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SDG indicators as a tool for improving interagency collaboration at the national level

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Abstract

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, National Statistical Offices (NSOs) have played a key role in the implementation and monitoring of SDGs at the national, regional, and global levels.

The annual report on the progress of the SDGs, prepared by the UN Secretary-General, is based on global indicators and data primarily provided by NSOs. Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on SDG implementation, regularly submitted by countries to the UN High-Level Political Forum, are also prepared using statistical data. In addition to these reports, NSOs develop and maintain National Platforms for SDG reporting.

Thus, all types of SDG reporting are based on statistical data collected by NSOs and other statistical information producers. Coordination and collaboration between different producers at the national level is one of the key conditions for providing quality country reporting.

This document outlines the experience of the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Bureau of National Statistics) in collaborating with policymakers at the national level in the process of SDG implementation and reporting.

I.   INTRODUCTION

1.   An effective institutional framework has been established in Kazakhstan to facilitate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To ensure coordination and consistency in the implementation of the global Agenda in Kazakhstan, a Coordination Council on SDGs was created under the chairmanship of the First Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

2.   In order to develop a comprehensive set of measures to achieve the SDGs and ensure their implementation, five interagency working groups operate under the Coordination Council: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership. These working groups are led by ministers:

i.   Working Group «People» – Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population;

  ii. Working Group «Planet» – Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources;
  iii. Working Group «Prosperity» – Ministry of National Economy;
  iv. Working Group «Peace» – Ministry of Culture and Information;
  v. Working Group «Partnership» – Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

3. The overall coordination of SDG implementation in the country is entrusted to the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which works in two directions:

- Ensuring general coordination of SDG implementation in the country (including the preparation of the Voluntary National Review);
- Developing, implementing, and monitoring the progress of goals within the scope of the «Prosperity» working group.

4. The Economic Research Institute under the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan acts as the Secretariat, providing expert and analytical support to the Coordination Council and the five working groups.

5. The overall oversight of SDG implementation in the country is carried out by the Parliamentary Commission on SDGs, chaired by the Speaker of the Senate of Parliament.

6. The Bureau of National Statistics serves as the national coordination center for monitoring SDG progress and plays a central role in establishing mechanisms of cooperation both at the national and international levels.

II. INTERACTIONS WITH GOVERNMENT BODIES

7. The Bureau of National Statistics has played a key role in the SDG implementation process since Kazakhstan's adoption of the 2030 Agenda. With strong methodological capacity, the Bureau of National Statistics has successfully coordinated the adaptation of global indicators to national conditions through several phases during national consultations starting in 2017.

8. It is worth noting that during the adaptation process, besides developing calculation methodologies, it was crucial to explain to policymakers the significance and rationale behind each global indicator to ensure their correct understanding and acceptance at the national level. This process ultimately resulted in mutual benefits: government agencies and other stakeholders (NGOs, the private sector, international organizations) gained a better understanding of statistical methodology and its importance, while statisticians enhanced their status and gained recognition as national coordinators for SDG indicators.

9. Currently, the Bureau of National Statistics performs the following functions:

- It plays a key role in establishing the SDG monitoring system;
- It coordinates and collaborates closely with all data producers and users in the process of collecting and disseminating SDG data;
- It forms the national list of indicators for SDG monitoring in collaboration with stakeholders;
- It provides methodological support on SDG indicators to all data producers;
- It participates in the preparation of publications and national reports on SDGs, including the Voluntary National Review;

- It coordinates the provision of national data on all SDG indicators at the regional and global levels to custodian agencies;
- It develops and maintains the National SDG Indicator Reporting Platform.

III.   COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION IN GLOBAL REPORTING

10.   The global SDG indicator list, approved by the UN General Assembly, includes over 200 indicators, for which data is collected by custodian agencies at various intervals. More than two-thirds of SDG indicators are generated from different administrative sources.

11.   Drawing on the experience of providing fragmented data from various sources for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Bureau of National Statistics assumed the role of sole coordinator for all SDG indicators to establish a unified national stance and to stay informed about all data flows and requests.

12.   It is important to highlight the significant efforts of the UN Statistics Division in creating a list of national coordinators and a dashboard of responsible experts within custodian agencies for each SDG indicator, which has greatly facilitated the work of both NSOs and custodian agencies.

13.   Thanks to this official assignment, the Bureau of National Statistics is recognized as the sole source of all national data and is empowered to coordinate the collection and quality of data for all indicators. In cases where data must be collected from multiple sources (especially for qualitative, non-statistical indicators), the Bureau of National Statistics gathers the information and coordinates a unified national position with all government bodies (for example, SDG Indicator 5.1.1 or SDG Indicator 6.5.1).

14.   The role of the UN Data Flow Guidelines should also be noted, which describe how custodian agencies and countries can collaborate to facilitate data flows necessary for creating a set of harmonized statistics for global monitoring.

15.   These guidelines and the official list of national coordinators helped resolve a misunderstanding that arose within the country when the country office of one of the custodian agencies, during a meeting of the Parliamentary Commission on SDG Monitoring, claimed that the country was not providing data at the global level. It turned out that the custodian agency had not used the official list of coordinators and had sent data requests to a ministry that was not responsible for those indicators.

