



PARIS21 and World Forum Co-operation

The OECD Statistics Directorate launched a Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies whose objective is to provide a focal point for the worldwide movement of projects that are developing key statistical indicators of progress. Over recent years, PARIS21 has provided some support in bringing developing country representatives into these discussions.

For statisticians in many developing countries, the selection and calculation of indicators — particularly, “non-traditional” indicators such as those not related to poverty, health, or education — is far from their top priority. Constraints related to human resources, funding, technical capacity, and institutions limit the data production to the basics needs of public policies. Some countries even have great difficulties to produce data related to these needs.

However, the development of NSDS needs assessments could certainly benefit, as argued by the Global Project, from the input of actors often not included in the assessment such as those in civil society and NGOs.

Thus far, PARIS21 and the Global Project have benefited greatly from their recent collaboration. The note that follows proposes ways in which the two bodies could collaborate further.

The Bureau is asked to decide if PARIS21 should pursue collaboration with the OECD Global Project and, if so, to what extent.

Towards National Roundtables for Measuring Progress

I. Background

This note outlines ways in which PARIS21 and the OECD's Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies could build on the very successful co-operation they have enjoyed over the past two years.

PARIS21's goal is to “develop a culture of evidence-based policy making and implementation which serves to improve governance and government effectiveness in reducing poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals”. The headline objective is that “every low-income country designs a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) in order to have, *inter alia*, nationally owned and produced data for all MDG indicators by 2010.”

The **OECD's Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies** is a focal point for the worldwide movement of projects that are developing key statistical indicators of progress. These projects are being run for a variety of reasons though they share a common concern that too much emphasis is placed on GDP as a measure of national progress. Societies, they argue, need to think more about improving their welfare (progress) rather than just their output. And progress needs to be defined and measured. The Global Project's mission is “to foster the development of sets of key economic, social and environmental indicators and their use to inform and promote evidence-based decision-making, within and across the public, private and citizen sectors”.

II. PARIS21 and OECD Co-operation – National Roundtables on Measuring Progress

The Global Project's mission directly supports that of PARIS21. Indicators of progress can promote **facts-based debate among policy-makers and the public** about where a society has come from, where it is heading, and where it stands. A reliable and objective set of progress indicators can **promote government accountability and effectiveness**, help citizens make reliable decisions in their increasingly complex lives and **improve the ways in which democracies and governance function** by ensuring that debate is focussed on the issues that really matter to a society.

The process of developing a set of progress indicators can also help **PARIS21's objective of bringing about a wider discussion on statistical priorities** within target countries – a discussion that engages the public and private sector and civil society. The idea of national partner meetings is a part of the proposed scaling up of investment in national statistical systems (NSS). An NSS comprises more than official statistics. It also provide statistics important to the entirety of a society – i.e., it should provide statistics useful for citizens and civil society as well as policy-makers. A discussion around progress indicators – which by definition should be a set of indicators most important for a society – can help broaden the content and reach of an NSS.

The Global Project wants to initiate a series of National Roundtables on Measuring Progress. These Roundtables are not intended to distract from the NSDS process but should be closely linked to it or even a key part of it. Discussions about societal progress and its measurement can help set statistical priorities and also help to engage a diverse and influential cross-section of opinion setters and decision makers. The participatory approach inherent in a national roundtable is also in line with the practices recommended in the drafting of Poverty Reduction Strategies.

Annex I explains the experience in Australia when this process was undertaken. Of course some might legitimately say that this is all very well for a country like Australia with a relatively mature statistical system, but how is it relevant to developing countries? Roundtables are essentially a chance for a group of diverse people to discuss the key statistical priorities for the nation. The focus on progress offers a subject which many people – statistically minded or otherwise – can engage in. And by doing so they have the potential to elevate the interest in statistics in a country. Once a roundtable has discussed what aspects of life constitute progress in their society and debated how those aspects could be measured it is for the NSO and others to consider what data are available. Often, appropriate data will not be available for some areas of progress. This in itself is useful: knowing the priorities of a roundtable can help an NSO to reconsider its priorities and stake a claim for more resources to build capacity.

During the Istanbul Forum we have seen that several non-OECD countries have already launched similar initiatives and others are thinking about this possibility. The expected participation of the UNDP and the World Bank in the Global Project, as well as of the Inter-American Development Bank and of the African Development Bank demonstrate the potential of the project to create synergies between various initiatives (national Human Development reports, PRSPs, etc.) based on statistical data and indicators already launched in developing countries.

Indicators are only a small part of the statistical story of course. Any indicator is only as good as the data that underpins it and no statistician would think only in terms of the indicators without considering their foundations in the broader statistical system. But indicators are also often the most visible output of a statistical system – the tip of the iceberg or, to use PARIS21’s expression customised for Africa, the ears of the hippo – and indicators worldwide are attracting increasing attention by policy makers and citizens alike. Giving indicators prominence in a process such as this can help to raise the quality of the data that underpins them.

