

Indicators for Sustainable Development: Proposals for the Way Forward

**Prepared on behalf of the
UN Division for Sustainable Development**

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“We need many indicators because we have many different purposes – but there may be over-arching purposes that transcend nations and cultures, and therefore there may be overarching indicators.”

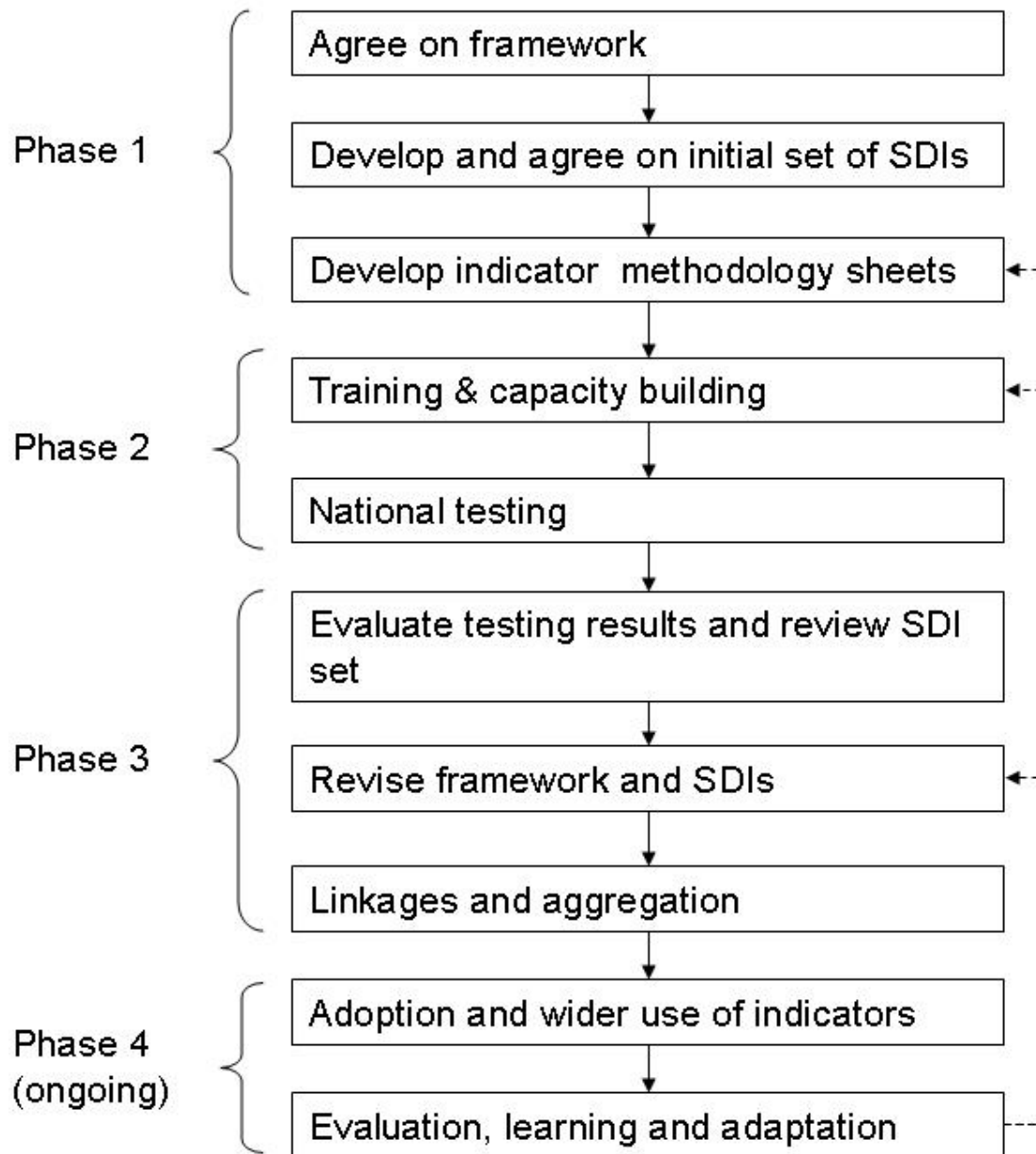
(Donella H. Meadows)

Key objectives

- Review key achievements and SDI trends
- Reflect on the role of the UN-CSD and its SDI program, including its relationship with institutional mechanisms like NSDS
- Assess the potential for a common global framework to emerge and offer a set of options for re-directing and advancing the CSD's work on indicators over the next decade

Emerging trends relevant for SDIs

- Continuing interest in the development of aggregate indices
- Interest in core sets of ‘headline indicators’
- Emergence of goal-oriented indicators
- Measurement of sustainability by capital (‘green’) accounting systems
- Making better use of indicators in performance measurement



Evaluation, learning and adaptation with regard to:

- Overall approach
- Framework
- Indicator set
- Methodology sheets
- Indicator use

- Direct and indirect impact of UN CSD's indicators
- While important in providing templates and some common SDIs, an indicator menu based approach *alone* did not lead to the desired level of commonality

Four scenarios

- **Indicator Zoo** - essentially assumes continuing the same approach to coordination, and a growing diversity of SDI frameworks and indicator sets.
- **Global Cooperation** - assumes stronger coordination mechanisms without a major overhaul of the existing approaches.
- **Global Integration** - envisions new and significantly strengthened institutional arrangements between key actors involved in SDIs.
- **Synergy World** - we assume that key actors of SD are willing to compromise, and there is political appetite for connecting SDIs with other policy mechanisms, particularly the SEEA and MGDIs.

Proposals for a pragmatic approach

- Adopt a framework based on various *categories* of capital and capital maintenance, with the understanding that the concept will need to be further developed to cover human well-being and social aspects and those assets and attributes that can not be expressed in terms of monetary value
- Strengthen the synergy between SDIs and underlying statistical data collection and accounting systems, building particularly on the widely accepted system of national accounts and their satellite, the SEEA;
- Adopt an evolutionary approach focusing in annual or if real progress requires multi-year work programmes on a small set of maximum 3-5 indicators, related to high-priority policy issues;

Proposals for a pragmatic approach

- Better align indicators with the MDGs, selecting globally relevant indicators, adopting core measures that would complement the MDGs particularly in the environmental domain, and linking SDIs, where possible to policy goals and targets
- Revitalize a capacity building program focused on priority indicators through the usual channels of technical support
- Continue to explore options for the integration of SDIs and National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS), recognizing that SDIs and NSDS are mutually supportive
- Promote the periodic review of SDIs e.g. through audits or peer reviews, following the approach adopted for NSDS, to ensure indicators address emerging priorities and ideas and have strong credibility

THANK YOU

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