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Indicators for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

> The present report was prepared at the request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-seventh session.[a] It describes the work in 2006 of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal Indicators in the following areas: improvement of the coverage, transparency and reporting on all indicators as presented in the database on all Millennium Development Goals; review of methodologies related to the agreed indicators; coordination of data collection at the global level; and preparation of the yearly analysis and reports on progress towards the Goals. The Commission is invited to comment on progress made by the Expert Group on the indicators and on future directions of work.

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> [a] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2006, Supplement No. 4* (E/2006/24), chap. I.B.

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* E/CN.3/2007/1.

I. Introduction

1.   Since the initial request by the General Assembly in 2002 that the Secretary-General report to it on progress achieved in the Millennium Development Goals, the shortcomings in the availability of country data have been a concern of the international statistical community and the international agencies mandated to provide the aggregate figures and related analysis to inform the report. The Statistical Commission, at its thirty-sixth session, in March 2005, requested that a report be prepared on the ability of countries to produce individual indicators and on the ways in which metadata should be presented to accompany the indicators. The report (E/CN.3/2006/15) was presented to the Statistical Commission in 2006 at its thirty-seventh session by the Friends of the Chair on Millennium Development Goal indicators. The Commission took note of the report and requested the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal indicators to take into account the relevant recommendations of the Friends of the Chair to improve further the compilation of the indicators used in the monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals and report back to the Commission at its thirty-eighth session.

2.   The Statistical Commission also proposed a resolution, approved by the Economic and Social Council in July 2006, on the strengthening of statistical capacity in countries[1] and included a set of recommendations to improve the coverage, transparency and reporting on all indicators.[2] The present report outlines the work undertaken by the Expert Group to implement the recommendations of the Friends of the Chair and describes the activities carried out by the Expert Group for the 2006 round of reporting.

II. Activities of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal indicators in 2006

3.   The Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal indicators met twice in 2006. The 9th meeting of the Expert Group was held in Washington, D.C., from 27 to 30 March. Sixteen agencies and regional commissions were represented.

4.   Based on the submissions provided by the agencies, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs prepared the *Millennium Development Goals Report, 2006*.[3] The report was launched in July 2006 by the Under-Secretary-General and was used to inform political debate at the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council in July and at the General Assembly in September 2006. The report was very well received and is currently being reprinted.

5.   The assessment of progress based on regional aggregates was also presented in a chart entitled "Millennium Development Goals: 2006 progress chart". The colour-coded chart presents an assessment of regional trends and indicates regions and

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[1] The work undertaken by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal indicators to address the need for statistical capacity-building to produce data for the indicators is presented in the report of the Secretary-General on statistical capacity-building (E/CN.3/2007/14).

[2] See Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6 on strengthening statistical capacity.

[3] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.I.18.

subregions that are on- or off-track in the achievement of the Goals. It is easy to read and is intended for wide dissemination.

6. The Statistics Division also prepared data and analysis to inform the 2006 report of the Secretary-General to the Assembly on the work of the Organization and its statistical annex, which was distributed at the sixty-first session of the Assembly.[4] The Division has also continued to maintain the website and database of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goal indicators (http://mdgs.un.org).

7. In August 2006 the Statistics Division, in collaboration with the DevInfo group and with the aim of supporting Member States in the use of common database systems and platforms, issued the second edition of MDGInfo,[5] an adaptation of DevInfo, a technology specifically designed to support Governments in monitoring the Millennium Development Goals.

8. The 10th meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the Millennium Development Goal indicators was held in Geneva from 13 to 16 November 2006. During the first two days of the meeting, participants included 46 experts from agencies and regional commissions. From 15 to 16 November, 21 representatives of national statistical offices from 14 countries and 45 experts from agencies, regional commissions and donor agencies attended the meeting.