16.   The Bureau of National Statistics provided links to the UN Statistics Division website (with the list of national coordinators) and information from the UN Data Flow Guidelines, after which a working meeting with international experts took place, and the data request was fully satisfied.

17.   The technical support provided by custodian agencies in strengthening statistical capacity has been highly appreciated by both the Bureau of National Statistics and other data producers in the country. Virtually no request for methodological assistance went unanswered, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, when international experts continued to visit offline and also provided online consultations.

IV.   VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS (VNR)

18.   Official statistics play a strategic role in the preparation of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), as they provide the data to support reporting. Countries are encouraged to engage NSOs in the preparation of VNRs, considering their coordinating role in national SDG monitoring and their obligation to adhere to

the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, which emphasize the provision of reliable, objective, and transparent statistical information, avoiding any political bias.

19.   The UN has provided two useful tools to assist countries in preparing VNRs: the UN Secretary-General's Guidelines and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) Guidelines. The requirements outlined in these documents offer flexibility in the format and content of the reports, as long as certain elements are included. One of the suggested optional elements of the report is a data annex (statistical annex).

20.   The Secretary-General's Guidelines suggest that countries may include a data annex, utilizing global SDG indicators and adding priority indicators identified at the regional and national levels where appropriate.

21.   According to the DESA Guidelines, access to high-quality, timely, and disaggregated data is crucial for VNRs. The guidelines also propose certain questions to consider when preparing the statistical annex: criteria for selecting indicators to include, whether to present the full set or a sample of the most significant indicators, the format of presentation, and the time series of the data (cf. (Road Map on Statistics for SDGs – Second Edition).

22.   Kazakhstan has presented two VNRs at the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)—in 2019 and 2022, with a third VNR planned for 2025.

23.   The Bureau of National Statistics was actively involved in the preparation and subsequent presentation of the VNRs at the HLPF, providing all necessary data for analyzing the situation on each SDG and preparing a separate Statistical Annex. It is noteworthy that in preparing the Statistical Annex for the first VNR in 2019, Kazakhstan included all available global SDG indicators with relevant disaggregations. In the second VNR of 2022, the Statistical Annex included the country's most priority SDG indicators, which are part of its strategic documents.

24.   In addition to the Statistical Annex, a brochure with infographics and a brief analysis of each SDG was prepared in 2019. In 2022, the publication featured infographics and analysis, with a special focus on vulnerable population groups in line with the SDG principle of «Leaving No One Behind».

V.   NATIONAL REPORTING PLATFORM

25.   As part of global reporting, countries are provided with a tool for disseminating SDG indicator data—the National Reporting Platform (NRP), which is defined as «...a means of presenting and disseminating national statistics, including SDG indicators and descriptive metadata, typically in the form of a website, database(s), and associated IT infrastructure, workflows, and procedures used for collecting, storing, protecting, and ultimately disseminating data and relevant metadata and documentation in an easily accessible manner for all target users» (cf. Road Map on Statistics for SDGs – Second Edition).

26.   The Bureau of National Statistics has developed a National SDG Reporting Platform (NSRP), where all data on the available 203 SDG indicators from the national set are published.

27.   Currently, the national system for SDG monitoring in Kazakhstan includes 262 indicators, of which:

- 146 global indicators are adopted without changes,
- 44 global indicators include minor modifications,

- 30 alternative/proxy indicators are proposed,
- 42 additional national indicators are included.

28.   For each indicator, data sources (enterprise reports, household surveys, censuses, administrative records, etc.), the level of disaggregation, data submission timelines, the responsible government agencies for data generation and policy implementation, and metadata descriptions are identified.

29.   Analysis of national SDG indicators revealed that, as of 2024, 123 indicators, or 60.6% (out of the 203 published indicators), had at least one type of disaggregation: 79 indicators are available with regional disaggregation, 37 by urban and rural areas, 32 by gender, 22 by age, 19 by education level, 9 by income level, and 2 by ethnicity. Where possible, dynamic time series for SDG indicators have been maintained since 2010.

VI.   CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

30.   The 2030 Agenda has set ambitious goals for all countries, and despite being halfway through, few countries can boast achieving even half of the targets, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

31.   The extensive set of 231 global SDG indicators, many of which require disaggregation across multiple dimensions, has posed a challenge for all statistical systems. On the other hand, this challenge has provided an impetus for statisticians to further develop and utilize all available resources to monitor SDG implementation.

32.   With only a few years remaining until 2030, Kazakhstan has decided to focus its efforts on the most priority goals and indicators, updating the national set of indicators and revising their relevance based on data availability.

33.   Currently, the process of revising the national SDG indicator set is ongoing, with a series of national consultations with all stakeholders already completed, and the final set of indicators is in the approval stage. After this set is approved by the SDG Coordination Council, the Bureau of National Statistics will collaborate with all government agencies to update the metadata and publish them on the National Reporting Platform. The final set of national SDG indicators will be used in preparing the 2025 VNR.

34.   Based on the lessons learned, the following points should be highlighted:

- Interagency coordination is crucial for the quality and timely monitoring of SDG implementation;
- It makes sense to prioritize the most important goals, targets, and indicators for phased implementation at the national level;
- The use of various, including non-traditional, data sources requires methodological work and data quality assessment, as well as training statisticians in new skills;
- At the global level, the number of indicators should be optimized, and methodologies should be provided as early as possible.

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