

19. Uzbekistan: The Importance of National Evaluation Capacities for the SDGs

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INTRODUCTION

By adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, world leaders committed their countries to mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change while ensuring that no one is left behind. This entails the formulation of development pathways of countries until 2030 with a solid framework of indicators and statistical data to monitor progress, inform policy and ensure accountability of all stakeholders. The role of statistics and reliable data in this regard, especially in ensuring that decisions are based on evidence that consider the needs of different population groups for leading a decent life, cannot be underestimated.

Statistical data provision gains the central position in monitoring the efficiency, impact and progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) both at national and international levels. Analysis of the current stance and prospects of any country is built on the basis of reliable, complete and comparable data. Commonality in the structure and composition of indicators across countries facilitates clear and proper cross-country national evaluation capacities.

Developing the national evaluation capacity has a broader meaning from an international perspective. All countries “crossed fingers” to achieve the Goals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To succeed in adopting the SDGs and to introduce the elements of the 2030 Agenda, countries should develop national evaluation capacities. Governments must have the ability to set, use and improve evaluation in order to make clear-cut and prudent decisions in development policymaking. Current trends in the introduction of national evaluation policies show that countries face certain barriers in developing evaluation capacities at national level. Qualitative and quantitative evaluations are based primarily on the institutional and structural aspects of data provision. In international practice, statistics authorities engage in consolidated data provision with centralized data collection structures. The reliability, relevance and timeliness of statistical data are seen as a clue or evidence

of appropriate national evaluation capacity. One of the key issues in developing national evaluation capacities is the provision and comparability of data. But the clue is easy to track and tackle. The key reason and core solution is the introduction of a unique methodology for each SDG indicator, which is seen as a purely practical issue by many governments. Another key challenge is in establishing properly functioning statistical mechanisms for data collection and evaluation processes. An appropriately designed evaluation links data to findings and assesses the achievement (or not) of intended outcomes. It also seeks to identify causes of any major differences between intended and actual outcomes.

Uzbekistan is actively taking actions towards implementing the SDGs consistent with its national development strategy. As a key component of the SDG adoption procedure, the Government took measures to ensure the alignment of national development indicators with SDG indicators. Comparisons and systemic analysis revealed differences between the two sets of indicators. Further efforts resulted in the establishment of national SDG indicators, which are a tailored mix of SDG indicators and a group of indicators in national practice which are widely used in national evaluations.

It must be stressed that methodological differences in statistical data are unavoidable. Country-specific aspects sometimes do not allow common aspects and principles in data collection and comparative analysis. However, in view of the three tiers of SDG indicators, it is also important to understand the limitations that governments are facing in developing country-specific indicator frameworks. The purpose of this paper is to share the experience of Uzbekistan in adopting the global SDGs and corresponding indicators in the local context, with an analysis of current limitations in terms of data and statistics and the planned way forward.

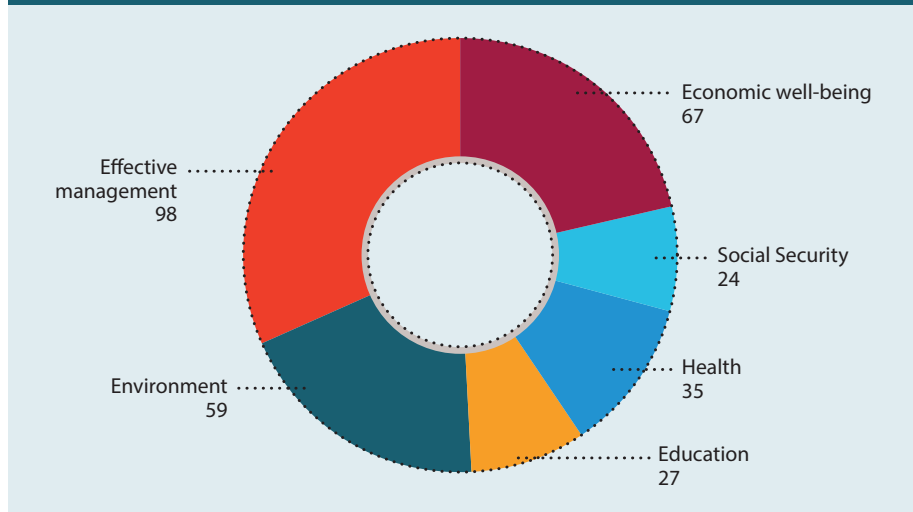
UZBEKISTAN'S APPROACH TO ADAPTING SDG INDICATORS

Following the endorsement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the General Assembly in September 2015, the Government of Uzbekistan elevated the SDG localization agenda to a strategic level through a government resolution issued in February 2016. The resolution has formalized the institutional set-up for the SDG localization process by: (1) setting up a high-level coordination committee, the SDG Steering Committee; (2) establishing six joint thematic working groups; and (3) formalizing an action plan to take forward the SDG localization in the country.

