development initiatives

October 2022

Case Study

The role of global custodians in supporting Malaysia's SDG monitoring framework

Contents

Abbreviations

DOSM	Department of Statistics Malaysia
ECDI	Early Childhood Development Index
HLG	High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for post-2015 monitoring
IAEG	Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators
MDA	Ministry, department or agency
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NSO	National statistics office
NSS	National statistical system
SDSN	UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network
UNSC	UN Statistical Commission
UNSD	UN Statistics Division

Introduction

Malaysia has made a strong commitment to meeting the SDGs as evidenced by its submission of two voluntary national reviews (in 2017[1] and 2021[2]). The monitoring of progress is a key element of this and the Department of Statistics (DOSM) has been tasked with ensuring that data for as many of the 248 SDG indicators as possible are collected and published.

The UN Statistics Division (UNSD) maintains a global SDG database allowing for the comparison of indicator progress across all countries. Table 1 shows that Malaysia already performs well in the provision of data[3] - ranking seventh in the world for the number of published indicators containing 2019 data.

Table 1 - Top ten countries providing 2019 data to the SDG Global Database

Country	Number of Indicators	Global Ranking
Peru	153	1
Thailand	147	2
Colombia	145	3
Mexico	144	4
Belarus	143	5
Ecuador	142	6
Costa Rica	139	7
Malaysia	139	7
Philippines	138	9
Zimbabwe	138	9

This table is, however, misleading. A comparison of Malaysian data in the global database with DOSM's 2020 publication of SDG Indicators[4] reveals many gaps and discrepancies.

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[1] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15881Malaysia.pdf
[2] https://www.epu.gov.my/sites/default/files/2021-07/Malaysia_Voluntary_National_Review_%28VNR%29_2021.pdf
[3] This comparison relates to the presence of data and not the values conveyed by the data.
[4] Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicators, Malaysia, 2020. https://newss.statistics.gov.my/newss-portalx/ep/epFreeDownloadContentSearch.seam?contentId=159273&actionMethod=ep%2FepFreeDownloadContentSearch.xhtml%3AcontentAction.doDisplayContent&cid=46165

During the first half of 2022 UNICEF's Malaysian country office, in consultation with the Prime Minister's Economic Planning Unit, contracted Development Initiatives to work with DOSM to fill a number of gaps in the country's SDG monitoring framework. While this has had some success it has also uncovered a number of obstacles that appear to exist globally in the relationship between national statistics offices (NSOs) and the international agencies (custodians) responsible for curating the SDGs.

This study shines a light on these challenges within the context of the commitments made by all parties involved in the governance of the SDGs. It makes recommendations which Malaysia, as a member of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG)[5], may wish to share with the SDG monitoring community.

[5] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/

Best Practice

In 2017 the UN Economic Commission for Europe agreed to conduct a pilot study in order to inform IAEG best practices[6] with particular reference to the current processes of country validation of agency-produced global statistics.

The study found that most countries had difficulty validating globally harmonised national statistics. Most countries reported not knowing the process by which globally harmonised country data are provided and released on the UN SDGs website. In some cases, countries reported that it was not clear why national data in the global database were not fully aligned with data they provided in an intermediary database.

The study concluded:

> *"To be able to produce globally harmonised statistics, custodian agencies need to understand national statistics. To be accountable for the statistics published, countries need a way of understanding and affirming the globally harmonised statistics produced by custodian agencies. This level of coordination is new, but necessary. There are ways in which data validation can be supported to meet the needs of both custodian agencies and countries. With focal points identified at both agencies and countries, it is possible to reach agreement on the process, to clarify data and metadata needs, and to request further explanation of the adjustment process."*[7]

This finding was acted upon by the IAEG as reflected in its document on *Best Practices in Data Flows and Global Data Reporting for the Sustainable Development Goals*[8] presented to the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) in March 2019. These best practices, as summarised in Table 2 are a point of reference for the discussion that follows.

