

Comments on the TTWG report

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Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguishes Participants of the session on Statistics and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda,

I would like to apologise for not being with you, I had to cancel my trip at the last minute due to unexpected circumstances. Nevertheless, I would like to share with you my brief comments on the TTWG report and on the future development agenda.

First of all let me stress that setting and adopting development goals like the MDGs was not only instrumental in achieving many of those goals, it was also instrumental in setting up monitoring mechanisms and thereby it was instrumental in a number of countries in strengthening the statistical systems that provide data and indicators for monitoring progress.

Second, I would like to share with you my view that the current MDGs, the post-2015 development agenda, sustainable development indicators, measuring progress „beyond GDP” and measuring well-being are best treated in an integrated manner as the relevant indicators are partly overlapping and many of them are definitely interrelated. Moreover, the national statistical services need to deal with the various development and sustainability indicators in an integrated manner in order to provide best quality data and be cost-effective at the same time. Therefore, I very much hope and recommend – if I may – that setting the post-2015 development agenda and the ongoing efforts related to setting sustainable development goals go parallel and that the work related to these goals will be coordinated.

As you know, the United Nations Statistical Commission is the designated intergovernmental expert body responsible for the development of all indicators in the context of monitoring UN development agendas. The Commission has been active for 66 years and is the centre of the Global Statistical System; it is very successful in the development of global methodological standards and recommendations and in the building of related statistical capacity. In particular in the last 13 years the UN Statistical Commission provided technical oversight to the Inter-agency and expert group on MDGs, responsible for compiling the global and regional data for the annual MDG progress report of the Secretary General.

Unfortunately, the UN Statistical Commission has not been involved in 2000 in the development of the MDG indicator framework, which later lead to measurement problems.

The statistical community since then has urged the appropriate bodies and institutions to involve statisticians at an early stage in the development of indicator and monitoring frameworks, in order to ensure that well-defined, objectively measurable, relevant and available indicators are defined in the target setting process. As regards substantive issues, it is advisable to carry out ex ante analyses of current social, economic and environmental processes as a preliminary to target setting. As regards measurement issues, an analyses of the availability and quality of national data suited both for international comparison and for comparison over time is also necessary.

The UN Statistical Commission in 2013 created a Friends of the Chair group (decision 44/114) to "develop broader measures of progress" and to "undertake an active dialogue with United Nations bodies and the policy sphere in order to ensure that a robust statistical measurement approach is incorporated from the outset in preparations for the post- 2015 development agenda". The Friends of the Chair group has launched its work, and will initially focus on the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development and will analyse the statistical implications of the recent published High Level Panel report. It should be noted that the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons called, in their recently published report, for „a data revolution for sustainable development, with a new international initiative to improve the quality of statistics and information available to citizens”, in particular with a view to empower people with information on the progress towards the targets. This request or recommendation can of course be generalised; statistics is one of the tools of democracy and empowerment; reliable statistics empower people to make informed choices.

Further investment in national statistical systems, in country capacities for data collection, data processing and analysis is inevitable, in particular if data at a more disaggregated territorial level or for population groups with special needs or special circumstances are to be produced. The indicators, to the extent possible, have to be based on official statistics. This requires the ongoing development and upgrading of national statistical services in terms of human resources as well as technology and methodological innovation. It would be to the benefit of the future development agenda if it would contain a target related to the development of sound national statistical systems and the associated capacity building. However, the selection of indicators should also consider resource implications for national statistical services, and this may be a limitation in developed countries, too.