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

WORKING GROUP ON GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION

Terms of Reference

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 for (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 well as other key stakeholders, such as civil society, academia and the private sector, as observers. 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 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 provides 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.

II.   Objectives and Tasks

The primary objective of the Working Group is to ensure from a statistical and geographic location perspective that the key principle of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind is reflected in the Global indicator framework. Tasks will include to:

1. Provide expertise and advice to the IAEG-SDGs and the larger statistical community as to how geospatial information, Earth observations and other new data sources can reliably and consistently contribute to the indicators.
2. Review options and provide guidance to IAEG-SDGs, as to the role of NSOs in considering geospatial information and earth observations, as well as other Big Data, as a means to contribute to and validate datasets as part of official statistics for SDG indicators.
3. Review the agreed indicators and metadata through a 'geographic location' lens and identify existing geospatial data gaps, methodological and measurements issues.
4. Consider how geospatial information can contribute to the indicators and metadata: 1) as a direct indicator in itself; 2) to support and augment statistical data; 3) to improve the production process of statistical data; 4) to validate national statistical data inputs; 5) to communicate and visualize the geographic dimensions and context of the indicators where appropriate; and 6) to provide granularity and disaggregation of the indicators where appropriate.
5. Provide national and regional level experiences and best practices in geospatial data production to measure leaving no one behind.
6. Propose strategies for undertaking methodological work on specific areas for improving disaggregation by geographic location concepts for national and sub-national reporting, including to the HLG and to the Statistical Commission.

It is envisioned that the Working Group will build on existing work and ongoing working mechanisms among stakeholders, and will consult widely regarding the current status of methodologies and geospatial data collection and input tools as a starting point.

An initial indicator analysis of geospatial inputs and metadata needs will be developed in the coming months and presented to the IAEG-SDGs for consideration. The analysis will include both areas for which geospatial and Earth observations data and methodologies exist, and those that need further development. The Working Group will identify what 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 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(s) of the IAEG-SDGs and consist of IAEG/HLG members and international organizations who have considerable

experience in the work of the group. 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 number of countries not presently members of the IAEG-SDGs or the HLG 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 United Nations Statistics Division will be the secretariat of the Working Group.

V. Organization of Work

The Working Group will work through electronic exchanges and periodic meetings. Where feasible, the meetings will be conducted in conjunction with the annual meetings of the IAEG-SDGs. 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, and will 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.

VI. Expected duration

The Working Group will identify its main milestones and conduct its activities starting April 2016 and until completion of its tasks. Regular review of the work of the group will be undertaken by the IAEG-SDGs and the HLG. The Working Group will provide a time frame for their completion.

VII. Proposed activities

The Working Group will decide on its detailed work plan and 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 observations data inputs into the global indicator framework.

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

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