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6 https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/Task+Team+on+Data+Flows+for+SDGs?preview=/128451079/255493334/2017-Data-Flow-Report.pdf

7 Ibid

8 https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/50th-session/documents/BG-3a-Best-Practices-in-Data-Flows-and-Global-Data-Reporting-for-theSDGs-E.pdf

Table 2 - IAEG Best Practices on Data Flows - 2019

1	Identify National Statistical Office (NSO) and Custodian Agency Focal Points
2	Share data collection calendar for SDG data requests
3	Provide clear and complete metadata by agencies to countries during data request and provide comprehensive metadata by countries to agencies when submitting their data
4	Use National data platforms and databases that contain sufficiently detailed information, including metadata, to allow data and metadata to be pulled directly for global SDG monitoring
5	Consult with countries on any harmonized, estimated, modelled or adjusted data through transparent mechanisms.
6	Improve coordination between NSSs and custodian agencies so that all involved parties are informed about data requests and are aware of who is providing the data and when and to whom the data is being provided

Complexity

One of the biggest challenges facing many NSOs is the sheer number and diversity of indicators. Table 3 shows that, across all countries, there remain 56 indicators that have not yet been published.[9]

Table 3 - Indicators in global database (all countries) by observation year

Observation Year	No. of indicators
2015	190
2016	189
2017	191
2018	194
2019	194
2020	177
2021	77

The global indicator framework to monitor the SDGs was completed in July 2017 by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG)[10] which had been established by the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) in March 2015. The IAEG is also responsible for the ongoing implementation of the indicator framework including updates and revisions.[11] Data to monitor the SDGs started being uploaded to the Global Indicator Database in 2016, which is hosted and maintained by the UNSD.[12]

When the UN set about developing the monitoring system for the SDGs it tried to avoid the pitfalls that impaired the MDG monitoring system. Right at the start of the process the UN System Task Team[13] was busy compiling and publishing its learning on the matter.[14] It's findings included: a perception of a donor-centric agenda operating through a top down model (from the international to the national statistical systems); the use of imprecise quantitative targets for some dimensions; and a lack of clarity on how to tailor global targets to national realities and regional dynamics.[15]

[9] There are only 231 unique indicators but those that are duplicated, making 248 in total, are represented in the global database.
[10] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/
[11] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/
[12] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-03/3rd-IAEG-SDGs-Meeting-Report.pdf
[13] The UN System Task Team was established by the UN Secretary General in September 2011 to support UN system-wide preparations for the post-2015 UN development agenda.
[14] https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post_2015_UNTTreport.pdf
[15] https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post_2015_UNTTreport.pdf

The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) was established by the UN Secretary-General in 2012.[16] In mid-2015, after discussions with a "large number" of NSOs, it recommended that 100 global indicators was the *maximum* number "on which NSOs can report and communicate effectively in a harmonised manner".[17] The SDSN reported that the UNSC and the IAEG "strongly endorsed" their recommendation.[18]

The UN System Task Team also said the SDG monitoring system should be built on existing household survey programmes.[19] [20] In 2018, the Africa Region added to this by suggesting that where there are gaps in household survey data, country-level administrative data and other non-traditional sources should be leveraged.[21]

The original agreement to limit the framework to 100 globally comparable indicators was a realistic one which has been undermined by uncontrolled interventions by subject matter experts and global custodians against the advice of the statistical community. The monitoring framework now covers 231 unique indicators. This complexity has presented countries with substantial challenges in producing globally comparable data.

And conversely, frustrated by this lack of national data, global custodians have resorted to a disproportionate amount of modelled and estimated data that bypasses and undermines the original intention of using the SDGs as an opportunity to build national data capacity.

International agencies in the pursuit of their missions are, understandably, continually reviewing their best practices and adapting them to the latest knowledge and experience. This presents a challenge when SDG indicators – which are meant to be consistent over a 15-year period – are revised midstream to reflect new practice.

