

PARIS21: Partnerships in Statistics for the 21st Century

Task Team: Improved Support for Monitoring Development Goals

Report to the Steering Committee, prepared by the World Bank

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1. Introduction

1.1 Objective

This Task Team was launched on 15th October 2002 to respond to the general concern of the development community, and the specific conclusion of the Roundtable on “Better Measuring, Monitoring and Managing for Development Results”¹, that greater statistical support is needed at international and national levels to improve the measurement of key development indicators.

Broadly, the objectives of the team² were to identify ways to improve the availability and quality of national and international data used to monitor progress towards development goals, such as those contained in the Millennium Declaration³ and Poverty Reduction Strategies⁴. To achieve these objectives, the team was asked to identify actions needed to achieve better coherence and harmonization between national and international statistical data and activities, and to document shortcomings in data production systems in countries.

1.2 Methodology

The work of the team was divided into three main activities. All were focused on the estimation of key national development indicators in developing countries.

- Six country case studies (Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Malawi, Moldova and Yemen).
- A study of the international statistical system.
- A study of internationally-sponsored household survey instruments.

1.3 Key events

July 2002	First Roundtable on “Better Management, Measurement and Monitoring for Results” Roundtable
October 2002	Inaugural Task Team meeting in Paris: Terms of Reference drafted, and Task Team composed
March 2003	Conveners meeting, Luxembourg
April 2003	International Study started

¹ June 2002, Washington, DC

² <http://www.paris21.org/documents/793.pdf>

³ <http://www.un.org/millennium/>

⁴ <http://www.worldbank.org/prsp>

June 4-5, 2003	International Conference on Improving Statistics for Measuring Development Outcomes, Washington DC, where emerging findings of the international study, and the focus of the country studies, were discussed
Nov 2003 – March 2004	Case studies conducted in Malawi, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Moldova, Yemen and Bolivia
January, 2004	International Study completed
February 2004	Marrakech Roundtable on Managing for Development Results, where key findings were presented as part of the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics
May 2004	Household Survey study completed
June 2004	Case study reports completed, summary report drafted
September 2004	Editing of key outputs completed, published on PARIS21 website
June 2005	Report to Steering Committee, case studies published in printed form

Task Team discussions were mostly combined with other activities. E-mail was the main method of communication between members and contributors. Resources to support the activities of the Team were provided by the institutions involved in Task Team activities and by the PARIS21 Secretariat.

1.4 Task Team composition

Active members of the Task Team included National Statistical Offices of relevant countries, UN Statistics Division, the Poverty Group of the UN Development Program, the European Commission (including Eurostat), the UK Department for International Development, and the Development Data Group of the World Bank (acting as Convener). A list of persons involved in Task Team activities is given in Annex 1.

2. Country Case Studies

2.1 Objective

The country case studies were conducted to provide the Task Team with evidence and analysis. They were directed at identifying key actions and activities to improve the availability and reliability of key development indicators, and their use in monitoring development goals.

2.2 Method

Countries were selected against a number of criteria, including geographical and income group coverage, the availability of existing documents and studies, and the interest in the studies from countries themselves. The key themes of the case studies were the sources and methodologies for estimating key indicators; demand for indicators, particularly by policymakers; statistical capacity; and government and donor support for statistical work.

For each case study, small work teams were formed from staff in various agencies, with each team supported by a consultant funded by the European Commission. In all cases, teams made a short field visit to the country concerned (visit costs were met by the agencies). The case study teams followed a general study guide⁵, prepared by the Task Team conveners. This included typical questions to ask at the interviews with stakeholders, and templates to organize information on indicators and data collection activities. Other study methods included the review of relevant publications and documentation and completion of the PARIS21 Statistical Capacity Building Indicators⁶ (SCBI) questionnaire by the Director of each statistical office.

A report was produced for each case study⁷, together with a summary report⁸ of the six studies to highlight issues that require special attention across countries and to understand variations in the underlying problem areas identified. Case study reports are also being published in “glossy” book form.

