

Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators

WORKING GROUP ON GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION

Terms of Reference – 25 July 2019

I. Background

In September 2015, Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and tasked the United Nations Statistical Commission, as a functional commission of ECOSOC, to develop the global indicator framework. The overarching principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is that no one should be left behind. “Data which is high quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts” is called (A/RES/70/1). To support implementation at all levels, the 2030 Agenda included the need to exploit the contribution to be made by a wide range of data, including Earth observations and geospatial information.

In March 2015 at its forty-sixth session, the United Nations Statistical Commission created an Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), which is composed of representatives from a regionally balanced group of Member States and includes regional and international agencies as observers. The group also invites as other key stakeholders, such as civil society, academia and the private sector, to attend its meetings and to provide inputs during consultations. The IAEG-SDGs was tasked with providing a proposal for a global indicator framework (and associated global and universal indicators) for the follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda to be considered by the Statistical Commission at its forty-seventh session in March 2016. At the forty-seventh session of the Commission, the Global indicator framework was agreed upon by Member States.

Although the development of the Global indicator framework has primarily been based on a statistical data input-output approach, the need for ‘geographic location’ in a new era of data needs is well recognized. Many national statistical offices now understand that geospatial information, Earth observations and other Geospatial Big Data are able to provide new and consistent data sources and methodologies to integrate multiple ‘location-based’ variables to support and inform official statistics and the indicators for the SDGs. Geography and location provide an important link to enable a richer picture of our countries, and what is happening in and across them. It enables data from diverse sources to be brought together to unleash their combined power in analysis and decision making.

To meet the ambitions and demands of the 2030 Agenda, it is necessary for the Global indicator framework to adequately and systematically address the issues of alternative data sources and methodologies, including geospatial information and Earth observations in the context of geographic location. Thus, at its forty-seventh session in March 2016, the IAEG-SDGs noted that the integration of geospatial information and statistical data will be key for the production of a number of the indicators. As a means to address these issues the creation of a Working Group on Geospatial Information, reporting to the IAEG-SDGs, is required.

The IAEG-SDGs recognizes the contributions and achievements made by the Working Group on Geospatial Information (WGGI). In particular, it has contributed in the use of geospatial tools for the analysis, production and dissemination of 24 indicators of the Global indicator framework approved by the General Assembly. In order to achieve greater synergy between the statistical and geographical communities, the IAEG-SDGs has decided to update the Terms of Reference of the WGGI.

II. Objectives and Tasks

The primary objective of the Working Group is to ensure from a statistical and geospatial perspective that one of the key principles of the 2030 Agenda, to leave no one behind, is reflected in the Global indicator framework.

Specific objectives are to:

1. Provide expertise and advice to the IAEG-SDGs, custodian agencies and the larger statistical community as to how geospatial data, Earth observations and other new data sources can reliably and consistently contribute to the production and dissemination of the indicators.
2. Review options and provide guidance to the IAEG-SDGs, as to the role of national statistical offices (NSOs) in considering geospatial data and Earth observations, as a mean to contribute to and validate datasets as part of official statistics for SDG indicators.

Tasks will include:

1. Identify and share:
 - common standards required for the use of geospatial data as a source in the production of official statistics.
 - national and regional level experiences, guidelines and best practices in geospatial data production and analysis to measure leaving no one behind.
 - frameworks and tools for linking statistical and geospatial data for further contributing to the effort of advancing the use of Geospatial Information System (GIS) for the SDGs.
 - guidelines and international standards on existing geospatial information platforms to facilitate data exchange and maximize interoperability (open geospatial consortium standards, SDMX information model, etc.).
2. Showcase how geospatial data can contribute to the indicators and metadata:
 - as a direct indicator in itself
 - to support and augment statistical data
 - to improve the production process of statistical data
 - to validate national statistical data inputs
 - to communicate and visualize the geographic dimensions and context of the indicators where appropriate
 - to provide granularity and disaggregation of the indicators where appropriate.
3. Work in close cooperation with the custodian agencies to propose strategies for undertaking methodological work on specific areas for improving either the calculation of some indicators or disaggregation by geographic location concepts for national and sub-national reporting, including to the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building (HLG) and to the Statistical Commission. It is envisioned that the Working Group will build on existing work and ongoing working mechanisms among stakeholders, especially the work of custodian agencies, and will consult widely regarding the status of methodologies and geospatial data collection and input tools as a starting point.
4. Review the agreed indicators and metadata through a ‘geographic location’ lens and identify existing geospatial data gaps, methodological and measurements issues, as well as advise on the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technologies for monitoring the achievement of the SDGs. To the initial indicator analysis of geospatial inputs and metadata presented to the IAEG-SDGs for

consideration (Shortlist), the WG will consult with the IAEG-SDGs to assess what progress exists and where further work needs to be focused.

III. Governance

The Working Group on Geospatial Information will work under the auspices of the IAEG-SDGs group and will report regularly to the group. The IAEG-SDGs will review the work of the Working Group and may revise these terms of reference based on the work this group has completed and any new items that the IAEG-SDGs would like the group to consider.

IV. Membership

The Working Group will be chaired or co-chaired by a member of the IAEG-SDGs and consist of IAEG members and international organizations, who have considerable experience in this area of work. All custodian agencies will be invited to participate. To ensure broad expertise and effectiveness, experts from the wider geospatial and earth observations communities should be drawn into the group, namely from the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM), the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics, the Expert Group on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information (EG-ISGI), and the Group on Earth Observations (GEO).

A few countries not presently members of the IAEG-SDGs can be invited to join the group as appropriate, noting that Working Group members should have technical expertise and practical experience in applying geospatial methodologies and tools within a monitoring context. The WG may invite experts, as appropriate, from academic, civil society, and the private sector to contribute their expertise and experiences on geospatial information and related data methods.

The United Nations Statistics Division will be the secretariat of the Working Group; the secretariat of the IAEG-SDGs will also be involved in the Working Group to ensure communication within the interested parties: IAEG-SDGs, UN-GGIM and Member States.

V. Organization of Work

The Working Group will work through electronic exchanges and periodic meetings.

Where feasible, the annual meetings of the Working Group will be conducted in conjunction with the annual meetings of the IAEG-SDGs. Additionally, to ensure close collaboration, the Working Group will be invited to participate in other IAEG-SDGs meetings, where the Working Group will deliver their regular reports on their progress.

Other meetings will be convened on the basis of need and with specific tasks to be accomplished.

The Working Group will benefit from other expert group meetings held by the United Nations Statistics Division in collaboration with partners.

The group will conduct its work in an open, inclusive and transparent manner.

VI. Work Plan

Based on the objectives and tasks, the Working Group will decide on its detailed work plan and internal organization of work, its communication and coordination with other groups and countries, and its methods of work, also taking advantage of the preparatory efforts and progress made by UN-GGIM, EG-ISGI, GEO, the GWG on Big Data and other various related groups, in the development of geospatial information and Earth observation data inputs into the Global Indicator Framework.

The work plan will be presented to the IAEG-SDGs for endorsement.

The Working Group may consider preparing papers, including status reports of their work, to the IAEG-SDGs, to the Statistical Commission and UN-GGIM as appropriate.

VII. Expected duration

The Working Group will identify its main milestones and conduct its activities until completion of its tasks, these milestones and deliverables will be communicated to the IAEG-SDGs. The Working Group and the IAEG-SDGs will agree on a time frame for their completion.