Indicator 4.2.1 which monitors early childhood development[22] is a case in point. The original indicator methodology was based on the 2009 version of UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. As Malaysia doesn't use the MICS survey it replicated the indicator's 10 questions in its new National Household Indicators Survey, the results of which are due by the end of 2022. In 2019 with the adoption of UNICEF's improved ECDI2030[23], the SDG methodology was altered to cover a different age range and 20 different questions.[24] DOSM is now faced with replacing its ECD module in its follow-up

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[16] https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/page/sdsn
[17] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2013150612-FINAL-SDSN-Indicator-Report1.pdf
[18] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2013150612-FINAL-SDSN-Indicator-Report1.pdf
[19] https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post_2015_UNTTreport.pdf
[20] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/First%20meeting%20IAEG-SDGs%20-%20June%202015%20-%20Meeting%20report%20-%2024%20June%202015.pdf
[21] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-08/BEST%20PRACTICE%20FOR%20DATA%20FLOWS%20IN%20AFRICA%20-%20SEPTEMBER%202018.pdf
[22] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-04-02-01.pdf
[23] https://blogs.unicef.org/evidence-for-action/progress-country-uptake-ecdi2030/
[24] https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ECDI2030-Frequently-Asked-Questions.pdf

survey, thus losing its baseline, or continuing with the original methodology publishing what is now a proxy that will not be accepted by the global database.

The IAEG was well aware of these challenges when it undertook a Comprehensive Review in 2020. It laid out a number of guiding principles in order to set the parameters within which the review would take place. These included:[25]

- *The review needs to take into account investments already made at the national and international levels and should not undermine ongoing efforts.*
- *The revised framework should not significantly impose an additional burden on national statistical work.*
- *There should be space for improvements, while at the same time ensuring that the changes are limited in scope and the size of the framework remains the same.*

[25] IAEG-SDGs: 2020 Comprehensive Review Process - https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/2020-comp-rev/

Harmonising national and global datasets

The IAEG best practice[26] recognises that "many countries have developed or are developing national data platforms (SDG specific and more general) in order to disseminate their data more effectively to users" and that using a national data platform "helps improving accountability, quality assurance, coordination and accessibility for SDG data. It also helps strengthen the central coordination role of NSO within NSS."[27]

Table 4 shows available Malaysian data for SDG-3 between 2018 and 2020, comparing data published by DOSM[28] with data currently published in the UN's global SDG database.[29] Of the 17 indicators for which Malaysia has published data only seven are replicated accurately in the global database. Three are not present at all and ten in the global database are classified[30] as estimates.

Table 4. Malaysian data for SDG 3, 2018 – 2020: National vs Global

SDG	Description	Custodian	Global Nature	2018		2019		2020	
				Nat'nl	Global	Nat'nl	Global	Nat'nl	Global
3.1.1	Maternal Mortality Ratio	WHO		23.5		21.1		24.9	
3.1.2	Skilled attendance at birth [C]	UNICEF	Country	99.6	99.6	99.6	99.6	99.6	
3.2.1	Under 5 mortality rate	UNICEF	Estimate	8.8	8.4	7.7	8.6	6.9	8.6
3.2.2	Neonatal mortality rate	UNICEF	Estimate	4.6	4.5	4.1	4.6	3.9	4.6
3.3.1	HIV infections per 1,000	UNAIDS	Estimate	0.2	0.16	0.2	0.18	0.2	0.19
3.3.2	TB per 100,000	WHO	Estimate	78.6	92	80.9	92	72.6	92
3.3.3	Malaria incidence per 1,000	WHO		0.1		0.1		0.1	
3.4.1	Mortality rates (cardio, cancer etc)	WHO	Estimate	National data contains rates per 100,000. Global data contains numbers					

