



SOCIAL WATCH

Global Indicator Framework on SDGs: update and CSO perspectives

By Barbara Adams and Karen Judd

The UN Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) is in the final stages of preparing its proposals for the 2020 Comprehensive Review of the global indicator framework of the SDGs, to be submitted to the Statistical Commission by [30 November](#).

The IAEG-SDGs was established by the UN Statistical Commission to identify a set of indicators by which to measure progress on the SDGs. The resulting global indicator framework was debated at the Commission meeting in March 2016 and accepted subject to refinements as methodologies improved. Thereafter the framework was submitted for an extensive online consultation and the process of revising it has continued through nine biannual IAEG-SDGs meetings—attended by agencies and member states as well as civil society.

At the UN Statistical Commission meeting in March 2019, the IAEG-SDGs submitted, in addition to regular indicator refinements and tier reclassifications, a set of proxy indicators for those lacking agreed methodology, along with 37 possible additional indicators. It also issued a call for proposals for additions, deletions, revisions and replacements to be considered as part of the 2020 Comprehensive Review of the global indicator framework.

According to the criteria set out by the IAEG-SDGs for the Comprehensive Review, an additional indicator may be considered “only in exceptional cases” such as a crucial aspect of an SDG target not being monitored or to address a critical or emerging issue that is not monitored; or when an SDG has very few indicators at Tier I or Tier II.

Following its extensive review of the proposals, and an online consultation in June 2019, the IAEG-SDGs submitted a subset of these proposals, covering 15 of the 17 SDG, to an open consultation 6 August- 8 September 2019.

The subset included (at a rough count) 21 replacements of existing indicators, 4 revisions of existing indicators, 25 additional indicators, 3 deletions of existing indicators and “in a few cases, requests for proposals replacing existing indicators where methodological progress or data collection efforts have stalled.” It included several indicators including the Gini and the Palma ratios to measure inequalities, long requested by civil society organizations (CSOs). There are no proposals to change the indicators used to measure SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) or SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure).

The IAEG-SDGs website reiterates, “The aim of the review will be to maintain the same number of indicators currently in the framework in order **not to alter significantly the original**

framework, which is already being implemented in most countries and not to increase the reporting burden on national statistical systems.”

After reviewing the inputs a revised set of proposals will be presented and discussed at the 10th meeting of the IAEG-SDGs in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 21-24 October 2019.

In preparation for the Addis meeting, a [webinar briefing for CSOs was held on 10 October](#). Addressing next steps, Benjamin Rae of the UN Statistics Division indicated that, depending on how much is agreed upon at Addis, there may be a short additional consultation of one or two weeks before the final list of proposals is drawn up for submission to the Statistical Commission.

Participants at the webinar understood that this stage is the final opportunity to influence the revised global indicator framework. Recognizing that there is not a huge appetite for additional indicators, John Romano of the TAP Network observed that it is “all a bit blurred” now that review process is being merged with comprehensive 2020 review. “At a minimum we should request greater transparency – why proposals included, or accepted and why” and suggested a joint statement requesting greater transparency to clarify which proposals are accepted and why, and focusing on what specifics the IAEG-SDGs should deal with.

Civil society perspectives

The dedicated and expert contributions of CSOs broke new ground during the elaboration of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and these efforts have continued through the implementation process, including with the IAEG-SDGs (see GPW briefing #29, “[Who influences whom in the policy arena? Statisticians seek greater voice](#)”).

During the webinar several CSOs offered their comments on the process and opportunities for engagement, recognizing increased openness and interaction, formal and informal, compared with that for the MDGs. However, they expressed disappointment on the disconnect between opportunities to input and opportunities to engage on substance as well as the lack of transparency on decision-making.

Antonia Wulff of Education International, speaking of the proposed additional indicators, stated that it is important to understand why previously sound additional indicators are now discarded, “particularly as we were told they could only be added as part of the comprehensive review”. (See [Spotlight Report on Sustainable Development 2019, SDG 4](#))

Sarah Long, of the World Justice Project explained that “there were no opportunities to answer questions and clarify issues” and detailed her organization’s experience.

Speaking of the World Justice Project proposal to add an indicator on access to civil justice to Target 16.3 on rule of law, she noted that the proposal they submitted in June, endorsed by UNDP and OECD, did not get into the open consultation. She eventually was told that UNODC also submitted two other proposals for this indicator, so they should get together to submit one

joint proposal. As the current indicator framework only measures access to criminal justice, she explained, Member States agreed to add an indicator on civil justice. Their proposed methodology is the only one there is, she added; countries do not collect data from administrative agencies – which only records use, not access. (See [World Justice Project Rule of Law Index](#))

By the time the joint proposal was submitted, she said, the consultation had closed. When asked if it was on the agenda for review, she added, the response was equivocal. “It is still not clear if all those that were in consultation will be considered or if some will be dropped.”

Romano joined in on this, saying “We thought this one was safe – but it is not clear yet.”

Later Benjamin Rae of UNSD confirmed it is on the agenda—despite the apparent lack of feedback. He said, “We have 200 proposals, 25 went into consultations, nowhere that many will go into the 2020 review - most likely one will probably make it. In general, replacement indicators more likely than additional indicators.” He added, regarding CSO participation, that the 6th IAEG-SDGs meeting in Beirut was “very strained”, and in 2018 in Vienna the mechanism for stakeholders shifted to support greater participation.

At the 10th meeting, the IAEG-SDGs will first meet in a closed session to review workplans of various working groups, updates on Tier III workplans not proposed for reclassification and data availability of Tier I and Tier II indicators.

The following day, open to all participants, will review the proposals for “revision, replacement, addition and deletion” to the global indicator framework which currently includes 104 Tier I indicators, 89 Tier II indicators, and 23 Tier III indicators.

Also on the agenda is a session on integrating statistical and geospatial information for SDG monitoring and an IAEG-SDGs working meeting on data disaggregation, “by invitation and other meeting participants may attend as observers”.

The next steps in the process will depend on how much is agreed in Addis. Once a new indicator is approved, monitoring begins immediately in order to allow for all of the approved changes to be incorporated into the process of reporting on progress on the SDGs.

CSOs share perspectives on the process going forward

Sarah Long advised, “The IAEG-SDGs wants to consider proposals on technical grounds only and does not want to take up conceptual issues.” She added that they will also not respond advocacy pressure, so it is important to submit the five most important technical points.

Marianne Haslegrave of the Commonwealth Medical Trust, stated: “The role of the custodial agencies is critical – if you can engage separately with them it is useful. It had not been clear to CSOs that everything had to go through custodial agencies.”

This observation echoed the detailed accounts of several participants in the IAEG-SDGs process, many of which are collected in a special edition of Global Policy, called [Knowledge and Politics in Setting and Measuring the SDGs](#), edited by Sakiko Fukada-Parr and Desmond McNeill.

Throughout the process, CSOs have made clear that opportunities to make inputs and to be present at some meetings do not constitute meaningful consultation and participation in contributing with technical and policy relevant expertise and experience. Furthermore accountability extends beyond transparency of documentation and timetables to transparency of and access to key decision-making processes and players.

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