3.3 Findings and recommendations

The situation relating to the problems faced by statistical systems and development indicators in the case study countries is surprisingly homogenous (although it should be stressed that the countries chosen do not form a representative sample, and that there are also many differences between countries.) The following conclusions were drawn together in the summary report:

- None of the case study countries were sufficiently well resourced by national budgets; there was a shortfall in funding for the core statistical systems required to provide information both for economic management and for monitoring the MDGs.
- All countries relied on donor support to some degree, particularly for their household survey programs.
- Most were unable to collect meaningful statistics through administrative systems because of capacity weaknesses.

⁵ <http://www.paris21.org/documents/1031.pdf>

⁶ The Statistical Capacity Building Indicators were developed by another under the PARIS21 task team led by the IMF http://www.paris21.org/pages/task-teams/teams/introduction/index.asp?id_team=6

⁷ http://www.paris21.org/pages/task-teams/teams/introduction/index.asp?id_team=2&tab=doc

⁸ <http://www.paris21.org/documents/1172.pdf>

- There was a general lack of support to improve the management of statistical systems.
- Funding for major activities, such as population censuses, is particularly difficult to secure.
- The basic demographic information needed to underpin key indicators is out of date in some countries.
- There was limited access to and use of development statistics both at the central and local levels.
- Statistical capacities of local statistical offices as well as statistical units of the line ministries were weak in many cases.
- In all countries, inconsistencies were found in the methodologies and definitions of indicators, which limited the utility of available data

To address these issues, the following ten recommendations were distilled from the case study reports:

Better planning and financing of statistical systems:

- Recommendation 1: *Countries should develop National Statistical Development Strategies, and multi-annual plans for statistical activities.*
- Recommendation 2: *Countries and development partners should finance statistical activities on the basis of National Statistical Development Strategies and multi-annual plans for statistical activities.*

Better management and organization of statistical systems:

- Recommendation 3: *The development of statistical capacity should include organizational change and management development in statistical organizations.*
- Recommendation 4: *Countries should implement arrangements to ensure professional statistical standards across the entire statistical system.*

Better use and accessibility of Data:

- Recommendation 5: *Countries should seek to make full use of software that facilitates a central repository of official development statistics, such as DevInfo.*
- Recommendation 6: *Provide training and skills development in data use and interpretation in poverty monitoring units and other key institutions.*

- Recommendation 7: *Improve the availability and use of local and sub-national statistics obtained from administrative system and surveys.*

Improvements in data collection and indicator estimation methodology:

- Recommendation 8: *Countries should strengthen the wider statistical system and develop programs to improve record keeping and statistical capacity in line ministries and in local offices.*
- Recommendation 9: *Countries should adopt a statistical strategy that provides a rolling prioritized plan of key statistical activities over a 10-year cycle, to include the population census.*
- Recommendation 10: *Countries should take the lead and agree, publish and use common methodologies and standards for statistical activities and the compilation of indicator estimates.*

3. International Study

3.1 Objective

The International Study was commissioned to provide a better understanding of processes of the international statistical system as they relate to the key development indicators in the MDG set. The study focused on assessing the data collection and compilation methods used by international lead agencies in their monitoring of MDG indicators, and tried to identify weaknesses and propose low-cost solutions.

3.2 Method

The study was conducted by Oxford Policy Management (OPM) and funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). OPM studied data collection and compilation practices of lead agencies through literature review and through dialogue with the agencies concerned. Initial findings were presented to an international conference on “Improving Statistics for Measuring Development Outcomes”⁹ held in Washington in June 2003, and the final report was prepared in January 2004. Outputs of this study are a full report¹⁰ and a briefing note¹¹ aimed at raising awareness among international agencies of key issues, and identifying possible actions for improvement.

3.3 Findings and recommendations

The main findings of the study relate to seven areas:

Inconsistent definitions: In some cases there are inconsistent definitions applied by international agencies to the same indicator. The study documents examples where this arises because indicator definitions are not clear, not consistently applied by international

⁹ <http://www.worldbank.org/data/intconference.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.paris21.org/documents/1175.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.paris21.org/documents/1174.pdf>

organizations, or not applied by countries when collecting data (HIV/AIDS indicators, literacy rates). It also examines indicator definitions that cannot always be readily applied to specific country circumstances, particularly where data are collected as a by-product of administrative systems (measles immunizations, births attended by skilled health personnel).

