESCWA. The [Terms of Reference](#) also deal with the issues of financial and in-kind contributions and monitoring and reporting.

In addition to the RCM and UNDG member agencies, other regional institutions undertake statistical activities in the region. The Data TF members may, therefore identify ways of engaging these institutions in areas