9. During the first part of the meeting, the Expert Group:

(a) Reviewed the outcomes of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly and their implications for the Millennium Development Goal monitoring framework;

(b) Reviewed the proposed revisions to the list of Millennium Development Goal indicators presented by the chairs of the thematic sub-groups and by other agencies;

(c) Reviewed data availability on the proposed new indicators for regional and trend analysis;

(d) Discussed plans for the next Expert Group meeting to be held tentatively in March/April 2007 with the main objectives of finalizing data preparation and analysis for the 2007 round of reporting to the Council and the Assembly.

10. The second part of the meeting, attended by the representatives of national statistical offices, addressed the issues raised by Council resolution 2006/6. In particular, the meeting:

(a) Reviewed the recommendations of the Friends of the Chair on Millennium Development Goal indicators and the resolution on strengthening statistical capacity;

(b) Reviewed and identified countries' priorities and suggested ways to improve the production and analysis of Millennium Development Goal and development indicators;

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[4] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-first Session, Supplement No. 1* and corrigendum (A/61/1 and Corr.1).

[5] Available from http://mdgs.un.org.

(c) Reviewed and discussed agencies' mechanisms to gather data from countries, their methods for compilation of international data series and imputation techniques used to calculate regional and global estimates for Millennium Development Goal indicators;

(d) Identified ways to improve compilation of international data series, by improving reporting mechanisms from national statistical systems to international agencies;

(e) Reviewed metadata presented in the MDGInfo database and made recommendations on ways to improve them;

(f) Reviewed current methodologies for imputations and mechanisms of consultation with concerned countries and made recommendations on ways to improve methodologies and their transparency and on existing consultation mechanisms with countries.

11. The Expert Group benefited from the presence of and informative address by Gilberto Calvillo Vives, President, National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI), Aguascalientes, Mexico, who addressed the meeting in his capacity as Chair of the Statistical Commission. He highlighted all the major problems faced by statisticians when producing statistics at the country and international levels, including the following: (a) comparability over time and across countries; and (b) coordination among agencies inside a country, between countries and international agencies, and between international agencies. He stressed the benefit of having a clearing house or agency in the country to coordinate the production and dissemination of official statistics and mentioned the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) initiative as the possible technical solution to improve data exchange within countries and between countries and international agencies.

12. The meeting was also addressed by Dennis Trewin, Government Statistician, Australian Bureau of Statistics, in his capacity as chair of Friends of the Chair on Millennium Development Goal indicators, who with two other members of that group present at the meeting, helped move forward the dialogue and coordination between the Expert Group and the Statistical Commission. The chair of Friends of the Chair commended the Expert Group for the steps already taken to address Friends of the Chair concerns and mentioned that coordination among agencies had improved and that a more concerted effort on capacity-building had been initiated. He also outlined what Friends of the Chair considered the major shortcomings in Millennium Development Goal monitoring, including the following: (a) the fact that more data are available in countries than those reported in the Millennium Development Goal database, and the existence of some substantial differences between data produced and disseminated by countries and those reported by international agencies; (b) the poor content of metadata for some Millennium Development Goal indicators; and (c) the use of imputations to fill in data gaps. Finally, he recalled the recommendations of the Friends of the Chair report, including the need to establish a business process to improve the transfer of data from countries to international agencies and among international agencies.

III. Improving the data and metadata in the international database

13. The 10th meeting also reviewed the work already done by the Statistics Division to address the concerns of the Friends of the Chair and the recommendations contained in resolution 2006/6, including the complete redesign of the database and website on Millennium Development Goal indicators and the inclusion of both cell-level and indicator-level metadata, which had been provided to participants in advance of the meeting for their thorough review.

14. Given that resolution 2006/6 had requested the establishment of a panel of experts to prepare a set of guidelines on metadata for indicators, the Division, in its capacity as coordinator of the Expert Group, requested the participants in the Expert Group meeting to form such a group. It was decided that steps would be undertaken to maintain consistent participation of country representatives in the Expert Group — at least for a core group — and that electronic means of communication would be used in between meetings to continuously review and improve the content and structure of the metadata. It was also agreed that participants from national statistical offices would consult further with specialists in their offices to provide recommendations and technical guidance on the metadata.