Data sources: The use of different data sources to produce certain indicators makes cross-country comparability difficult. This is often dictated by data availability at country level; for example, welfare measures are based either on income or consumption, and there are often difficulties comparing the estimates calculated from surveys using each method. Differences between employment estimates derived from administrative records and labor force surveys are well known.

Household surveys: at the time of the study there was no systematic record of household surveys conducted by individual countries, and systems which utilize estimates derived from household surveys occasionally fail to make use of all available data. Surveys with useful and valid data are sometimes missed by agency search mechanisms, even though sophisticated semi-formal sectoral networks exist, and agency field offices are often used to identify data sources.

Use of survey data: Greater efforts are being made by agencies to more fully utilize data from household surveys. However, there remain areas where the use of survey data to supplement data collected through administrative systems would improve the coverage and quality of data estimates. The main example is school enrolment data, which could be supplemented or validated with attendance data from surveys (although it should be noted that UNESCO Institute of Statistics are already actively attempting to utilize survey data more fully).

Use of questionnaires: Collection of data using agency questionnaires is sometimes problematic. Although many agencies utilize their field offices, questionnaires do not always reach their intended recipient, or receive due attention when they do – particularly if they are long and onerous to complete. Countries do not always have adequate capacity to manage the questionnaire completion process well.

Population estimates: International population data are inconsistent, but are utilized heavily by some agencies, both to calculate indicator values for countries (e.g. as the denominator in six MDG indicators) and to generate regional and global estimates. There are three main sources: the UN Population Division, the World Bank, and the US Census Bureau. Data from these sources often differ; in one country in every six, for the year 2000, differences between the lowest and highest estimate vary by more than 10%. Differences in population estimates – particularly where the size of specific population sub-groups needs to be estimated – can make dramatic differences in indicator estimates.

Dissemination: Data presentation practices can cause misuse of indicator data. Estimates tend to be presented without full metadata detailing data sources, specific limitations, or freshness, and are sometimes presented representing a range of years. The result can be

confusing to data users, who may not be able to, for example, easily distinguish between data updated last year on one web site, and data updated this year on another - and may even try to compare the two. The report documents cases where apparently different estimates for specific indicators and countries are reported by different agencies, but where the difference is actually caused by data freshness.

Actions were suggested by the study in five areas:

Household surveys. Consolidate household survey networks, and create an international household survey database. Informal, semi-formal and formal networks already exist, and there are several examples of household survey databanks maintained by international organizations. The study proposes a joint effort to consolidate these initiatives, to improve data availability, more widely share knowledge and information, and to enable improved cross-country comparability. Proactive use of household survey data in improving estimates made primarily from administrative sources is also suggested.

Practices of the international statistical system. Conduct a systematic review of data collection and reporting practices. This should examine more closely the agency questionnaires and their use, and seek for a possible consolidation of reporting practices in order to minimize response burden and improve effectiveness. Rules and systems which define responsibilities of countries and agencies in the reporting process should also be reviewed to improve data quality.

Population estimates. Improve the use of international population estimates, including through the provision of more complete documentation of sources and methods, and information on the precision of estimates. The study also suggests that it would be helpful for MDG reporting purposes if major producers of population data were to agree on a common set of estimates to be used in MDG calculations and reporting.

Methodology. Improvements in the management and use of common methodologies and definitions, including increased efforts to collate and promote definitions and guidelines (it is recognized that the UN MDG indicator metadata published in 2003 addresses some of these issues.) Greater attention needs to be paid to country-level data collection systems, to try to accommodate international definitions and requirements without distorting national requirements.

Dissemination. Increase the level of detail in metadata in published international databases, and make changes to data management and presentation practices to increase the information available to users and minimize the potential for misinterpretation and confusion, particularly when comparing data from different international sources.

