

Report of the Post-2015 Development Agenda Working Group on Monitoring and Indicators

**Comments by Ian Kinniburgh
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Madam Chair,

First and foremost, I should like to thank you for the opportunity to participate in this event, particularly since I am a dinosaur in this world. I predate the MDGs and, for many in this audience, I think that is a case of “How old can you be?”

Next, I should like to congratulate Robert Johnston and all those who contributed to this report on a job well done. It is difficult to produce such a multi-stakeholder document and I think the end product will be very useful to those who are deciding where to go from here. It encapsulates a lot of lessons of experience and pointers for the future that should not be ignored. All involved in post-2015 discussions should take time to read **at least** its conclusions.

The report implicitly focuses on the targets and indicators for what are currently Goals 1-7 because this is where there have been the greatest statistical challenges. However, this should not cause the critical Goal 8 to be overlooked; data here are more readily available but further improvements are possible, for example in the areas of finance and trade.

My view is that, if we look back to where we were 15 years ago, the MDGs **as a concept** can be declared a success from several perspectives – politically, organizationally, in terms of achieving development results and in various other ways, including improving statistics. As always, there is more to be done in all these respects but progress - and I would say substantial progress - has been made. Indeed, one of the challenges, I feel, is that the MDGs have become victims of their own success. Now, it appears that all interest groups want to have targets or indicators for their own particular sphere of activity included in whatever framework is agreed for the future. I am, however, doubtful whether this is the correct approach.

15 years ago, governments were preparing a document called the Millennium *Declaration*, whereas now reference is being made to the post-2015 ‘*Agenda*’. The MDGs were only a part of what might be termed the overall ‘development agenda’ that had been adopted by governments through a wide range of consultations within the UN system prior to 2000. The post-2015 agenda is likely to be more comprehensive than the Millennium Declaration and this is one reason why there is an underlying urge for all participants to see their interests reflected.

A further difference between 2000 and 2013 is that, if I may over-simplify what is in the report, in 2000 Governments decided on some Goals and then went to the statisticians and said ‘Measure that!’ As the report makes clear, an enormous amount of hard-slog statistical work has

been done and the results, as summarized in para. 38, have probably exceeded anything that was realistically expected when such work began. Nevertheless, there are, for example, still no data on access to essential drugs and only very recent data on malaria. However worthy the goals in these areas may be, it has not been possible, despite the best efforts of statisticians and others, to assemble the data necessary to evaluate progress towards the quantitative goal that was established. This puts in question the usefulness of such a goal and is a test that should be applied in deciding on future goals and targets.

In other areas, there are still gaps in country coverage in some critical areas, particularly in lower income countries. To the extent that there is a trade-off between adding new indicators to the framework and improving the country coverage of the existing indicators, my preference would be for the latter. I am not referring here to the extreme difficulties in war-torn and similar countries, but to the gaps in the data in many LDCs. As one dimension of the emphasis on poverty and inequality, attention must continue to be given to the differences among countries. In setting Goals and measuring progress, we must ensure that the special needs of the least developed and other disadvantaged countries are addressed and that data are available to measure progress in these countries.

Despite the focus on the MDGs and all the important work on MDG indicators, it is important not to overlook the equally outstanding statistical work that has been done in other areas, many of which may previously have been considered beyond normal statistical reporting. Our Keynote Speaker gave impressive evidence of the statistical progress that has been made in the area of human rights. As underlined in the report, there has been equally remarkable progress in other areas, such as environment and sustainable development, gender, governance and others. These results have been achieved largely without any form of MDG-endorsement. One can expect the same will continue in the future in response to evolving needs and demands and with the application of new techniques and technologies. Inclusion or exclusion in the post-2015 framework is unlikely to be the be-all and end-all of these developing areas of statistics.

In this respect, some of the pioneering work that has been patiently done outside the MDG framework over the years, even decades, has resulted in the availability of data that could, if required, now be incorporated in the post-2015 framework. Developing sound global data systems is a long-term process but some of these new areas are now 'ready for prime-time'.

I would illustrate some of these issues by referring to the increasing attention being given to the growing inequality in the world. Developing meaningful global data on poverty has been an enormous undertaking but this would probably pale in comparison with the effort required to obtain operationally useful *global* measures of inequality. [Personally, as a policy issue, I believe the emphasis should continue to be on reducing poverty and hunger rather than on reducing inequality.] This is not to say that reducing inequality should not be a complementary goal of the post-2015 agenda, but I do not believe it is amenable to a global numerical target at the present time.

In applying the goals and targets, it is critical to underline the importance of para. 9 of the conclusions which emphasizes that the MDGs were global goals: they provided an overarching framework and they were not all equally relevant to all developing countries. Each individual

country must take responsibility for and have full ownership of its own development strategy, setting its own goals and targets. Countries can respond to the global goals in the context of their own priorities and the availability of resources. Reverting to the case of inequality, for example, the international community may decide that reducing inequality should be a global goal and individual countries may wish to set their own goals for doing so, using indicators that could vary from country to country. Development partners should respect and support these domestically-adopted strategies, goals and targets. First, they should not impose global goals, either implicitly or explicitly, as any form of requirement or condition at the country level. Secondly, partners should continue to provide support to developing countries in implementing their strategies, in this case in developing their statistical capabilities.

In establishing global goals and targets, there can be a high degree of political ambition but there also needs to be a healthy dose of technical pragmatism in specifying targets and selecting indicators. Combining paragraphs 5 and 12 of the conclusions, the post-2015 agenda needs indicators that are:

- clearly linked to the targets;
- well defined;
- objectively measurable;
- measurable over time;
- based on data that can be collected in a cost-effective and practical manner;
- useable across countries; and
- ‘aggregatable’.

An essential improvement in preparing the agenda on this occasion should therefore be to discuss the technicalities of any proposed numerical goals and related targets and indicators with the relevant statisticians before they are set in stone. In a perfectly operating UN system, this would involve obtaining endorsement by the Statistical Commission; one might consider a special meeting of the Statistical Commission for this purpose. Realistically, however, particularly in view of the time constraints, this may be a goal too far. Nevertheless, it is indispensable that there should be some prior consultations with the statisticians in the relevant substantive agencies on the technical aspects of any numerical goals and targets.

With regard to this meeting, I believe the stretch goal should be for everybody concerned to read this report. The aspirational goal – and one that is eminently achievable – should be for everybody to read, absorb and apply the conclusions. The minimalist position would be for everybody to do their part to ensure that about a dozen key paragraphs are rigourously adhered to in the post 2015 agenda. My choice for these mandatory paras. would be 5-6, 8, 9, 12-13, 34-36, 41 and 45. I believe these should be a mantra on the walls of any room where the goals and targets for the post-2015 agenda are being discussed.

Thank you.