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# Measuring population-related SDGs and targets

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## I. Introduction

In September 2015, the UN General Assembly established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a follow up to the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). Expanded in scope, the SDGs specify 17 universal goals, 169 targets and 230 indicators. They address the most pressing global challenges of our time, calling upon collaborative partnerships across and between countries to balance the three dimensions of sustainable development, economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion.

## II. Key Issues

With the "leaving no one behind" commitment, there is unpreceded demand for data to measure progress towards achieving the SDGs. This includes provision of data at subnational level. The measurement of development change at these levels would assist to determine how much effort Governments are required to put in to improve people's living conditions at the grassroots-level.

SDG indicator framework is a vital tool in checking progress in measuring the population SDGs. When used properly, it aids in ensuring that all the SDGs targets and indicators are tracked and reported on. However, in the process of operationalizing the framework, lack of coordination among its users may lead to inconsistency in measuring population related SDGs.

There is competing needs to generate data for administrative use and for SDGs reporting. Countries have to commit on both needs. Aligning of national plans to international goals and targets is key. Where possible, some targets and indicators should be restated to make them more applicable to national circumstances and conditions This fact is in line with the resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 27 July 2012;

 "We recognize that progress towards the achievement of the Goals needs to be assessed and accompanied by targets and indicators, while taking into account different national circumstances, capacities and levels of development"[2]

Emerging population megatrends have brought additional challenges that countries have to face in the quest of achieving sustainable development. Urban population growth in recent times has posed a challenge in meeting the targets by 2030. The rapid growth of urban centers is increasingly becoming a source of planning problems associated with urbanization. In Zambia, the rural population has decreased from 65.3 percent in 2000 to 60.5 percent in 2010, leading to an increase in the percentage of total urban population (from 34.7 percent to 39.5 percent, respectively). Urban population in 2018 is estimated at 42.8 percent and is expected to reach 45.5 percent by 2030. The proportion of population living in cities that implement urban and regional development plans integrating population projections and resource needs, by size of city can is used to measure efforts in addressing socio-economic challenges that result due to urbanization in line with the ICPD POA 9.17 which states that "Governments should strengthen the capacity for land management, including urban planning, at all levels in order to take into account demographic trends and encourage the search for innovative approaches to address the challenges facing cities, with special attention to the pressures and needs resulting from the growth of their populations".

A country's population age structure has implications on sustainable development. This has increased pressure on the Government to provide public goods and services, such as education, health, housing, water and sanitation and employment. Investments in family planning and reproductive health will help in controlling this emerging population mega trend in most developing countries. By harnessing this

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[2] United Nations. The future we want. In Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 27 July 2012; A/RES/66/288; UN: New York, NY, USA, 2012

demographic dividend, large numbers of young people may represent great economic potential if investment is made in their health, education and entrepreneurship as stipulated in the ICPD POA 6.13."Countries should aim to meet the needs and aspirations of youth, particularly in the areas of formal and non-formal education, training, employment opportunities, housing and health, thereby ensuring their integration and participation in all spheres of society, including participation in the political process and preparation for leadership roles". This can be measured mostly by indicators in Goals 3, 4, 5 and 8. Meeting the targets in these goals will not only meet the aspirations of countries outlined in the SDGs, but will also enable countries meet the POA adopted during the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994.

## *III. Challenges of measuring population-related SDGs and targets.*

1. Some indicators require a lot of effort (4-5 years) for data to be available.
2. Low data quality.
3. Inadequate data disaggregation particularly the administrative data. It is now about 3 years since the SDGs came in force, and targets cannot be measured due to inadequate disaggregation.
4. The framework may not explicitly measure urbanization or the growth of urban population without use of additional indicators that are not in the SDGs.

## *IV. Policy Recommendation*

1. Further investment in national statistical systems and capacity development is needed to provide quality and timely data. Training in data modelling techniques would assist to measure population-related SDGs at lower level which is usually unavailable from other sources other than the population census. This will require use of robust estimation methods such as projections to aide annual measurement of indicators. More efforts should be placed on training planners, M&E officers and statisticians in the sector ministries on how to compile and analyze the administrative data. Capacity building should continue for the National Statistical System.

2. Use of existing dataset to generate indictors. More effort by countries should be dedicated to generate indicators from existing dataset.

3. Alignment of regional and national plans to the SDGs is key to meet national and international measurement requirements.

4. Ownership of the SDGs and targets should not be left to the National Statistical Offices but to the entire NSS. This will help in increasing the number of indicators that are measured.

5. Establishment of a functional National Statistical System. As highlighted in the ACTION 12.6 of the ICPD "Demographic, socio-economic and other relevant information networks should be created or strengthened, where appropriate, at the national, regional and global levels to facilitate monitoring the implementation of Programmes of Action and activities on population, environment and development at the national, regional and global levels". The strategy was developed in order to strengthen the Zambia National Statistical System (NSS) through an effective coordination mechanism. The office is in the process of developing the second generation NSDS for the period 2019-2023 which will be designed to be sector inclusive.

6. With limited fiscal space, there is need to take advantage of the advancement in technology and innovation to do more with less in measuring SDGs. This could be in data collection, data sharing and data dissemination and use of data portals.