15. The experts from countries and international agencies made important recommendations for further improving the metadata, including the following:

(a) Adding a detailed explanation of the difference between global and national monitoring and related implications on methods and data presentation;

(b) Adding metadata on population estimates used to calculate indicators;

(c) Including in the website a mechanism for users to provide feedback to better understand users' needs and for them to request additional information;

(d) Including three new categories of metadata to provide users with more detailed information on agencies responsible for the compilation of data and on sources used.

16. The new website and database are continuously being upgraded, including input based on the latest recommendations made by the Expert Group, and are available from http://mdgs.un.org.

IV. Improving reporting mechanisms from national statistical systems to international agencies

17. The Expert Group reviewed and discussed existing mechanisms for agencies to gather data from national sources and made suggestions for their improvement. One of the major problems identified relates to the decentralization, in many countries, of existing reporting mechanisms, with each data producer (in line ministries) communicating directly with its own counterpart in the international agencies.

18. Country participants and international agencies recommended the following:

(a) Involve the regional commissions more extensively in data checking (discrepancies between national and international data series) and in channelling and

following up on specific queries on data and metadata between national statistical systems and international agencies;

(b) Identify a focal point, inside the national statistical system, for the coordination of official statistics. It could be the national statistical office or a statistical board or committee composed of all statistical stakeholders, with the national statistical office as member and secretariat;

(c) Improve data sharing at the international level and better identify the leading agency and its specific data requirements for each substantive topic. Specific requests for data or information would then be better channelled from countries to the international community and vice versa. In addition, countries need more timely and accurate information on data requests by international agencies so that such requests can be incorporated into their strategic planning processes;

(d) Establish a national statistical system website and database providing a single set of data (after reconciliation of all possible data sources in the country, including administrative records) and a calendar for dissemination of official statistics. Taking this step would facilitate the use of official statistics in the international community and reduce the burden on countries and international agencies.

V. Improving methodologies for the production of Millennium Development Goal indicators for global monitoring

19. Since the 8th meeting of the Expert Group in October 2005, partner agencies have agreed to provide a complete description of the way estimates and imputations are produced. The Expert Group, at its November 2006 meeting, reviewed those methodologies and made recommendations on further work. Country representatives pointed out that some of the indicators still lack an accurate description of the methods used in their compilation. They urged agencies to provide the missing metadata to the Statistics Division so that the available information on indicators could be harmonized and standardized.

20. Participants agreed that imputations, if accompanied by clear and transparent metadata, are useful for two main reasons, as follows: (a) they can be used by countries in case no official statistics are available; and (b) they make the global monitoring process more transparent by providing the user with the underlying imputed data used to estimate regional and global aggregates. Participants stressed the need for clear explanation of the entire process leading to the imputed figures, including the data, definitions and techniques used to obtain imputed data.

VI. Conclusions and the way forward

21. **The Statistics Division, in its role as coordinating agency of the Expert Group, will continue to work with the agencies and countries to improve the coverage, transparency and reporting on all Millennium Development Goal indicators.**

22. **The Commission might wish to comment on the work done in 2006 by the Expert Group and the Statistics Division in implementing the recommendations set out in resolution 2006/6 and comment on the proposed next steps, as follows:**

(a) **Make arrangements for country participants regularly to attend the fall meeting of the Expert Group, engage in consultations by electronic means between meetings and advise the Expert Group and the Division on their work to continuously improve the metadata and the methodologies used in estimates and imputations;**

(b) **Continue to work through the existing joint monitoring groups, the thematic sub-groups and the peer review groups to ensure that experts, country representatives and international agencies work together to develop the most appropriate definitions and methods for the production of all indicators and related regional and global aggregates.**

Annex

Assessment of country data availability in the Millennium Development Goal indicators database

1.   The Statistics Division conducted an assessment of data available in the Millennium Development Goal indicators database, similar to the one presented to the thirty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission and prepared under the guidance of the Friends of the Chair on Millennium Development Goal indicators.