[26] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/50th-session/documents/BG-3a-Best-Practices-in-Data-Flows-and-Global-Data-Reporting-for-theSDGs-E.pdf
[27] Ibid
[28] Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicators, Malaysia, 2020. https://newss.statistics.gov.my/newss-portalx/ep/epFreeDownloadContentSearch.seam?contentId=159273&actionMethod=ep%2FepFreeDownloadContentSearch.xhtml%3AcontentAction.doDisplayContent&cid=46165
The table only contains data for those indicators that meet the standard metadata. Proxies and partial data are excluded.
[29] Data as downloaded from the SDG Database Archive on 20 Aug 2022. Dataset = Global SDG Indicators Database on 12 August 2022. https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/archive
[30] The global database contains a field labeled "Nature" which specifies the provenance of the data

SDG	Description	Custodian	Global Nature	2018		2019		2020	
				Nat'nl	Global	Nat'nl	Global	Nat'nl	Global
3.4.2	Suicide mortality rate per 100,000	WHO	Estimate	0.1		0.0	5.7	0.0	
3.6.1	Death rate due to road traffic injuries per 100,000	WHO	Estimate	18.1		17.7	22.5	13.2	
3.7.1	Adolescent birth rate 10 - 14	UNDESA	Country Adjusted	0.1		0.1	0.1	0.1	
3.7.1	Adolescent birth rate 15 - 19	UNDESA	Country Adjusted	8.5		8.2	8.6	7.6	
3.8.2	Proportion of pop with 25% spend on health	WHO	Country			0.13	0.13		
3.8.2	Proportion of pop with 10% spend on health	WHO	Country			1.52	1.52		
3.a.1	Age-standardised prevalence of tobacco use	WHO	Estimate		22.8	20.7	22.8		22.5
3.b.1	Proportion of target population covered by vaccines (DTP)	WHO	Estimate	110.2	99	98.4	98	97.7	98
3.b.1	Proportion of target population covered by vaccines (HPV)	WHO	Estimate	82.2	83	84.4	85	82.6	84

In July 2022 DOSM hosted a workshop at which officials from 21 ministries, departments or agencies (MDAs) attended. The aim was to explore how to fill the gaps in DOSM's portfolio of SDG indicators. Of the 46[31] indicators reviewed 23 are already published in the global database without DOSM or MDA knowledge or approval. Of these 23, MDAs reported that they either disagreed with or did not recognise the data in 14 of them. And of these 14, five are classified in the global database as country data.

Table 5 - DOSM workshop: Data in global database not recognised by MDAs

SDG	Nature	Indicator
1.3.1	Estimate	Proportion of population covered by social protection systems, by sex, age, distinguishing children, unemployed, disabilities, etc.
3.9.1	Estimate	Mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution

[31] 55 indicators were presented but 9 of these are derived by the OECD from its member countries Official Development Aid contributions and are therefore not relevant to Malaysia's reporting commitments.

SDG	Nature	Indicator
3.9.2	Estimate	Mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene
5.a.2	Global	Proportion of countries where the legal framework guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control
5.c.1	Global	Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment
6.3.1	Estimate	Proportion of domestic and industrial wastewater flows safely treated
6.4.1	Estimate	Change in water-use efficiency over time
6.4.2	Estimate	Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources
6.5.1	Country	Degree of integrated water resources management
6.a.1	Country	Amount of water- and sanitation-related official development assistance that is part of a government-coordinated spending plan
6.b.1	Country	Proportion of local administrative units with established procedures for participation of local communities in WASH management
14.1.1	Modelled	(a) Index of coastal eutrophication; and (b) plastic debris density
14.7.1	Country Adjusted	Sustainable fisheries as a proportion of GDP in small island developing States, least developed countries and all countries
15.4.1	Country	Coverage by protected areas of important sites for mountain biodiversity

An inspection of the nature classifications in the global database which describe the provenance of the data shows that half of the indicators (47% for Malaysia and 52% for all countries) are populated by data that has not come from country sources. The actual situation is even worse than this as the two tables above show that a number of indicators classified as "Country" have in fact been estimated by global custodians.