As a result, there are six SDG working groups in the thematic areas of economic well-being, social protection, health, education, environment and governance, comprised of 108 experts from 40 organizations including key ministries and government committees, non-governmental organizations, think tanks and law enforcement structures who were assigned to consult, prioritize and adapt the global SDG framework to the country context.

The government action plan on SDG localization envisaged intensive consultations for each Goal. Thematic working groups engaged with wider stakeholders, including development partners, and conducted thematic research and analysis for baseline setting. This approach was to ensure that the process is evidence-based, well grounded, participatory and inclusive.

FIGURE 1. BREAKDOWN OF PROPOSED NATIONAL SDG INDICATORS BY THEMATIC AREA



The SDGs and Uzbekistan’s new “Strategy on five priority directions of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017-2021”, launched by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, possess common features in orientation and objectives. The essence and core aims of the SDGs match the development orientation and proposed pathways to the targets of the new national development strategy. Working groups and coordinating expert group are working to match the national SDGs with the national development strategy, which outlines the key development areas and program of measures to obtain targets.

The most significant step in enhancing national capacity was the launch of a new joint project titled “Support for strategic research for the SDGs” by the Government of Uzbekistan and the United Nations Development Programme in May 2017. The joint project includes components to enhance national capacity in monitoring and assessing progress towards the SDGs. Approaches to the existing issues of enhancement of national capacity from different standpoints were clearly defined and well substantiated in terms of applicability, essence and prudence.

Several rounds of consultations, with the engagement of national think tanks, included mapping of the global SDGs against national priorities, strategies and programmes and in-depth analysis of the relevance of the SDGs and identification of national goals and targets, resulting in the formulation of draft national SDGs comprising 16 goals, 159 targets and 311 indicators. The grouping of indicators by thematic areas is shown in the figure above.

The availability of sufficient methodologies, mechanisms and capacities for collection of high-quality data across all three tiers of indicators is important to ensure the evidence-based setting of targets and regular monitoring of progress towards the SDGs. Preliminary analysis revealed that data on 50 percent, or around 150 of the 311 proposed indicators, are

collected by the State Statistics Committee and other ministries. Considering the relevance of all of SDG indicators, the methodology and practice for collecting and processing data are to be introduced. The data collection and corresponding methodologies for remaining indicators need to be developed further. Therefore, the Government has taken several measures to incorporate these indicators to the statistical workplan for the subsequent collection of relevant data within one government institution. Centralization of data sources for SDG indicators facilitates the collection and use of complete, timely and comparable data to monitor and evaluate national capacities in meeting the targets of the SDGs.

Acknowledging the important role of the State Statistics Committee for data collection and in ensuring access, timeliness and comparability of data at the global level, a Presidential Decree on “Measures to improve the activities of the State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan” has been issued. Under this decree, statistical data provided by government authorities will be compiled by the State Statistics Committee and will be released for public disclosure. Following the decree, a separate department on the national SDGs was established in the State Statistics Committee. The department is tasked to collect, consolidate and publish data related to the national SDGs and to coordinate in this process with other ministries.

THE WAY FORWARD

In line with taken measures and achieved results, further actions will be taken for the full-fledged adoption of SDG indicators and national evaluation capacity practices. As a key data provider for SDG indicators, the State Statistics Committee has identified the following further actions:

- Government authorities collect, monitor and analyse data related to their jurisdictions for control and decision-making purposes. Strong linkages in inter-agency data exchange are crucial for collecting data for all important indicators. Therefore, conducting additional consultations with ministries and government agencies on the availability of data for the remaining unavailable indicators paves the way for a full-fledged set of SDG indicators.
- Coordinated approach to collecting data on the SDG indicators enables monitoring of progress towards the SDGs. Mechanisms for coordination of data collection for the indicators for the national SDGs should be developed.
- Cooperation with international organizations on the development of methodologies and tools for collecting data for Tier III indicators of the national SDGs and their incorporation to the national statistics system.
- Establishment of an online database to track progress towards the achievement of national SDGs, which enables remote access and permanent availability for all stakeholders.