Focussing on a set of progress measures, this approach could have several benefits for PARIS21, including:

- a) The project is quite exciting – and could be something that engages people’s attention and energy at a quite senior level.
- b) The project is focussed and is relatively easy to run to a timetable and not get diverted.
- c) The project has a momentum and is likely to keep people more engaged and engaged for longer than a broader discussion on “statistical priorities”.
- d) The project is of interest to the public and the media and can give an increased emphasis on statistics.
- e) The NSDS plans already bring together different actors to discuss the priorities for the national statistical system (NSS). In some countries, good data might already be produced outside of the NSS. The Forum project could help in developing a comprehensive view of what is needed and where data can be obtained.
- f) The Forum project will be supported by UNDP and the World Bank, who have their own strong networks. It would make sense to bring these networks together to avoid duplication. On the other hand, the publication of national human development reports is important to national political authorities. Bringing together the Forum Project, PARIS21, UNDP and the Bank would create a very powerful critical mass.
- g) Advocacy is a fundamental role for PARIS21 and the Global Project: there are synergies to be exploited.
- h) If PARIS21 becomes a partner, it will become member of the advisory body, in charge of steering the whole project.

III. Ways Forward – For Discussion

If the PARIS21 Steering Committee agrees that there is some merit in encouraging national roundtables on progress (and such roundtables are likely only to work when they are ‘owned’ by the country concerned and supported enthusiastically), then:

- 1) We could encourage countries to develop a set of progress measures as being a good candidate for a national statistical priority.... (this could for instance be a standing item on the agenda for meetings that PARIS21 arranges to discuss the setting of priorities for the NSDS with countries)

And, if they agree ...

- 2) PARIS21 and the OECD work together to get initiatives off the ground in targeted countries. Fledgling regional working groups for measuring progress, which are being set up with the support of regional partners for Africa, Latin America and the Arab Region, could help.

There are several ways to get such national roundtables up and running. Cape Verde and Rwanda have already expressed an interest. Madagascar, Mozambique and Mauritania might also be good candidates. In some countries, working with the national statistical associations might provide a way to begin informal conversations in this area.

Annex I: The Australian Example

Some projects are run by governments, some by civil society or academics and some by national statistical offices. But evidence suggests that the best projects are run as a collaborative venture that spans different sectors. One of the better known projects was led by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and entitled *Measures of Australia's Progress* (MAP). The ABS is Australia's national statistical agency: it is a part of government but it is widely recognised as being a strongly independent and objective agency.

When the ABS embarked on the project in 2000 they sought to develop some headline measures of Australian progress. They recognised that there were many ways of considering what "progress" meant for Australia. Progress means different things to different people – one person might feel strongly that environmental issues were vital to assessing progress; someone else might feel poverty and inequality was a key factor, etc. Because there is no single "right" answer about what progress looks like, the ABS decided to consult a broad cross section of society before selecting the final set of measures. What was effectively a national roundtable on progress was set up. This comprised an expert group and associated consultation process. The expert group comprised a leading environmental scientist, several academics, the head of a major social charity, the director of a think tank and several policy makers. Members were chosen for both their expertise in aspects of progress and the diversity of their opinions on what progress might mean for the nation as a whole. The expert group worked with the ABS to select a set of 15 headline indicators of progress. These outcome-based indicators were opened up to public consultation, refined on the basis of comments received and first published in 2002. The fourth issue of the publication was recently released.

Outcomes of Measuring Australia's Progress

The project is highly regarded within Australia (it won an award from Australia's leading public affairs magazine as the "Smartest Social Project" in 2002). It is also respected worldwide. Outcomes include:

- **A greater use of facts in public debate.** MAP receives a lot of media attention. It is cited weekly in parliament and has been used often as an undisputed set of facts e.g., in major debates on environmental problems, where it used to be more common for the "facts" to be more often debated more than the "issues". It has also had a significant influence on the debate around poverty in Australia. Before it was published there was a perception that the rich were getting richer and the poor getting poorer. This was not the case and MAP rectified it.
- **A stronger relationship between government, statisticians and civil society** – The ongoing discussions around what aspects of progress should be included in MAP and how they should be measured has promoted better understanding among all concerned.
- **A more joined up government.** A single set of outcomes of progress has helped government departments to work together and think more holistically about what they are trying to achieve. For example, after MAP was released the Australian Treasury developed its own framework of well-being to help better understand the Treasury's role in government.
- **Revisions to the set of official statistics.** MAP's focus on analysis progress over time led to mistakes in official statistics being uncovered and then fixed. The ABS's statistical output is continuing to change to become more relevant to today's concerns.