Table 6 - Categorisation of 2019 indicator data by "Nature"

Nature	Malaysia (%)	All Countries (%)
Country / Country adjusted	53	48
Estimated / Modelled / Global / None	47	52

Communication

The IAEG, recognising in its best practices that "communication is the key issue to understand data flows and to ensure that all parties are informed of the data being transmitted and of any harmonization that takes place"[32] maintains that "NSOs should be the coordinator of the national statistical system" and that they should be consulted on all matters pertaining to their country's data.

> *"In order for custodian agencies to ensure that data are internationally comparable, values are sometimes adjusted and no longer match the figure reported at the national level. In these cases, it is essential that a detailed explanation of the process and methodologies used to adjust the data be provided to the country and that the country has the opportunity to comment on this new value."*[33]

A sizable proportion of DI's work with DOSM has been to engage on DOSM's behalf with global custodians. In part this has been to clarify indicator methodologies, but a larger part has been to establish the provenance of data held in the global database of which neither DOSM nor the relevant MDA was aware. Over half the Malaysian indicators in the global database are derived from modelled or estimated data[34] and DOSM currently has little knowledge of the provenance or methodologies employed in their calculation.

Engagement also revealed a number of instances of custodian emails going missing or custodians battling to establish and connect with the appropriate country focal point. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that, overall, there is a lack of communication between custodians and DOSM.

Curation of the SDG indicators is shared across 38 international agencies as illustrated in Table 7. This means that the governance of the framework is widely distributed and the maintenance of common standards across all custodians is challenging. While the UNSD is responsible for hosting the global database it is the custodians who are responsible for quality assurance. This was evidenced by the author in communication with UNSD. Their response was: "We have seen, and it has also reported to us, that some agencies might not be specifying the correct nature. We are working closer with agencies to address this."

[32] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/50th-session/documents/BG-3a-Best-Practices-in-Data-Flows-and-Global-Data-Reporting-for-theSDGs-E.pdf
[33] Ibid
[34] In addition to the 47% indicated in Table 5, Tables 3 and 4 both show that there are additional indicators that are classified as being "country" data that in fact are not.

Table 7 - Global custodians and indicators covered

Custodian	Indicators Curated		Custodian	Indicators Curated
WHO	25		ITU	4
UNEP	22		UNDP	4
FAO	21		UNFCCC	4
UNESCO	19		ITC	3
World Bank	17		PARIS21	3
OECD	15		UN Women	3
UNICEF	14		UNCTAD	3
ILO	13		UNSD	3
UNDRR	11		IEA	2
UNODC	11		IRENA	2
UN-Habitat	10		IUCN	2
UNIDO	6		UNFPA	2
OHCHR	5		UNWTO	2
UNDESA	5		Others	13
IMF	4			

Malaysia is not alone in its frustration. In 2019 the Mexican co-chair of the IAEG had this to say:

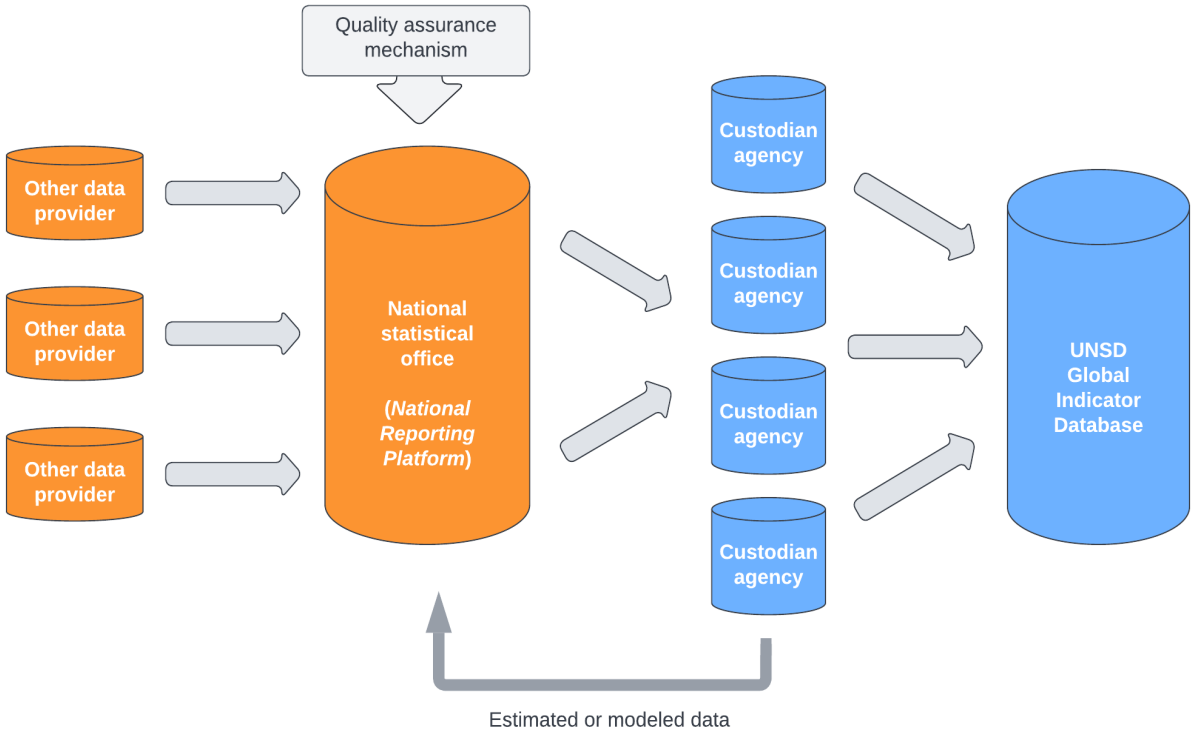
> *"The IAEG SDG has taken a critical position on the procedures of some agencies in terms of the lack of transparency, communication and involvement of the NSO in producing global, thematic and regional indicators, either through estimates, imputations, data modelling or conducting surveys in various countries."*[35]

[35] Ordaz (2019) The SDGs Indicators: A Challenging Task for the International Statistical Community - Global Policy (2019) 10:Suppl.1 https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/1758-5899.12631

Data flows

Figure 1 is a flow diagram from the IAEG's best practices.[36] It puts the NSO at the heart of the data ecosystem – both in terms of data flows as well as quality assurance. All national data flows through the NSO. Data estimated or modelled by custodian agencies is referred back to the NSO for validation.

Figure 1 - Planned SDG data flows[37]