4. Household Survey Study

4.1 Objective

A Household Survey Study was commissioned because improvements in household surveys were identified as one of the priority areas for improvement from the

international and country case studies, particularly during the international conference on measuring development outcomes in June, 2003. Household survey data are often under-utilized in international data sets, and surveys are not conducted in a harmonized manner in countries. The specific purpose of the study was to assess the role of household surveys in providing data for monitoring the MDGs, and to recommend ways in which this role might be strengthened.

4.2 Method

This was a desk study conducted by Juan Muñoz of Sistemas Integrales and Kinnon Scott of the World Bank's Development Economics Research Group. The output is a report¹² containing a review of the role of household surveys in estimating MDG indicators, how household surveys need to be an integral part of the national statistical system, a description of the components of an "optimal" household survey system for the MDGs, and a discussion of the role of the international community in this area.

4.3 Findings and recommendations

The report highlights the critical importance of household surveys in measuring key indicators (over half of the 48 MDG indicators can be estimated from survey data, and ten indicators require them) but stresses that the emphasis on indicator estimation should be balanced with wider uses of survey data for policy making and management. Reliance on household surveys for indicator estimation is greatest where data available from administrative systems are weak.

MDG indicator requirements, however, mean that there is not one single survey that can meet all needs; and that the creation of a single "MDG survey" is not feasible. Fortunately, however, existing survey instruments can provide most estimates, but the current levels of investment in survey programs in many countries are inadequate: surveys are conducted rarely and are often not fully utilized. Further, many statistical offices rely on external funding of survey programs which often means that they are not able to ensure the right mix or continuity of surveys.

At national level, recommendations to address these issues include better linkage of data users and producers, the provision of adequate resources for household surveys, and the creation of a continuous household survey program. The report describes how a survey program based on a permanent Labor Force Survey, a program of Living Standards Measurement Study surveys every four years, and Demographic and Health Surveys every four years (in intermediate years) would be capable of producing estimates of all household survey-based MDG indicators, and would provide continuous monitoring of labor markets, regular information on social services, and regular poverty measures and profiles. This program would also develop permanent household survey-taking capacity.

At international level, the creation of the International Household Survey Network (IHSN) is supported. Important functions of the IHSN are to improve coordination and

¹² <http://www.paris21.org/documents/1181.pdf>

information sharing, to develop better guidelines and procedures for household survey taking, and to act as a “clearing house” for survey results and survey practitioners.

Annex 1. Persons involved in Task Team activities

Country case study teams

Bolivia

Castillo, Walter	National Statistical Office, Bolivia
Cervera-Ferri, José	Consultant (for European Commission)
Lee, Haeduck (team leader)	World Bank
Zepeda, Eduardo	UNDP Bolivia

Burkina Faso

Guzman, Pilar	Consultant (for European Commission)
Johnston, Robert	United Nations Statistics Division
Ponty, Nicolas	UNDP Burkina Faso
Watanabe, Naoko (team leader)	World Bank

Cambodia

Beaven, Rachael	UK Department for International Development
Pier Giorgio-Ardeni	Consultant (for European Commission)
Harrison, Makiko (team leader)	World Bank
MacDonald, Lynn	UNDP New York

Moldova

Cervera-Ferri, José	Consultant (for European Commission)
Fantom, Neil (team leader)	World Bank
MacDonald, Lynn	UNDP New York
Me, Angela	UN Economic Commission for Europe

Malawi

Fantom, Neil (team leader)	World Bank
Guzman, Pilar	Consultant (for European Commission)
Kanyuka, Mercy	National Statistical Office, Malawi
Kubota, Asuza	UNDP Malawi

Yemen

Fantom, Neil	World Bank
Pier Giorgio-Ardeni	Consultant (for European Commission)
Hill, Kate	UK Department for International Development

Case study summary

Strode, Mary	Consultant
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International Study

Carraro, Ludovico	Oxford Policy Management
Khan, Salman	Oxford Policy Management
Hunt, Simon	Oxford Policy Management
Rawle, Georgina	Oxford Policy Management
Robinson, Matt	Oxford Policy Management
Antoninis, Manos	Oxford Policy Management
Street, Laura	Oxford Policy Management

Household Survey Study

Juan Muñoz	Sistemas Integrales
Kinnon Scott	World Bank

