

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING A NATIONAL PROGRAMME OF INDICATORS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

As contained in Chapter 3 of the publication ‘Indicators of Sustainable Development: Guidelines and Methodologies’ United Nations, New York 2001

The following guidance is intended to help countries in setting up their own national indicator programmes as a basis for monitoring the achievement of key national goals and objectives for sustainable development, using the framework and methodologies provided herein. These guidelines were used and enhanced by the 22 countries that volunteered to participate in the indicator pilot testing phase over a three-year period. To learn more of how countries have interpreted the guidelines as a starting point for national programmes please refer to Annex 3.

Procedures for the Development, Testing and Use of Indicators

The procedures and processes to be followed in developing, testing and using indicators of sustainable development will vary from country to country, depending on country specific conditions, national priorities and objectives, available infrastructure, expertise and the availability of data and other information for decision-making. Because the process requires the allocation of human and financial resources, a pragmatic, cost-effective approach is essential.

The following procedural issues are addressed: Organization; Implementation; Assessment and Evaluation; Institutional Support and Capacity Building; and Reporting.

3.1 Organization

The underlying theme of sustainable development is the integration of economic, social environmental issues in decision and policy making at all levels. This integration implies the involvement of virtually all traditional sectors of economic and government activity, such as economic planning, agriculture, health, energy, water, natural resources, industry, education and the environment, and so forth, according to the principal ministries of government. The assumption of integration is reflected in the indicators of sustainable development, which contain social, economic, environmental and institutional indicators, and should be taken up in mechanisms for institutional integration, such as national sustainable development councils, committees, and task forces as well as national strategies for sustainable development. This fundamental approach to sustainable development should be kept in mind in developing, testing and using indicators.

In many countries, responsibility for monitoring the achievement of national goals and objectives, including data collection, compilation and analysis of information resides in a number of institutions, including national statistical offices, sectoral ministries and national commissions for sustainable development. Responsibility may also be shared by governmental and non-governmental actors, and it may be supported by national, bilateral and international programmes and activities.

A coordination mechanism for the development of a national programme on indicators may be needed to facilitate networking amongst interested partners. The **national coordinating mechanism** could take a variety of forms depending on each country's needs and requirements. It could be set up as a Task Force, Working Group or a Committee, among other possibilities. It should, however, build upon and utilize already existing institutional arrangements and experience and should be flexible and transparent making use of the widest possible consultation and participation among all stakeholders involved. It should therefore involve among others, those ministries with programmes relevant to Agenda 21 (for example, Ministries of Planning, Health, Agriculture, Industry, Social Development and the Environment, among others) as well as those agencies charged with data collection, compilation and analysis in the country.

The **national coordinating** mechanism might usefully include officials from the national delegation to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, when possible, or representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Members of the scientific community could be included to provide technical support and expertise and linkage with other international or national programmes related to indicators of sustainable development.

Representation from national-level information activities sponsored by UN system organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the UN Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT), could also be included.

For countries that cooperate or "twin" with another country in developing indicators, it might also be useful to establish a bilateral committee, either as a subsidiary of the national coordinating mechanism or as a related entity. Twinning arrangements could include a broad exchange of views, learning from each other and supporting each other in setting up, starting and implementing the monitoring process.

Each national coordinating mechanism may wish to appoint a **National Focal Point** who would serve as the point of contact and liaison between members of the national coordinating mechanism. The **Focal Point** will be part of the national coordinating mechanism and serve to facilitate cooperation and communication among all participants. The focal point should be someone who can marshal the respect and commitment of the various cooperating ministries.

UN System organizations with indicator-related expertise at the country level could also be enlisted to assist the work of the national coordinating body.

3.2. Implementation

Before beginning implementation of the development phase, the national coordinating mechanism may, as a first step, wish to determine the current status of indicator use in the country. This includes, for example:

- determining which indicators are already being used within the country, by whom they are used, for what purposes and the degree of parallels with the CSD approach; and

- reviewing data already being collected for indicators or other uses, by whom, where and its availability.

An important step in the development process is to make clear the relationship between national priorities and strategies and the indicators to be selected for testing. The initial stages of implementation might then include the following:

- specifying a number of selected priority issues identified in the national strategy and selecting indicators from the CSD list that correspond to those priorities, and selecting country-specific indicators not identified in the CSD list, as needed;
- matching the priority indicators selected with the list of indicators already in use in the country;
- assessing data availability for those priority indicators for which data are not already being collected;
- establishing necessary arrangements to collect the missing data, where possible, which may include modifying current data compilation arrangements where necessary;
- making an initial evaluation of any training and other capacity-building that may be needed to collect that data and to perform other functions required by the testing process;
- collecting and/or compiling data needed for the indicators selected; and
- developing a strategy for dissemination of indicator information to stakeholders (e.g., via annual reporting, headline indicators, news letters or bulletins).

3.3. Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment is a continuous process and should take place throughout the development phase and include members from ministries, experts, the scientific community and other sectors of civil society, as appropriate. It should focus, inter alia, on the technical, decision-making and institutional/capacity building issues outlined below:

Technical Issues:

- the **usefulness** of the **methodology sheets** for developing the indicators;
- the **availability of data** for the indicators and the **source, continuity, delivery and reliability** of that data;
- the **data product**; that is, the medium (e.g., print or electronic; short summaries, reports, or comprehensive publications) through which the analytical information is conveyed to the decision-makers; and
- planning for the short, medium – and long term data development.

Decision-Making Issues:

- the **usefulness** of the **indicators** for national decision-makers;
- the **analysis of the data** into concise, policy-relevant information;
- and

- the **use** to which the decision-maker puts the information.

Institutional Support and Capacity-Building Issues:

- the need for training;
- the need for institutional support for data collection and analysis;
- other capacity-building needs for the development of a national indicator programme; and
- an evaluation of the twinning process, where relevant, and of other international and bilateral cooperation of relevance to indicators of sustainable development.

3.4. Reporting

The national coordinating mechanism and the Focal Point may wish to establish a government web site or mechanism for regular reporting on progress during various phases of the indicator development work. This would provide a ready means of communicating results and obtaining feedback from the various participants. Regular meetings should also be held by the coordinating body during the course of its work. Results, difficulties and problems may also be reported to the CSD Secretariat in terms of any advice or support that the Secretariat may be able to provide.

At the end of the development phase, a final, comprehensive evaluation of the process may be needed in order to make further adjustments to the national indicators and methodology sheets. The CSD Secretariat would welcome such reports as a means of further assessing changes and modifications that may be required in the programme. The evaluation report could contain such items as:

- A. Introduction
 1. Background and objectives
 2. Identification of the users and relevance to national decision-making
 3. Institutional, organizational and resource arrangements for indicator development
 4. Experience with twinning, as applicable

- B. Identification and selection of the indicators
Description of the process through which the indicators were chosen, and the criteria for selection, including reference to:
 1. National strategies, targets and priorities
 2. Existing indicators and indicator programmes
 3. Data availability
 4. Other parameters

- C. Usefulness of the indicators
 1. Usefulness of the methodology sheets
 2. Relevance of the data product

3. Development of linkages among the indicators, of national indicator frameworks and of aggregated indicators
4. Comments and suggestions on changes and improvements

D. Challenges

1. Problems encountered in data availability, reliability and delivery
2. Strengthening and training of human resources
3. Other capacity-building needs
4. Other

E. Recommendations