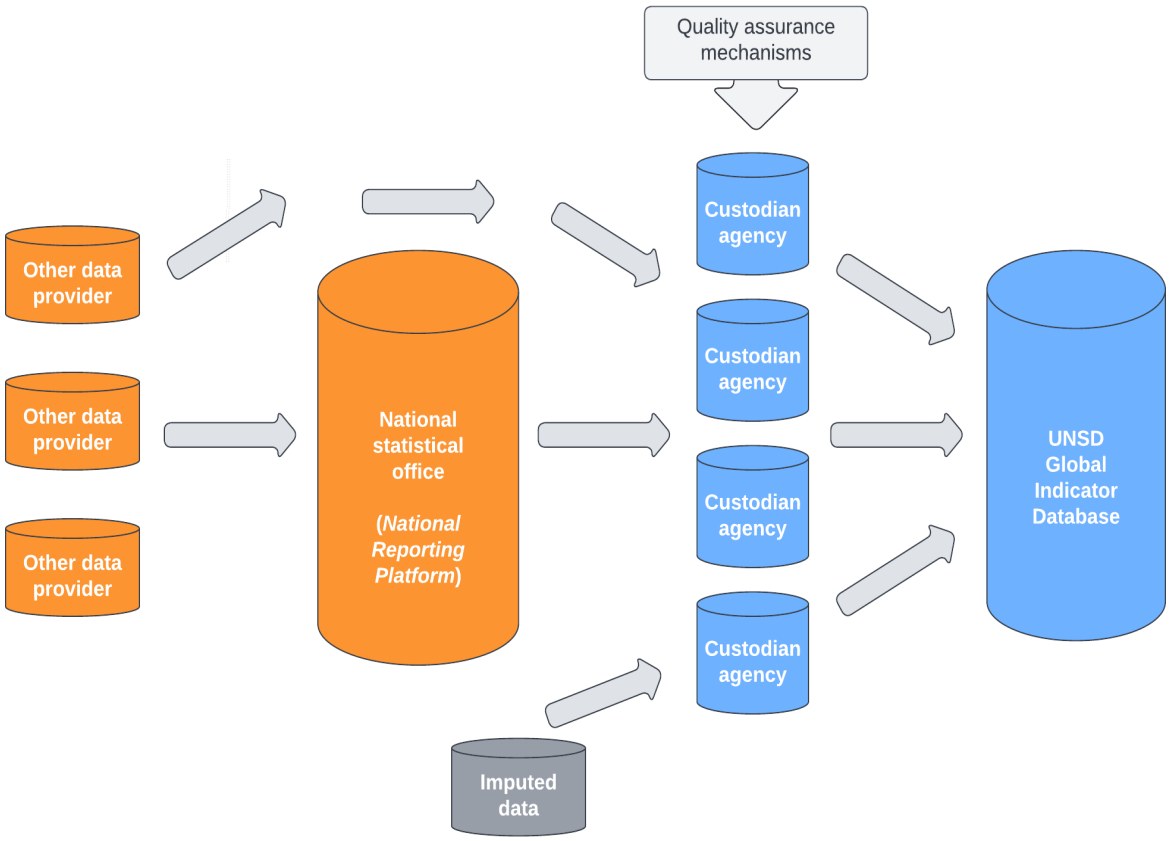


[36] Originally produced in 2017 by a UNECE task force responsible for compiling guidelines for countries to facilitate decisions about reporting on the SDGs. UNECE (2017) Guidelines for national SDG-indicators reporting mechanisms. https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/ge.32/2017/mtg1/Guidelines_draft_2017-03-31.docx

[37] Ibid. The document presents two models: centralised and decentralised. This is the centralised version for NSOs that are responsible for all official statistics. The diagram has been redrawn but accurately reflects the content of the original.

Figure 2 is the author's modification of the original planned flow diagram to generally reflect current practice. Some data flows direct from MDAs to custodians without NSO knowledge or validation. Other indicators are constructed by custodians from imputed data. There is no feedback loop for modelled or estimated data. And quality assurance rests with the custodians, not the NSO. Global custodians, not NSOs, have become the heartbeat of the SDG monitoring framework.

Figure 2 - Actual SDG data flows



Capacity

At the first meeting of the IAEG in 2015 it was recognised that "significant efforts will be necessary in order to develop the statistical methodology and build the national statistical capacities."[38] The UN Statistical Commission had already anticipated this with its decision the same year to establish the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for post-2015 monitoring (HLG) "to promote national ownership of the post-2015 monitoring system and foster statistical capacity building, partnership and coordination."[39]

By 2019 little progress had been made. In a journal article introducing a collection of critiques on the SDGs the editors concluded that:

> *"Most national statistical offices cannot implement the SDG indicator framework without adequate resources. National governments and international donors should give higher priority to supporting these needs."*[40]