2.   Since the previous assessment was conducted, more information has become available on the exact nature and sources for most of the indicators contained in the database. The analysis is based on data available in the database on Millennium Development Goal indicators as of November 2006 and focuses only on "official" Millennium Development Goal indicators and/or series and only on countries in the developing regions, for a total of 163 countries. Countries produce the data on the indicators and provide the data to the designated international agencies. Some agencies adjust the data for international comparability or produce estimates based on country data from different sources or for different reference years. Modelled data — data estimated by models based on different variables — are not counted in the assessment.

3.   The indicators have been grouped into four clusters, defined below on the basis of country coverage:

    (a)   Indicators for which less than 13 per cent of the countries in developing regions have at least two data points since 1990. These are the most problematic indicators, with few countries collecting data for their monitoring on a regular basis;

Indicators in cluster (a)	All data including estimates		Countries with at least 2 data points excluding modelled data	
	Number of countries with at least 1 data point	Number of countries with at least 2 data points	(Number)	(Percentage)
Births attended by skilled health personnel (percentage)	*137*	*0*	*0*	*0*
Literacy rates of 15-24 years old, both sexes (percentage)	125	77	0	0
People living with HIV, 15-49 years old (percentage)	118	99	0	0
Poorest quintile's share in national income or consumption (percentage)	77	0	0	0
Women-to-men parity index, as ratio of literacy rates, 15-24 years old	125	77	0	0
Men 15-24 years old with comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS (percentage)	23	1	1	1
Children under 5 sleeping under insecticide-treated bed nets (percentage)	42	4	4	2
Children under 5 with fever being treated with anti-malarial drugs (percentage)	43	6	6	4
Women 15-24 years old with comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS (percentage)	48	6	6	4

Indicators in cluster (a)	All data including estimates		Countries with at least 2 data points excluding modelled data	
	Number of countries with at least 1 data point	*Number of countries with at least 2 data points*	*(Number)*	*(Percentage)*
Condom use at last high-risk sex, 15-24 years old, men (percentage)	33	12	12	7
Condom use at last high-risk sex, 15-24 years old, women (percentage)	35	12	12	7
Ratio of school attendance rate of orphans to school attendance rate of non-orphans	55	22	22	13

Note: Italics indicate provisional information.

   (b)   Indicators for which between 35 and 44 per cent of countries in developing regions have at least two data points since 1990. This group includes indicators with a "global" dimension, such as poverty at one dollar per day and the poverty gap ratio, that are compiled by international agencies with the main purpose of providing the General Assembly with regional and global figures. The group also includes such indicators as youth unemployment and children underweight that in principle should be regularly monitored by countries, but for which data are either insufficient or not being regularly transmitted to the international system;

Indicators in cluster (b)	All data including estimates		Countries with at least 2 data points excluding modelled data	
	Number of countries with at least 1 data point	*Number of countries with at least 2 data points*	*(Number)*	*(Percentage)*
Population below $1 (PPP)[a] per day consumption percentage	71	57	57	35
Poverty gap ratio	71	57	57	35
Youth unemployment rate, aged 15-24, both sexes	72	58	58	36
Children under 5 moderately or severely underweight (percentage)	111	62	62	38
Maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 live births	133	131	63	39
Condom use to overall contraceptive use among currently married women 15-49 years old (percentage)	107	70	70	43
Contraceptive use among currently married women 15-49 years old, any method (percentage)	107	72	72	44
Energy use (kg oil equivalent) per $1,000 (PPP) GDP[b]	162	72	72	44

   [a]   PPP = purchasing power parity.
   [b]   GDP = gross domestic product.

