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Background document
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Items for discussion and decision: Data and indicators for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

**Main points from the High Level Forum on Official Statistics
'Working together to measure progress towards the SDGs'
Monday, 06 March, 2017**

Prepared by UNSD

Main points from the High Level Forum on Official Statistics, ‘Working together to measure progress towards the SDGs’, Monday, 6 March 2017

Note by the Chairs of the Expert Panels

1. The High-Level Forum on Official Statistics, organized by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) in conjunction with the 48th session of the UN Statistical Commission, was dedicated to discuss how the global statistical community can work together to measure progress towards the SDGs. The Forum took place on Monday, 6 March 2017, and was attended by over 200 participants from national statistics offices, regional and international organizations, and a few representatives of civil society, academia and the private sector.
2. The Forum consisted of two panels with panelists including chief statisticians from national statistical offices and regional and international organizations. The first panel discussed the importance of global reporting on the SDGs for the implementation of the 2030 agenda and the respective roles of the international organizations and national statistical systems, and offered some reflections on how to improve the global reporting mechanisms. The second panel looked specifically at cooperation and coordination between the international organizations and national statistical systems. The panel discussed best practices in data reporting mechanisms; how to support countries in compiling high-quality SDG indicator data; country review processes for adjustments, estimates or modeled data produced by international agencies; mechanisms to reduce the reporting burden; and practical tools and mechanism for efficient data flows.
3. **Summary of the Forum:**
 - The President of the General Assembly opened the Forum by highlighting that “in an environment where an unprecedented amount of data is required for SDG implementation and monitoring, greater coordinated for global data-generation efforts are urgently needed”.
 - The implementation of the 2030 Agenda provides a unique opportunity to enhance coordination and collaboration between national statistical systems and regional and international organisations as they work together towards strengthening national statistical capacities at both country and international levels while improving the tools for the follow-up and review for the SDGs.
 - Two important keywords and concepts that emerged from the discussion were transparency and coordination. National representatives stressed the fundamental importance of a continuous and transparent dialogue with international agencies in order for them to fully understand and, to the largest extent possible, contribute to the compilation, adjustments and estimation of data for international series. The need to improve coordination both at the national level across government agencies and, globally, among international agencies, was highlighted by all panelists. Also, early

country engagement in the process was recommended as necessary for their full participation and in order to have a meaningful impact. The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the Fundamental Principles of International Organizations were recommended to serve as the basis for statistical work at the national and international levels.

- National Statistical Systems play the central role in the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda at all levels as they are the main source of data. Regional organizations and mechanisms are indispensable for reporting at the regional level, to facilitate the coordination of reporting at the global level and to help coordinate capacity building activities.
- International organizations produce internationally comparable data for the monitoring of the SDGs at global level and help create synergies among all partners. In addition, building partnership with other data producers and users is important, such as policy makers, civil society organizations, the private sector and academia.
- Specific recommendations were made on how to improve coordination and communication at all levels. At national level, a statistical coordination body with political support is important for effective national monitoring of the SDGs, for effectively communicating with the public and all data users, and to facilitate reporting to regional and international organizations. National statistical offices often play this important coordination role. It was further stressed that regional coordination mechanisms help ensure regional coordination on statistical activities and facilitate global reporting, but that international organization should also be involved in the process.
- At the global level, international agencies play a key role in coordinating efforts on data collection, methodology development, and in providing technical support to countries. National statistical offices recognize this role and stressed the need for closer dialogue and transparent mechanisms of collaboration to fully benefit from the services international agencies offer to national statistical systems. Continuous and transparent dialogue within countries, among agencies, between countries and agencies was highlighted as key.
- Panelists recognized that communication and sharing of information are essential to build trust and ensure effective working relationships between national statistical systems and regional and international organizations. When data are harmonized, adjusted or estimated for global comparability and reporting, countries need to be fully consulted and the methods by which the adjustments or estimates are produced should be transparent and accessible. These data must be ultimately validated by the national statistical system. The national statistical office should be involved and informed of the process even in cases where the communication takes place mainly with other parts of the statistical system (data produced by other government agencies, line ministries).

- The need for more specialized work on specific indicators and/or groups of indicators was also stressed. This work will be mainly the responsibility of international agencies in their respective areas of expertise. Recognizing that indicators are very different and might require a very different approach in the reporting mechanism, a more focused discussion was seen as key.
- Additional work must take place to reduce the reporting burden on countries. This can be accomplished by improving coordination across international agencies on their data collection schedules and using existing mechanisms for data reporting.
- To ease the work of data reporting, enhanced technological tools and services, such as SDMX and open data platforms, should be used to facilitate the transmission of data. The international statistical community should also move towards data flow automation. Work should take place to facilitate interoperability between data systems and to simplify the exchange process.
- There was agreement that global reporting is necessary and important and that international agencies and countries will work together to make it as effective as possible. However, while improving global data reporting will be a focus of work by both international agencies and national statistical systems over the years, the ultimate goal is to strengthen national statistical capacity for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda at national level and local level.
- In the context of national reporting, many stressed the important role played by international agencies at country level, and the work done by the UN Country Teams (UNCTs). National guidelines for SDG national reporting were recently released by the UN Development Group to guide and facilitate UNCTs in their work with national governments in this area.
- There was overall consensus on the need to develop principles and criteria for the reporting from the national to the international statistical system. The work already undertaken by international agencies in identifying ways to improve coordination and facilitate reporting was highlighted. It was also recognized that the recommendations by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) were important and that the group should organize further discussions on these issues with a view towards developing guiding principles and practices on data reporting and data sharing between national statistical systems and international organizations in order to improve coordination for monitoring the SDGs.