In the same collection a UNDP representative observed that "there is no indication from member states where the funding to support data production and statistical capacity development for the 2030 Agenda would come from."[41]

And in its 2019 Statistical Capacity Outlook PARIS21 maintained that:

> *"While financing is certainly not the only driver, the current levels of both domestic and international support for data and statistics are simply too modest to respond to the ever increasing demand driven by global initiatives such as the SDGs."*[42]

[38] First Meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators New York, 1-2 June 2015. https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/documents/2020-37-FinalReport-E.pdf
[39] Third meeting of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for post-2015 monitoring New York, 14-15 January 2016 - https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/meetings/hlg-meeting-03/hlg-meeting-03-Report.pdf
[40] Knowledge and Politics in Setting and Measuring the SDGs: Introduction to Special Issue. Global Policy (2019) 10:Suppl.1 - https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/1758-5899.12604
[41] Kapto (2019) Layers of Politics and Power Struggles in the SDG Indicators Process. Global Policy (2019) 10:Suppl.1 - https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/1758-5899.12630
[42] PARIS21 (2019) Statistical Capacity Development Outlook 2019 - https://paris21.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Statistical%20Capacity%20Development%20Outlook%202019.pdf

Malaysia as a middle income country does not face the same level of financial pressures that many other lower income countries do, but nevertheless the scope of the SDG monitoring framework is broad enough to stretch all countries' capacity. Where data currently doesn't exist DOSM is faced with prioritisation decisions on where to best focus its resources. It can further be argued that the role that DI as consultants have played in assisting DOSM should in fact have already been covered by the HLG's own commitments.

Conclusion

The UN System Task Team established in September 2011 to support preparations for the post-2015 agenda produced its first report in June 2012 entitled “Realizing the Future We Want for All”.[43] It proposed that:

> *“The post-2015 UN development agenda should be conceived as a truly global agenda with shared responsibilities for all countries. Accordingly, the global partnership for development would also need to be redefined towards a more balanced approach among all development partners that will enable the transformative change needed for a rights-based, equitable and sustainable process of global development. This would also involve reforms of mechanisms of global governance.”*[44]

This is the way the Philippines Statistics Authority interpreted these reforms:

> *“Unlike the MDGs, which only targets the developing countries, the SDGs apply to all countries whether rich, middle or poor countries. The SDGs are also nationally owned and country-led, wherein each country is given the freedom to establish a national framework in achieving the SDGs.”*[45]

And the final report of the 2020 meeting of the UN Statistical Commission reiterated that

> *“The application of the global indicator framework is a voluntary and country-led process and that alternative or complementary indicators for national and subnational levels of monitoring will be developed at the national level on the basis of national priorities, realities, capacities and circumstances.”*[46]

There has never been any disagreement over how the SDG monitoring framework should function. There is only a problem of implementation and the honouring of commitments. The IAEG’s best practices highlighted at the beginning of the paper contain all the

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[43] https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post_2015_UNTTreport.pdf
[44] Ibid
[45] How are the Sustainable Development Goals different from MDGs? - https://psa.gov.ph/content/how-are-sustainable-development-goals-different-mdgs
[46] United Nations Statistical Commission. Report on the fifty-first session (3–6 March 2020). Decision 51/101 - https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/documents/2020-37-FinalReport-E.pdf

necessary solutions. The only element missing is a stronger central coordinating role for either the UNSD, the HLG or the IAEG to hold custodians to account.

There is one simple, overriding recommendation to be made to all global custodians. It is to honour the commitments already made in supporting national statistical offices to become the engine rooms that must drive the global monitoring framework.

Development Initiatives (DI) is an international development organisation that focuses on putting data-driven decision-making at the heart of poverty eradication.

Our vision is a world without poverty that invests in human security and where everyone shares the benefits of opportunity and growth.

We provide rigorous information to support better decisions, influence policy outcomes, increase accountability and strengthen the use of data to eradicate poverty.

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