   (c)   Indicators for which between 55 and 87 per cent of countries in developing regions have at least two data points since 1990. The group includes indicators with a global dimension, such as protected areas and population undernourished and indicators (i) derived from very well-established data collection programmes and efficient mechanisms for reporting to international agencies (e.g. in education); (ii) derived from well-established data collection programmes and

supported by well-established peer review and inter-agency mechanisms with strong mandates (e.g. water and sanitation, child mortality); and (iii) based on data obtained from official records (e.g. women in national parliaments);

	All data including estimates		Countries with at least 2 data points excluding modelled data	
Indicators in cluster (c)	*Number of countries with at least 1 data point*	*Number of countries with at least 2 data points*	*(Number)*	*(Percentage)*
Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector	141	89	89	55
Percentage of pupils starting grade 1 reaching grade 5, both sexes	152	99	99	61
Proportion of the population using improved sanitation facilities (total)	162	104	104	64
Slum population as percentage of urban	158	105	105	64
Debt service as percentage of exports of goods and services and net income from abroad	111	107	107	66
Proportion of the population using improved drinking water sources (total)	162	110	110	67
Gender parity index in tertiary level enrolment	152	111	111	68
Net enrolment ratio in primary education, both sexes	152	116	116	71
Population undernourished (percentage)	121	121	121	74
Personal computers per 100 population	126	123	123	75
Primary completion rate, both sexes	137	125	125	77
Protected area to total surface area (percentage)	135	132	132	81
Seats held by women in national parliament (percentage)	134	132	132	81
Consumption of ozone-depleting CFCs[a] in ODP[b] metric tons	135	134	134	82
Children 1 year old immunized against measles (percentage)	137	137	137	84
Children's under-five mortality rate per 1,000 live births	138	138	138	85
Infant mortality rate (0-1 year) per 1,000 live births	138	138	138	85
Gender parity index in secondary level enrolment	143	138	138	85
Tuberculosis treatment success rate under DOTS[a] (percentage)	*145*	*138*	*138*	*85*
Gender parity index in primary level enrolment	143	140	140	86
Tuberculosis detection rate under DOTS (percentage)	*147*	*142*	*142*	*87*

Note: Italics indicate provisional information.
   [a] CFCs = chlorofluorocarbons.
   [b] ODP = ozone-depleting potential.
   [c] DOTS = Directly Observed Treatment Shortcourse.

(d)   Indicators for which more than 90 per cent of countries in developing regions have at least 2 data points since 1990. This group includes, among other indicators, those with a global dimension, such as emissions of CO_2 and indicators based on data obtained from administrative sources (Internet users and telephone subscribers).

Indicators in cluster (d)	All data including estimates		Countries with at least 2 data points excluding modelled data	
	Number of countries with at least 1 data point	*Number of countries with at least 2 data points*	*(Number)*	*(Percentage)*
Internet users per 100 population	152	148	148	91
Telephone lines and cellular subscribers per 100 population	151	151	151	93
Carbon dioxide emissions (CO_2), metric tons of CO_2 per capita	154	154	154	94
Land area covered by forest (percentage)	158	155	155	95

Technical notes

Information presented for indicators in italics is still provisional. Responsible agencies have been contacted for additional information.

The following indicators have not been considered in the analysis because country-level data are not available:

(a)   Population using solid fuels, percentage;

(b)   Population with access to essential drugs;

(c)   Notified cases of malaria per 100,000 population;

(d)   Malaria death rate per 100,000 population.

The following indicators have not been considered in the analysis because they are used only at the aggregate level (no country data):

(a)   Average tariffs on (i) textiles; (ii) clothing; and (iii) agricultural products;

(b)   Developed country imports from developing countries and from least developed countries, admitted duty free.

The following indicators have not been considered in the assessment, since the responsible agency has not yet provided the necessary metadata:

(a)   Tuberculosis death rate per 100,000 population;

(b)   Tuberculosis prevalence rate per 100,000 population.

Indicators under Goal 8, targets 12, 13, 14 and 15 addressing the issue of a global partnership for development have not been considered since they relate only to donor countries.

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