

How to reach the Sustainable Development Goals? We need a GPS

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With the Sustainable Development Goals, the world has set itself ambitious targets for the next 15 years. But ambition will also be essential if we are to collect and process the data needed for monitoring the goals. Thanks to more than half a century of experience, the OECD is well-placed to support this global project.

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In September 2015, world leaders meeting at the United Nations endorsed 17 SDGs comprising 169 targets ranging from ending poverty and hunger, through tackling climate and environmental threats, to achieving peace and justice for all. The

SDGs may be complex and wide-ranging but their ultimate goal is simple—“leave no one behind”.

Meeting the goals will be a challenge. But so, too, will be getting the data we need to keep on track—a fact acknowledged by leaders at the UN meeting. They recognised that tracking progress towards these objectives, and adjusting policies accordingly, will require good data to monitor progress but will enable governments to make evidence-based decisions and citizens to hold them to account. In short, the world needs a new global positioning system—a GPS for the SDGs.

The OECD is particularly well-placed to help tackle the new and diverse data challenges raised by the SDGs. The Organisation is renowned for its statistics and has been at the forefront of global innovations in statistical methods, systems and dissemination for over half a century. We are also a recognised authority on a vast array of economic, social, environmental and development-related statistics.

Many of the SDG targets are complex, interlinked and multifaceted, requiring the development of new concepts and measures. The SDGs’ emphasis on leaving no one behind will also require disaggregated data across multiple dimensions, such as gender, age and socio-economic status. The OECD’s experience in developing measures of well-being in multiple dimensions that pay attention to both distributions and averages provides useful lessons in this regard.

To be sure, the SDG measurement task is daunting. No country, even among OECD members, currently has all the necessary data. New sources must be tapped to fill the gaps, and an unprecedented and sustained international effort will be needed to develop all the information required. But there are good reasons to hope that the challenge can be met. There are now more data available than ever and new technologies and methods can provide more detailed and granular information. New partnerships are emerging to harness this data revolution, and the OECD is supporting several of these, including the Global Partnership on Sustainable Development Data.

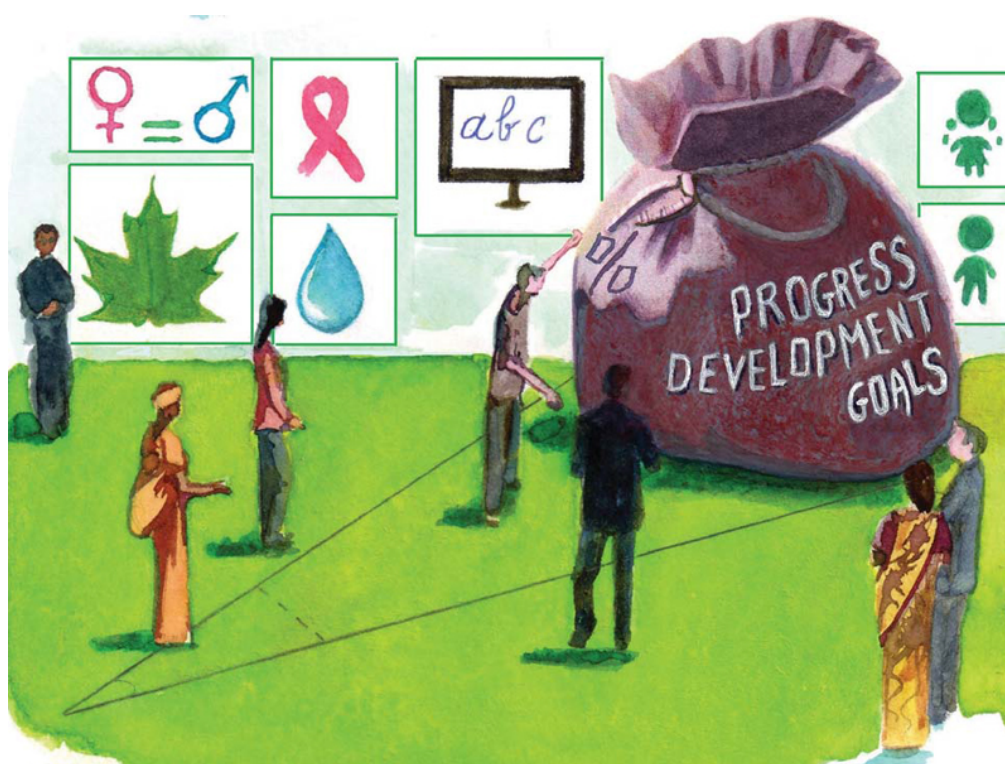
The first steps in building the GPS for the SDGs have already been taken. Throughout 2015 and into 2016, a group of 28 UN member states, assisted by observers including the OECD, elaborated a global indicator framework comprising 230 unique indicators covering all the goals and targets. In March this year, the UN Statistical Commission agreed to this as a practical starting point. The data on these indicators will form the basis of UN reviews of progress at the global level, including official reports and high-level policy discussions. But careful interpretation will also be required. In support of this, the OECD is already supplying both data and commentary to the UN for use in its first SDG reports.

There will also be thematic, regional and national follow-up and review of the SDGs, and the OECD is assisting its members on all these levels. We are contributing in particular to interagency follow-up processes in the education

sector, and we are also collaborating with the UN and other organisations to help improve the statistical base, especially in the environmental and governance fields. At the regional level, many OECD members are members of the UN Economic Commission for Europe, and the OECD is helping them and the commission to develop a road map for regional SDG reporting for approval by the Conference of European Statisticians in 2017.

National-level reporting presents special challenges, as countries must first adopt and adapt the global goals in the light of their own situations and objectives. To help members orient their thinking on national follow-up, we will produce a preliminary assessment of their starting positions against the SDGs. This will help shed light on national priorities to deliver on both domestic outcomes and global responsibilities, thus demonstrating the importance OECD countries attach to this universal agenda.

Ongoing work to further develop our statistics will also benefit the SDG review process. For example, our Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), already the world's most widely used gauge of educational outcomes, is being adapted for use in more countries under our PISA for Development initiative. And we continue to develop and extend other measures of progress in areas as diverse as science and technology, income distribution, trust, health, labour, international investment and regional analysis.



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Many of the SDG targets require measuring how actions taken in one country affect other countries' performance. Through our world input-output tables, we track the transboundary impacts of production and consumption in OECD countries on CO2 emissions and critical

natural resources. Our data on official development assistance provide information on country efforts to meet aid targets, and we are developing new metrics, such as [Total Official Support for Sustainable Development \(TOSSD\)](#), to give a more comprehensive view of resource flows. Similarly, our Revenue Statistics provide unique information on the capacity of developing countries' tax systems to raise domestic resources. The OECD has for decades been a key contributor to the process of setting global goals and tracking progress. Our 1996 development co-operation strategy *Shaping the 21st Century* was a key step towards formulating the Millennium Development Goals, and we have played a vital role in monitoring the MDGs over the past 15 years. Since 1999, we have also hosted PARIS21, the Partnership in Statistics for the 21st Century.

Clearly, building a statistical system capable of pinpointing countries' progress against the SDGs will demand even greater investment in capacity and skills across the entire spectrum—from conceiving and collecting data to interpreting and communicating them clearly, and making them open and accessible to all. We will mobilise our long-standing expertise and knowledge to help our member and partner countries and the whole international community to rise to the unprecedented measurement challenges presented by the SDGs.

Visit www.oecd.org/statistics/better-life-initiative.htm and www.paris21.org

References

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